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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 Bordelow, 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.

David, where are we in the church here?

David: We are at the third Sunday after Epiphany.

That's the time when the church celebrates the ongoing mission of God and the bringing of the light of Christ to all nations.

Jessica: And Peter, what are the texts this week?

Peter: The texts are taken from Jonah chapter 3, 1 Corinthians 7, Mark 1, and Psalm 62.

Jessica: As always, I ask each of you to tell me what text you would preach on.

David, will you go first this week?

David: Sure, I will.

So I would preach on the Mark passage, the Gospel reading.

And Jessica, if you could read verse 17 and 18.

Jessica: And Jesus said to them, follow me and I will make you become fishers of men.

And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

David: Okay.

And Jessica, here's my feeling.

My feeling is that when we hear this text, it's kind of frustrating because we can't do this.

I don't know.

Does that resonate with you?

Peter: Man, I wish evangelism worked like that.

Jessica: I know.

Peter: Or you could just say, oh, come on, follow me.

And it happens.

So there's three different kinds of questions going on here that you could work with.

David: It's a text that is frustrating to me because it's so clear.

I see somebody, I call, they drop, they follow, and they become fishers of men.

And it's just too simple.

And my life isn't that simple.

Peter: Kind of unrealistic.

David: And it makes me then wonder, where is God working in my life?

The sermon title is Life in the Gutter.

What comes to mind when I say Life in the Gutter?

Jessica: Rats.

David: Rats.

Peter: I was thinking bowling.

David: Oh, there you go.

Peter: Some bowling alleys.  
Maybe you've got rats.

Jessica: No, I don't have rats, but thank you, Peter.

David: The reason I like that title is in a graphic novel, you have the frame, right, of the picture that's representing the incident of the story.

And then you have the space between the frame, which is called the gutter.

And the theory regarding graphic novels is that the experience of the graphic novel, the way in which this graphic novel invites participation on the part of the reader, is not through the frames, but through what happens in the gutter.

So that the gap between the one frame and the other frame is what you need to fill in with your imagination.

And so there's this idea is that your participation, your experience of the story is often a filling in of stuff that hasn't been reported to you as you're reading the story.

In verse 17, notice how there are two things, which are two very different frames.

Jesus said to them, follow me.

So that's the frame of Jesus standing there and the disciples being at their nets, or the soon to be disciples being at their nets.

And then the next thing is, I will make you become fishers of men.

And that's the frame of Peter standing up and preaching on Pentecost, or Peter in Acts going into the temple and giving the lame man not money, but what we have, which is the name of Jesus Christ that brings about healing, right?

I mean, so you've got Peter engaged in active ministry.

So you've got two frames, you've got this frame of Peter fishing and being called.

And you've got this frame of Peter, by the power of Jesus, having become a fisher of men.

And in between, you have all of the ministry of Jesus and all of the life of Peter.

And so it's kind of this, this idea that, that there's a day when God is calling you, and there is a person, an activity, a life that God knows he is going to form in you.

And there's all of that stuff in between that is working toward that end.

And so my life as a Christian is a lot of times a life in the gutter, a life in, in all of the small ways in which God is working in my life to bring me to that final end of what it is that he's called me to be, what it is that he's called me to do, you know, that, that, you know.

So Jessica, you're talking to a friend of yours, you're sharing comfort and consolation at a time of illness.

And in the back of your mind, there's the truth that this is what you were baptized for.

This is what God baptized you for.

And this is what God has used all of the stuff that's happened in your life that isn't, didn't make it to the frame of the graphic novel.

All of that stuff is, has been used by God to bring you to this moment, right, when you're

doing this thing.

Peter: Yeah, I mean, that's what you're doing is you're kind of slowing down the, the, the moment between when God calls us as his own and when God uses us in some fashion for his kingdom and what he's doing in us and the way he's shaping us in the meantime, prepares us for that.

So there's kind of a future orientation to this.

Just looking at the text, I will make you become fishers of men.

So I'm picturing people who are not yet there where God is sending them.

But this sermon is a time when you're helping them reflect on how God is shaping them in the meantime.

David: Right.

And so for me, the question is, how do I relate to this text?

I, you know, I'm not going to drop everything and follow Jesus in the same way that Peter does.

That's, you know, because I already am following Jesus doing what I've been called to do.

So how can I relate to this?

And I think the way I relate to it is, is thinking about the fact that this, this God who holds all of my future in his hand has called me and is at work to bring about these things in my life and in the world.

Peter: What's interesting about that too is he says, I will make you fishers of men, and they left their nets.

Right.

Now, fishers of men, in some ways, if you've been thinking about these things a lot, then it's kind of a, almost a phrase that you don't even kind of washes over fishers of men.

But it is kind of an odd phrase to think about.

