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Jessica: Welcome to Lectionary Kickstart.
We're sparking your thoughts for Sunday as you plan your
sermon or teaching lesson.
I'm your host and producer, Jessica Bordeleau,
here with Dr. David Schmitt and Dr. Peter Nafzger.
They're both professors of homiletics here at Concordia
Seminary, St. Louis.
You can hear all about us in our introductory episode,
but trust me, they're pretty good preachers.
All right, let's get started.

Peter: Peter, where are we in the church here?
We're talking about the Sunday, which is the 21st week after
Pentecost,
the time of the church when we think about the Holy Spirit
working through His people
for the sake of God's creation.

Jessica: And David, what's the text for this week?

David: The Old Testament reading is Isaiah 45.
The epistle is 1 Thessalonians 1,
and then we have Matthew 22 as the gospel,
and the psalm is Psalm 96.

Jessica: As always, I ask each of you to tell me which text you would
choose to preach on,
and this week, Peter, will you go first?

Peter: Okay, I am looking at 1 Thessalonians for a couple of
reasons.
One is I always kind of find it interesting to plan ahead, of
course,
and see what you're thinking about.
And anytime there's an epistle that's kind of short,
preaching through an epistle, I think is kind of nice.
You can spend some time digging into the letter
and helping your congregation learn more about a specific
book of the Bible.
And I was actually looking back at all my years of preaching.
I've not done this with 1 Thessalonians.
So to me, it would be kind of interesting just to preach
through 1 Thessalonians
for the next five weeks.
Now, I don't know if we'll...

David: No, Yyu just took away the surprise now for five weeks.

Peter: No, I'm not sure if I will.
We'll have to see what the text looks like.
But at least this first week, I think I'll start.

David: And then we're going to wonder why you're not preaching on 1
Thessalonians.

Peter: What is in there that he doesn't want to talk about?

Peter: So at least for this Sunday, I'm thinking about 1
Thessalonians chapter 1.
And I'll say this too.

Sometimes when I would preach through a whole letter, I'd start with a theme.
You look at the text and you think about what theme could I have.
At least at this point, I haven't identified a theme that I would carry through.
So it'd be more kind of this expository just kind of going through the letter.
So this first week, the readings from 1 Thessalonians 1, Silvanus and Timothy are giving thanks to God.
And what are they giving thanks for?
Well, three things.
Their work of faith, their labor of love, and their steadfastness of hope.
Now what struck me about when I just looked at that first glance is that the order, faith, love, and hope, which is different than 1 Corinthians 13, right?
Faith, hope, and love.
But faith, love, and hope.
And so I was kind of thinking about maybe playing around with that a little bit.
And Paul doesn't say it this way, but maybe this week, faith, love, and hope, and the greatest of these is hope, not love.
And so let's think about hope.
Now maybe one of the reasons I'm thinking along these lines is we just finished our symposium on living by hope in a secular age.
And so hope has been on the mind for the last two or three days.
But among the things that have been on my mind as I've been thinking about hope is one of the plenaries made the point that all people have hope. They don't always hope in the right thing, but everybody lives by hope.
Everybody's looking for something in the future. They're longing for something, they're anticipating, expecting, and it seems like it's not a bad idea to spend some time helping Christians clarify and hope in the right things, and hope in the right way.
So that's kind of a theme that I would want to work with in the sermon, maybe, would be Christian hope.

Jessica: Which is different than a wish.
I think when people hear hope, it means wish to them.
You know, someone would be like, I sure hope so, or all you can do is hope.
Like I hope my kids are healthy.
You know, I hope they're having a good day at school.
I hope they have good friends.
It's like, I can only wish.

I think that that's a big distinction that people might need to hear.

Because even if you ask me, what do you hope for?

Well, they're still just kind of wishes.

It's different than a certain hope.

Peter: The way you said it made me think of kind of a diagnosis or test.

I hope this turns out.

I hope the tests are negative.

I hope the surgery works.

What I was thinking we might do would be to do a little bit more of a definition of Christian hope.

What is Christian hope?

Now, you can, of course, contrast that with one of these other ones.

But as I look at the text, I see kind of three aspects of Christian hope that maybe you would highlight.

The first one would be in verse four, where Paul says, for we know brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you.

He has chosen you.

That's getting to the foundation of our hope.

Why do we hope?

Well, I hope because I'm confident that he has chosen me.

God has called me in my baptism, enlightened me with his gifts.

He has said, you are mine.

I choose you.

Kind of the Jesus words of the apostles, you did not choose me, but I chose you.

And our hope is grounded.

It's founded in God's gracious decision to bring me to himself.

