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Jessica: Welcome to Lectionary Kickstart!

We're sparking your thoughts for Sunday as you plan your sermon or your teaching lesson.
I'm your host and producer, Jessica Bordeleau,
here with Dr. David Schmitt and Dr. Peter Nafzger.
They are 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, where are we in the church here?

Peter: So, of course, we're at the end of Epiphany.

We've got Transfiguration next week, and then the season of Lent comes right after that.
We're wrapping up the season of Epiphany, and we think about God's revelation to all people
that Christ has come as the Savior of the world.

Jessica: And David, what are the texts for this week?

David: Isaiah 40, Psalm 147, 1 Corinthians 9, and Mark 1.

Jessica: As always, I ask each of you to tell me which texts you would choose to preach about.
This week, Peter, would you go first?

Peter: Yeah, if you listened last week, you know that I'm on this

extensive two-week sermon series on 1 Corinthians Chapter 8 and 9.

A time to challenge a couple of very basic American assumptions, at least, about how we live
as Christians and ways in which we need to continually return to the Scriptures because
our world preaches a very different message.

And so, last week, I thought a little bit about Christian freedom, especially within the church.
How do you use Christian freedom to build up the church?

This week, our attention, or Paul takes our attention, I think, outside the church,
toward others. And so, how ought we react and respond to those who are not yet Christians?
And so, to do that, Jessica, would you start us off by reading verses 19 to 23?

Jessica: For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all,
that I might win more of them.

To the Jews, I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews.

To those under the law, I became as one under the law,
though not being myself under the law, that I might win those under the law.

To those outside the law, I became as one outside the law, not being outside the law of God,
but under the law of Christ, that I might win those outside the law.

To the weak, I became weak, that I might win the weak.

I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

Peter: Okay, so a season of epiphany is the last Sunday in Epiphany,

where we've been thinking about this mission of Jesus to all nations.

Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free men, women, upper class, lower class, no class, all people.

And that's epiphany, right?
Even the Magi from afar are coming.
And so, Paul is talking about here what he's willing to do to win all people.
People from every nation, every tribe, every tongue.
And what he's willing to do is he's willing to become all things,
that by all means possible he might save some.
And I think about that phrase, I'm willing to become all things to all people.
And that to me flies in the face of our cultural American preaching,
that you should be yourself.
Don't become someone else.

David: Yeah, that's right.

Peter: Don't sacrifice who you are.

You do you.

You be true to yourself.

I mean, I watch my kids sometimes, you know, the outfits and the hair and the things kids do at school.
There's no longer a single style.

The style is be different than everyone else.

Be true to yourself, which in some ways is a new slavery.

But I thought about this because I read back in December,

did you guys see what the Merriam-Webster word of the year was for 2023?

Did I tell you this?

Well, the word of the year, according to Merriam-Webster's dictionary in 2023 was authentic.
One of the measures they used to find this word is which were the words that people Googled
and searched for most and authentic was a big thing.

Now think about it.

They talk about artificial intelligence and kind of the fabrications we spread on social media,
even the little ones just about ourselves, about how well things are going.

Kind of the celebrity culture.

Apparently, I don't know this because I don't listen to her.

But apparently Taylor Swift talks an awful lot about being your authentic self.

Even Elon Musk, this article is saying, emphasizes the need for authenticity on social media.

David: Well, I've often thought that with postmodernity, if you get rid of or you lose truth,
all you have left is authenticity.

Because what is true is not true.

If there is no truth, there's nothing that's true for everybody.

So all we can have is what's authentic for you.

Peter: Yeah.

Yeah.

I mean, and then that makes you kind of turn in on yourself, right?

David: Right.

Peter: Because now I'm looking inside myself, I'm expressing myself, I'm being myself.

And to that, Paul says, I have become all things to all people.

David: Wow.

Peter: It's kind of a fly in the face of this emphasis on authenticity.

Jessica: I think my perception and the perception maybe of other people sitting in the pew is that this open door to being authentic and being real is a good thing.
That means that you can live out your Christian faith and be who God made you to be because your identity is in him.
So you be that.
And if other people disagree with you, that's not going to change who you are or how you should act.
So I think other people might think, well, why is the pastor saying that's bad?
I thought that was good.