And it picks up on what they're leaving.

David: Right.

Peter: Because they were fishers of fish.

David: Right.

Peter: And now they're going to become fishers of men.

So there's a sense in which that which God is preparing for us, he's using that which he's already given us.

David: He's already laid the foundation.

Peter: Right.

David: Right.

Yeah.

And it's a transforming of what you were into what you will be in my kingdom.

Peter: Right.

David: Yeah.

Follow me, I'll make you fishers of men.

So we got those two frames.

And what I think we need to do is kind of live in the gutter between those and thinking about, you know, what was it that happened in the ministry, that when Peter was following

Jesus and saw him, you know, heal the leper, saw him forgive sins, and then heal the paralytic so that people know he has the power to forgive sins.

When Peter saw him walking on the water, when Peter felt him grab his hand and lift him out of the water as he was sinking, how did all of those experiences contribute to the kind of fisher he became later on, as he reached out to others?

Right.

So it's that idea that all of our life is kind of governed by this God who not only has called us, but knows what he's going to do with us and how he's going to make us.

Jessica: I love the image of a graphic novel.

And if you were to preach this and have one in the bulletin or one on the PowerPoint.

David: Wouldn't it be cool to have the, well if you could actually get pictures that work with these two moments, right?

Jessica: Because then I would see what you mean by gutter.

David: Right.

Jessica: And the life in between the two scenes.

That's great.

David: Right.

And then we could actually kind of start writing in, in the gutter, start writing in things that God has done in our life to bring us here to where we're at.

Well now write in the gutter some of the things that made you a good parent, some of the things that made you a good Christian leader or something like that.

Jessica: I could use that in the high school Bible study.

That's great.

Peter: You could have your high school before Sunday, your kids draw the comic, draw one scene of Jesus saying, follow me and draw another scene of Peter preaching on Pentecost.

Jessica: I know a lot of kids who love graphic novels.

That's great idea.

Peter, what about you?

What would you preach on?

Peter: All right, I'm going to preach on the text that I like least this week.

And that is the first Corinthians text.

Let me just say why I don't like it.

I don't like it because it's, well, it's hard.

David: It's really hard.

Peter: It's really hard.

And you know, I found myself as I was looking at the text thinking, if you're going to read a text like first Corinthians seven, I think you probably should preach on it.

Because if you don't.

David: Jessica would like this, right?

Jessica: Yes, true that.

I'm not sure that I want you to read that people should live as if they didn't have wives.

Right.

Those who have wives live as though they had none.

Please explain it.

That would be wonderful.

Peter: See, and I actually, my reason for doing this is I had people in my congregation that would come up after a service and be really upset about a text that I didn't preach on.

David: Right.

Peter: Because I kind of avoided it because it was frankly kind of hard, but we still read it because you're supposed to read the text.

And I grew to think, man, if it's a really hard text, I either need to preach on it or

I need to pick a different text that will fit the theme or something.

So at any rate, this one is hard because it seems to suggest that we shouldn't act like we're married for those who are married.

So I, but this text also, I think, and I think if I'm going to preach on this, I'm going to, this is going to be a teaching sermon.

I'm going to select the teaching of the faith to use this text to teach on.

And the teaching of the faith that I would emphasize would be vocation.

I think vocation is, let me put it like this.

I was up at a pastor's conference.

This is, I don't know, maybe 10 years ago and when I was a pastor up in Minnesota and there's a joint Minnesota North South district pastor's conference.

We had David Kinnaman from Barna group come and speak to us, really did a good job.

And he made a comment in his presentation.

He asked, now get this, here's a non-Lutheran asking double district full of Lutheran pastors, what's Luther's greatest contribution?

And he invited people to go to the microphones.

There's like a long list of, you know, article four, justification by faith, all these kinds of things, means of grace.

And after about 10 people spoke, he realized this maybe wasn't the best idea.

He said, let me just tell you what I think is Luther's greatest contribution.

And he said, I think it's vocation.

His Luther's concept of vocation, he said, I'm in a lot of church settings and this is a thing that Lutherans get really well that he said, you guys have got to share this more.

And so this idea of vocation, I think is a fundamental Christian, but also a Lutheran distinction or concept that is really helpful.

And I think I would use this text to bring some, to help people find some vocational balance.

Okay.

I might even call the sermon something like, you know, keeping all the plates spinning or, you know,

David: I like that idea.

What do you mean by vocational balance?

Peter: Okay.

So here's, here's kind of what the, here's how I'm imagining getting at it.

And I've got an idea about how to do it, but I want you to help me with the structure a little bit.

I'm thinking about a question answered structure where I would, the text raises a question for me that I want to raise for the congregation and then work through how would you answer this question as the sermon progresses.