David: And you know, it's interesting that it's the steadfastness of hope, right?

And I think Satan loves to attack us by making us question whether we really were called.

Did this, you know, baptism really matter?

You know, you struggle with things and you wonder, I wonder if God really has chosen me.

Peter: Right.

David: You know, you have that vacillation and that can cause you to doubt.

Peter: And that's kind of where to get away from the aspiration kind of idea, where it depends on me.

This is totally external.

It's not from myself.

And so my hope, first of all, foundation of my hope is that it's got really nothing to do with my efforts, my ability.

It's all in God's promise.

A second move then would be to think about, well, what is the object of our hope?

What do we hope for?

Verse 10.

Would you read verse 10?

This is talking about how the Thessalians have turned to God from idols.

And then it says what they're doing, basically.

Jessica: And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Peter: Okay, so what do we hope for?

I think there's a lot of things we hope for, kind of little hopes, little age hopes.

You know, we do hope that the tests turn out all right.

We do hope that our kids don't make a huge mess of their lives.

But the big hope, the big age hope is we are waiting for his Son from heaven.

You know, Jesus, the resurrected one, who ascended into heaven and said, I'm coming back the way I'm leaving.

And when I do, I'll make all things new.

And I'm thinking about the foundational, if why we hope is because God has chosen us,

what we hope for is that Jesus would return and finish what he started and make all things new.

And until then, some hopes will be realized, little hopes, some won't.

Some diagnoses will go bad.

Some surgeries, I think about, I had a member of my congregation who had some heart trouble.

And I was with him and his wife before surgery.

Went there and we prayed together, read some scriptures.

And I read to him Psalm 16, which is a great Psalm.

It's a great bedside Psalm because it talks about you hold my lot is a phrase in there.

I'd always, I'd write that on the board in the hospital room.

And I'd tell them, remember, when they put you down for the medicine, remember, you hold my lot.

That's your reminder to yourself.

And I'm reminding you that God holds your lot in Christ.

And Wally, we did that and we wheeled him off and Kathy and I walked him to the door

to go into the surgery wing and he died in surgery.

And sometimes our little H hopes aren't realized.

And so this is a chance, I think, to ground and to clarify what in the end, what's our

big hope.

And in the end, our hope is either in the return of Jesus and the resurrection of all

flesh and deliverance from the wrath to come, or our hope is in something that is false.
And so I want my hearers to have that kind of eschatological perspective where they're looking for Jesus to return as they struggle through whatever it is they're struggling.
So we've got, why do we hope?
What do we hope for?
And the third part I would think about, well, how do we hope?
What does it look like to hope?
And that's where I would pick up on verse six.
Would you read verse six, Jessica?

Jessica: And you became imitators of us and of the Lord.

Peter: Okay, you can just stop right there.

Paul's again, Paul's giving thanks to the Thessalonians, is opening to the letter and he's talking about why we're so grateful for you.
Well, you became imitators of us and of the Lord.
People who are steadfast in hope aren't just rejoicing that they've been chosen.
They aren't just looking forward to the return of Jesus.
They're also imitating Paul.
They're imitating Jesus.

David: And so this, I think, gets to...
And what was Paul at this point?

Because you say imitate Paul today and it's like, oh, I need to write letters of the New Testament and I need to have churches built after me, right?
But I mean, back then, that's not what he was.

Peter: Yeah, I mean, Paul is giving himself to others.

He is suffering for the sake that all may know and believe.
He's praying for his own people.

David: He was run out of Thessalonica.

Peter: Right, he's... say more about that.

David: Well, yeah, he was... this was his missionary journey, went to Thessalonica.

Some people say it was there as least as three weeks and others maybe six more weeks.

And the controversy arose.

They ran him out of Thessalonica.

He went to Berea.

And then the people who ran him out of Thessalonica went to Berea and ran him out of Berea.

So you know the kind of opposition that is present in Thessalonica.

And you know that the people who are suffering under that opposition have had very little training.

They've had very little schooling, right?

I mean, you've had six weeks of catechesis.

And now the guy that was teaching you is being run out of town.

Things are being said about him.

He's a traveling philosopher.

He's going to get money out of you.
And he's being held up as a jerk.
He's been run out of town.
And here you are.
And how do you...

I mean, you know, how do you follow that?
You know, he's like, follow my example.
Peter: I don't know exactly why, but Hebrews 11 came to mind for me.
The faith is the assurance of things hoped for.
And that litany of people who you would imitate, you could
kind of walk through the Old Testament
of people who are worthy of imitation in their faithful hope.