Peter: What I think you might do in the sermon is land and come back to what you just said.
But to do that, first of all, we have to talk about the idea of being authentic.
We have to tear down a conception and a use of authenticity that is self-serving instead of serving others.
So to be an authentic Christian, and that's what maybe I'd call this sermon, authentic Christianity or being an authentic Christian, is not I come up with my own truth.
I'm going to express myself however I want to.
And that is a prominent theme, I think, in our culture that I think I'd want to start by exposing that and calling that into question with Paul's language that I will become all things to all people so that I might save some.
Once you kind of give up the need to be authentic and you do have this truth, then I think you can start to look at, well, what does it mean to be faithful and true as a Christian?
And that is to set aside all that is peculiar to me for the sake of my neighbor.
So now my goal is not to express myself.
My goal is to do everything I can to love and to share the gospel with others.

David: Why would it be a problem if Paul wasn't all things to all people?

Peter: Say more what you're asking there.

David: He's a Jew to those who are Jews.
He's a Gentile to those who are Gentiles.
Well, what would be wrong with him being a Jew to the Gentiles?

Peter: Well, so what he's, so there's two things going on here.
One is, I think Paul is talking a little bit about the freedom we have in the gospel, and that kind of picks up from last week's text, that there is no single way to be a Christian.
To those who are Jews, he becomes a Christian Jew.
To those who are Gentiles, he becomes a Christian Gentile.
To those who are slaves, he becomes a Christian slave, that kind of thing.

Jessica: Can you tell me how that's different than lying or faking around people?
Or trying to be what they are?
Do you know what I mean?
It sounds like he's being kind of fake.

Peter: Well, I mean, you could say fake or you could say meeting people where they are.
You could say...

David: And recognizing that the kingdom of God is broader than any one person's understanding of it.

Peter: Any one person's understanding, any one cultural manifestation, the gospel transcends those things.
And so that gives us kind of this freedom not to be fake or inauthentic, but to be Christian in a way that makes sense to and is caring for those people whose Christianity manifests itself in a different way.
And so I think there's an opportunity here to kind of tear down some walls or some fences that Christians sometimes set up with certain people groups, certain communities.
But recognize that maybe I need to come among them as a guest.

David: Correct.

Peter: And listen and learn and then...
But here's the key.
I had you read all the way up to verse 23.
Jessica, would you read verse 23 one more time?

Jessica: I do it all for the sake of the gospel that I may share with them in its blessings.

Peter: Okay.
So why do I spurn my natural inclinations?
Why do I become something that's not natural to me for the sake of someone else?
Well, for two reasons, and verse 23 says.
One, I do it for the sake of the gospel.
I do it for the sake of the good news of Jesus.
This good news that transcends any people group, any time, any place.
This gospel that is ours, it's the heart of what we celebrated all Epiphany going back to Christmas.
It's what we're about to look forward to in the season of Lent and of course Holy Week.
For the sake of the gospel, I do this, but also that I may share with them and its blessings.
God has already bestowed his blessings upon us
and becoming all things to all people is a matter of sharing those blessings with others.
And I think there's even a sense in which you understand the blessings of the gospel even more when you share it with people who aren't just like you.
I was reading in one of my bibles the subheading to this section in 1 Corinthians 9 and the subheading said, Paul surrenders his rights.
And I thought kind of some language kind of surrendering your need to be authentic, surrendering your need to be yourself.
This time, unlike last week's text, not so much for the sake of your brothers and sisters in the church, but now we're talking about for those who are in the church, but now we're talking about for those who are outside.
Kind of a selfless giving up of our proclivities, our opinions, our preferences, so that all may hear and that at least some may be saved.

Jessica: But that doesn't mean that we put on a false attitude of acceptance for things that are sinful.

Peter: Oh, of course not.
And that's where pastors need to be really clear and maybe help members sometimes.
This doesn't mean changing the gospel or adjusting the scriptures.

David: Because then they'll never hear the gospel and be saved.

Peter: Right, then they'll hear a distortion of the gospel.

David: Right.

Peter: Which isn't safe.

And there's no gospel.

David: Right, yeah.

So this is not, I don't think there's any danger as long as you understand and are intentional about proclaiming the truths of God.

It's not about changing truth.

It's about surrendering your rights and doing everything so that you can share the gospel with everybody.

Jessica: David, what would you preach on this?

David: David, what would you preach on?

I would preach on the Gospel of Mark.

I was thinking that like Peter, you have two texts that flow into one another and you could possibly have kind of a mini sermon series now.

So last time we learned about Jesus being the cosmic Christ.

And now I think we could think a little bit more fully about what kind of a ministry does the cosmic Christ have.