So the question would start, well, would you read verse 29 to 31, Jessica, to get us started?

Jessica: This is what I mean, brothers.

The appointed time has grown very short from now on.

Let those who have wives live as though they had none.

And those who mourn as though they were not mourning and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing and those who buy as though they had no goods and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it for the present form of this world is passing away.

Peter: Okay.

There's, there's a couple of the book ends here in verse 29 and 31 the appointed time has grown very short.

The present form of this world is passing away.

Okay, those are some basic truths.

The middle part of those verses, so how ought we to live?

What should we do in this short time in this world that is passing away?

And Paul brings up a couple of different examples of kind of what that means and then he unpacks a little bit further in the following verses, the whole married example.

What I think would be helpful to do would be to notice that in this short time that we have, we have a variety of vocations and they are in some ways kind of competing. We can't fulfill all of them as well as we'd like, as well as we should, as well as we must.

I think about this with the vocations each of us have.

Okay.

So I'm a, I'm a father, I'm a teacher, I'm a citizen.

I'm a member of a congregation.

I'm a brother.

I'm a son.

David: Husband.

Peter: I'm a husband.

And sometimes these vocations compete against each other.

So I don't have time.

I'm finite.

I don't have time to be as good a teacher as I want to be and as good a member of the congregation and as good a father.

And how do you possibly fulfill them all?

David: It's hard.

Jessica: You're describing my life.

Peter: Yeah.

Jessica: Yes.

David: And you feel so...

Jessica: I won't even list the things.  
Yes.

David: And you feel so bad.  
You feel like you're a failure.

Peter: Well, I think this is one of those areas where you can speak into the real, real lives of real experience of people.  
So the question again, we're going to frame this sermon with, well, the time is short.  
What do I do?  
I've got all these vocations, which, how do I, how do I slice my time up?  
Well, the first false answer could be on yourself.  
That one is not really raised in the text.  
That would be more kind of coming out of the world because that is a dominant, prominent theme in the world is that you take care of yourself.  
That would be a way to address kind of a false answer that the world would suggest that that's the time is short, so take care of yourself.

David: Right.

Peter: No, no, that's not, that's not right.  
The next false answer would be the one that's trickiest with the text.  
And that is time is short, so devote yourself to God to the neglect of your neighbor.

David: Well, yeah.  
How about saying just, you know, devote yourself to your vocation of God, even though you might need to neglect your neighbor.  
Because if you say and neglect your neighbor, I'm just going to say to you, well, I wouldn't do that.

Peter: Well, but this is where the, this to me where the text is, you should live as if you have no life.

David: Oh yeah, that's true.

Peter: I mean, this is what makes this text so hard.

David: So you're going to use the, you're going to use the text here to say, this is what we hear.

Peter: Yes.

David: Okay.  
Okay.  
That makes sense.

Peter: Well, and, but this is where what we hear is.  
So look at verse 34, for instance, Jessica, would you read verse 33 and the first part of verse 34?

Jessica: But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife and his interests are divided.

Peter: Okay.  
Notice his interests are divided.

He's got to worry about his wife and he's got other stuff to worry about.  
That to me sounds like this vocational struggle.  
I've got this divided, I've got these different vocations.  
And I think Paul is using a marriage as an example of what it looks like to have a divided heart.

David: Okay.

Peter: So this is, this is where I wouldn't so much look at this as a, the problem here is not that the husband is being sinful and he's trying to please his wife.  
The problem is that he's finite and he doesn't have the ability to focus completely on everything because he's got all these different vocations he's got to fulfill.

Okay.

And this is a real dilemma because we can't do it all.

And so I would, I would explore the, this example of a married man and his wife in the text as kind of the false answer here is that you, what should you do?

Well, you should devote yourself to the Lord.

And that means neglecting your other vocations.

Neglect your spouse if you're married.

If you're not married, you neglect your parents or you neglect your siblings or you neglect your neighbor next door.

You have no time for your neighbor because you're so busy in your work.

And there's this, just this dilemma that we have divided hearts and we, we should just say enough to all of them.

I'm going to devote myself to God.

And that's not the way it should be.

And the key to where it's not the way it's supposed to be is in verse 35.

Would you read verse 35, Jessica?

Jessica: I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

Peter: Okay.

Your undivided devotion to the Lord.

I want to pick up on that to help proclaim the true answer.

How ought we to live as Christians?

We ought to live in undivided devotion to the Lord.

The Lord is our only focus.

Now, when you understand that fully from a biblical theology context, we know that the way you devote yourself to the Lord is by loving the people he puts in your life.

And so this undivided devotion plays itself out in loving those neighbors that God puts around you.

And so if you're married, that means your spouse.

If you're, if you've got siblings, that means caring for your siblings, the neighbors that are in your life.