David: And it's, I think it's helpful to remember that this is a
Thanksgiving.
So Paul is not chastising the Thessalonians for not hoping.
Paul is actually commending them.
He's saying you guys are an example.
I mean, just imagine you're under persecution.
The guy that came there and taught you is gone.
You're trying to figure out what to do.
And then you get this letter from him that, you know, I've
received news that you're staying
firm in the faith.

And you know, you're an example to others and all that.
I mean, so he always kind of gives you that.
It's so...
I don't know.

Sometimes I think that we have this attitude that we always
need to find fault with our
people so that we can then forgive them.

David: Right?

Peter: Right.

David: And yet in this letter, Paul is right now is not finding
fault in them.

Peter: Right.

David: He's praising them and he's giving God thanks because of
them.

And it makes you think, you know, what would it sound like to
preach a sermon where I'm
telling people how I'm thanking God because of them?

Peter: Right.

David: You know, I'm thanking God because of you that you're holding
on to your hope.

I mean, that you're here.

Peter: Well, that's the thing is they're here.

The people who are in your worship service are not the ones
who have given up hope.

David: Right.

Peter: But they're the ones who maybe among the few who have
remained steadfast.

David: Right.

Peter: And they're perfect, of course, but you don't want to berate
them for being something they're
not.

David: Right.
Right.
And so you get an opportunity to praise your people for the works that God is doing among them in a world that is, you know, that it's very hard to live in.

Peter: Yeah.
They're the work of their faith, the labor of their love, their steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.
I think that could be a very honest and a very encouraging sermon.

David: Yeah.
Yeah.
And their steadfastness of hope is founded in their being chosen by Christ.
Right.
And what are the other ones?

Peter: They're looking to the return.

David: They're waiting for Jesus.
Right.

Peter: And in the meantime, they're imitating Paul and the Lord.

David: Right.
Right.

Peter: As they remain steadfast.

David: Yeah.
I like that.

Jessica: What about you, David?
What would you preach about?

David: Well, I went to Matthew 22, their Gospel reading.

Peter: All right.

David: Jessica, if you could read verse 17.

Jessica: Tell us then what you think.
Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?

David: Okay.
So I love that question.
It's a what we would call a false either or.
It's an either or.
Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?
You got black or white, one choice or the other, and they're posing this either or.
And I think to myself, how often have, you know, there are some either or situations.
Should I stay married or commit adultery?
Okay.
So that's a pretty clear black or white situation.
But there are other situations that people make either or that really are not either or situations.
Okay.
Like, should I send my child to public school or not?
So all of the sudden, if you send your child to a public school, you're not a Christian,

because Christians don't send their children to public school.
Have you ever encountered, what are some things that people make false either ors?
Read verse 21.

Jessica: So Jesus says, whose likeness and inscription is this?
Verse 21, they say Caesar's.
Then he said to them, therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.

David: Okay.
Notice how Jesus has a both and.
Now, it doesn't, you know, it still forces you to try to figure out what is Caesar's and what is God's, right?
And in one sense, the coinage is Caesar's.
But in another sense, the coinage is God's, because God's the one who provides us money.
And what we do with our money is a representation of how we steward God's gifts, right?
So they're trying to entrap him with a false either or, and he responds by giving them a both and, which is a way of asking them to think more discerningly, to not make it all black and white.

Peter: What's helpful about that is, so in verse 18, it just says up front, the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in the words.
This is a trap.

David: Right.

Peter: So they try to trick him with their words with a bad question.
And then to reflect on how we either can get suckered into that or we even sometimes participate in asking the wrong questions.

David: You know, the Apostle Paul is recognizing that intersection of Christian life and culture is a little more complicated than a black or white, you either are this or you're this.

Peter: But the black and white is so comfortable.

David: It's very comfortable.
Why though?
Why?

Peter: Because it makes things easy.

David: It makes things easy.

Peter: Right.
And it's easy to be in the right.

Jessica: But it's also easier than to know that I'm not making a mistake.
If something is black and white, then I know that I'm doing it the right way.
It's not always.

David: And there are black or white issues, right?

Jessica: Like if you had Ikea directions, do you want the direction to say, yeah, you can put this screw in A or B or maybe you can just put it in a little slot over there.
And never follow those instructions.
Just tell me black or white, know which piece goes where.
And then I'm all good.
I'm not messing it up.
Well, I mean, isn't that it would be nice if it were that way for everything.

David: Yeah, it'd be nice if it were that way for your kids.
So do all of your kids, do you do you converse with them and nurture them in the exact same way?
Or is there a little bit more complexity that you raise your son a little bit differently than you do your daughter because they're different people.

Peter: Yeah.