But this flows from an undivided devotion to the Lord.

Okay.



So the way I would get to that would be to look at 1 John.

1 John, it's not one of the readings for this week.

1 John 4 verse 11 says, Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to love...

Jessica: One another.

Peter: Think about how odd that sounds.

In our world, someone loves us.

So what should we do?

David: Love them back.

Right.

Peter: Yeah.

1 John says, Brothers, Beloved, let us love one another for God has loved us.

So now we love one another.

John says, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

So the love of God, we meet with love for each other.

And so our undivided attention to the Lord does not lead us to kind of off in the desert where we just contemplate God or just worry about our relationship with the Lord.

Our undivided devotion to Him is lived out in our vocations around us.

Okay.

Now, that doesn't solve the problem of balancing your vocations.

But what it does do is it focuses you on living out the love that God has given us toward our neighbors.

I don't think Paul is saying here, don't care for your spouse.

I think what he's pointing out is that we are finite.

And it's hard as finite creatures to fulfill all our vocations.

And so have an undivided devotion to the Lord.

And then you have to expand beyond the text to say, what does that look like?

And I think that will lead us actually to care for the neighbors around us.

Jessica: I want to hear more about this.

I would like you to continue in an hour-long Bible study, please, because it specifically applies to my life.

Because just like you said, we all have a lot of vocations and I feel like I can't do all of them.

Peter: In my thinking, most sermons, if you can be really clear and focused on the problem you're addressing, that will help you with your sermon.

If you can pick a problem that is appropriate for your hearers, an effect of sin, a cause of sin, a specific sin.

David: Right.

Peter: We talk about malady, right?

David: Yeah.

Peter: And the malady in this sermon would be our finitude.

David: Okay.

Peter: That we're finite.

And that by necessity, because we have different vocations, our interests are divided.

It's hard to be faithful in all our vocations.  
And in fact, we can't do it.  
And so what do we do in this finite situation?  
We cannot fulfill all our vocations.  
Well, we have an undivided devotion to the Lord.  
That means we turn our eyes completely and solely to Him, the one who gives us life,  
who forgives us, who saves us.  
When we do that, He tells us to love one another.  
And this is where I think fulfilling our vocations with an undivided devotion to the Lord recognizes  
that we can't do everything.

David: Correct.

Peter: But we're called to be faithful kind of as best as we can.

David: Right.

Peter: And as one who's devoted to the Lord because of His love.  
Again, that's where the 1 John 4 emphasizes the love that God has shown us first.  
That's kind of the linchpin to the whole thing.  
The proclamation of God's love in Christ to us.  
God's undivided heart for us in Christ then allows us to be devoted to Him and do the  
best we can in our vocations.

David: You know, it's a hard text.

And with hard texts, people try to get around them.

Right?

And what I've heard people getting around this text is basically, this is Paul writing  
under a hyper eschatology that the return of Christ is imminent, like at this very moment.  
So therefore, you separate yourself from all your vocations because Christ is about to  
arrive.

And then, you know, later on, Paul realizes that there might be a delay in Christ coming.  
And so that's kind of how we get out of really listening to these words as something that  
speaks to us today.

Peter: Well I'm thinking with this text, when I first looked at this text, the first thing I did  
was I wrote down what are the clear truths that Paul is speaking in this text.

And the clear truth is as far as I made a list of four of them.

The appointed time has grown short.

Present form of this world is passing away.

We're filled with anxiety and divided interests.

Paul's calling us to secure our undivided devotion to the Lord.

And then the stuff about marriage is kind of just an example.

Jessica: And even if we just had one vocation, it still wouldn't be perfect.

Peter: Right.

Even if we had one, we'd fall short because we're finite.

You're moving from time is short, undivided devotion to the Lord.

And then you're helping your hearers, first of all, name and recognize the challenge of  
divided interests.

And then with a full devotion to the Lord, because of what he has done for us, then you're sending them to go forth boldly as best they can with these divided interests.

David: You know what, and I like the way that works out with that last line where Paul says, I say this for your benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you.

Paul is freeing you from the restraints.

Why?

By how?

By giving you to the Lord.

Because he is you, because you're in a relationship with the Lord and that relationship with the Lord guides your heart and mind and spirit to the things that God desires you to do in the world.

And that promotes good order.

Right.

Peter: And I think there's a way to proclaim the gospel fully and clearly with this undivided devotion to the Lord, which is based on his undivided love for us in Christ.

David: Right.

Jessica: That's all for today.

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I'm your host and producer, Jessica Bordeleau.

Join us next week here at Lectionary Kickstart when Dr. David Schmitt and Dr. Peter Nafzger spark your thoughts for next Sunday.

Peter: Maybe you've got rats.

Jessica: No, I don't have rats, but thank you Peter.