David: And there's different ways of dealing with it.
You're still being a Christian mother.
You're still exercising your vocation, but you're exercising it with discernment rather than this fear that drives you to I have to know that I'm doing it right.
And to do it right, I have to do it the same way for everybody.

Peter: Well, you mentioned fear there as part of the problem.
You know, that's part of the challenge here, I think, is that our society and leaders in our society peddle in fear.
Sow fears so that then you either need my product or you need to or I will fix your problem
or in the church, we can fall into that too, where fear becomes almost paralyzing.
I'm not sure what to do.
There must be a right or wrong.
And there's a freedom and a responsible freedom that allows you to say, okay, it's not either
or.

David: Right.
I mean, I don't want a church where the family that is homeschooling looks down on the family that's sending their children to parochial school and the family sending their children to parochial school looks down on the family that's sending their child to a public school.
Many of those options are okay, but all of them demand that you do it with discernment as Christians.
We don't always make the same decision.
Conformity is there's one way to do it and this is the way to do it.
And if you conform, you're a Christian.
If you don't conform, you're not.

Confession is this is what we believe, this is what we confess, but we're going to confess it in different ways depending upon where we're at and to whom we're speaking.

Does that make sense?

Peter: And central to our confession is that verse 21, render to Caesar things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.

David: Right.

And what's beautiful about that is that Jesus has just asked them to give him a coin and he uses the coin to talk about the image that's on the coin. And what's lying in the background, what's not being seen is that we have God's image printed on us.

And so as I enter into the world, as I enter into a world where I've got this Roman coinage and I'm trying to figure out what to do with it, I do it as a person who recognizes that I have the image of God imprinted on me.

Peter: So another way you could look at this is the contrast between the coin with the image and the people with the image.

So they want to talk about the coins to try to trap him. And Jesus is not going to be explicit.

David: And they're basically saying, you know, there has to be a way to work with that coinage. And you either give it to Caesar or not, and as soon as you tell me what to do, then I know who's Christian, I know who's not, or I know who's a faithful Jewish person and I know who's not.

Right.

Peter: And Jesus won't be trapped.

David: And Jesus is not trapped.

And he makes it a both-and where all of the sudden it's not that simple.

And I'm recognizing that I have the image of God and that how I handle things is a expression of how God has handled me.

Peter: So you know, I think if you're going to preach this way on this text, I think you probably have to have some pretty concrete examples of what you mean.

David: Very concrete examples.

Peter: So that you don't kind of create confusion about what is an either or.

David: So you might want to have a silly concrete example, right? So is it okay to have a potluck with Jell-O or not?

Peter: No, well that's not silly.

David: Right, yeah.

Them's fighting words.

You know, you can start in a place where everybody sees it's silly, and then incrementally more

and more people are going to be saying those are fighting words.

Peter: Right.

David: And why are they fighting words?

And I think Jessica's right, partly they're fighting words because people really desire to live God-pleasing lives and to do things that honor God and honor their vocation, and they desire that and they want direction.

Peter: But that desire is so strong that it creates a world where... Where being right is the most important thing.

Even more important than recognizing who we are as people who've been made in God's image and who belong to Him.

David: And then all of a sudden we're basing who we are as Christians on how we...

Peter: On what we do.

David: On what we do and not what God has done for us, right? And all of a sudden it becomes this electric issue...

Peter: This electric mess that has focused us so much on ourselves.

David: On ourselves.

That we've kind of forgotten who we are.

And you know, we're struggling to make these decisions, and rather than supporting one

another and helping one another confess how what they're doing is what God has called

them to do, we're making them defend themselves and fight over what they do.

And then we kind of group ourselves into different people on the basis of what time we put our children to bed or how we respond when the baby cries.

Peter: No, I mean, this is...

I can imagine this kind of sermon being really helpful for the right congregation and doing it in the right way.

And knowing either you're going to go in with your eyes wide open and know this is going

to be something that we need to talk about afterwards, or it's one that you're trying

to just prepare them for future thinking.

David: Right, yeah, let's not fall into a trap.

Peter: But you've got to know who your congregation is, especially for this one, I think.

David: Yeah.

The gospel part is that you're not defined by what you do, but you're defined by what God has done for you.

And you live by what God has done for you and through you. You kind of see his work in your life now.

Jessica: Well, that's all for today.

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I'm your host and producer, Jessica Bordeleau.

Join us next week here at Lectinary Kickstart when Dr. David Schmitt and Dr. Peter Nafzger

will spark your thoughts for next Sunday.

David: So is it okay to have a potluck with Jell-O or not?

Peter: Oh, that's not silly.