And my theme would be something like Christ's ministry is intimate and infinite.

Okay, so I'm choosing those two words because I think there's a little bit of attention between them.

When you see something infinite, like the vast sky of stars and the way the universe is extending and extending and extending, you don't think of that as very intimate.

Peter: I think of it as distant.

David: It's very distant and it's much larger than me.

And the cosmic Christ and the rule of Christ is much larger and it's infinite, but it's also very intimate.

And so I'm looking at these passages and we've just seen this Christ in the synagogue cast out a demon.

We've realized the infinite nature of Christ.

And now we're going to see him in ministry and we're going to see how it's a balance of the infinite ministry and the intimate ministry.

Peter: Okay?

David: So, Jessica, if you could read verse 29 through 31 and then jump to verse 35.

Jessica: And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John.

Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever and immediately they told him about her and he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up and the fever left her and she began to serve them.

And rising very early in the morning while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place and there he prayed.

David: Okay.

So I think first thing with the intimacy is that the ministry of Jesus arises from an intimacy with his father.

And that's what we hear in this moment of very early in the morning, it's still dark.

Jesus gets up, goes out to a desolate place and prays.

So there is a very personal, very intimate relationship that Jesus has with his father.

He, as the son of God, has come to do his Father's will and his Father's will is the salvation of all people.

And so we see that way in which Jesus is kind of keeping his ministry on track is through that personal connection with his Father.

But then it's also an intimate connection to us and that's where this visit to the house of Simon and Andrew, I love this miracle.

Peter: I've always loved this, yeah.

David: I know because it's so, I mean, there are laws of hospitality and there definitely is kind of shame and honor going on and you have a guest and you want to serve the guest, but still she's having, she has a fever.

Right?

I mean, it's not a huge, you know, it's not like you're possessed by an unclean spirit, right?

You have a fever.

Right?

And I just love this.

I mean, it reminds me of my mom who would always say things like, you know, well, I'm not going to, you know, God's got more important things.

I can't ask him about that because this is so little.

Or, you know, I don't want to waste God's time with this little thing.

I'm like, mom, he's eternal.

He's got a lot of time.

So, you know, let me see, you've got this, that the ministry of Christ is such that he is so intimate that he is even concerned about a fever that you have.

Peter: Yeah, I think that's, it is, you think about these extravagant miracles.

David: Right.

Peter: And the healings of these terrible diseases and casting out demons and raising the dead even.

And then, you know, what's this, 100.3 or something like that?

David: I know.

And all of a sudden he heals her of a fever.

It's just a beautiful, a beautiful moment.

And it's not even like, you know, I mean, let's say, let's say he healed her of the fever and then she went on to become this doctor who discovered penicillin and has saved millions of lives, right?

So then you'd say, oh, well, that's why he did.

I mean, he heals her of a fever and she makes dinner.

Right?

So, it's kind of, it's this beautiful way in which Jesus is attentive to and active in the smallest vocations of our lives.

Peter: Yeah, the mundane, both the degree to the problem, the fever, and then the service that

flows from it.

David: Right.

Peter: It's very realistic.

David: Yeah.

So, there's this beautiful intimacy.

So, we've got this cosmic Christ who is intimately related to the Father and the Father is intimately related to you and has sent his Son to come and be there for you for even the smallest things.

It's just a gorgeous invitation to open your life, every part of your life to God.

I just think it's, I think it's wonderful, the intimacy.

Peter: I always think about this with Simon and we're talking about Simon Peter here and, you know, his mother-in-law.

So, that kind of highlights something about Peter and being married.

But there's a relative of the apostle who then is impacted by Jesus through the apostle.

And I think about just the family connections we have that I was, it always struck me at my congregation in Minnesota how many of the new members that we had were families, you know, family members and friends of the members who already existed.

And so, it's almost, you know, that verse 30, they immediately, they told him about her.

And that's kind of how it often worked was people told other people who were close to them about Jesus and what he does.

And this would be a way to, I can imagine there's people in the congregation who have opportunities to speak to loved ones in intimate moments and can speak about an intimate Savior.

David: Right.

Peter: That sometimes maybe when a guard is down, you could be equipping them to speak to their family and friends.

David: Right.

And you can bring anyone in your life to Jesus in prayer.

So, they went and told him about their mother-in-law.

Peter: Right.

David: Who are you telling Jesus about today?

Peter: Yeah.

Yeah.

David: Who are the people in your life that may not know enough to pray for themselves?

So, are you praying for them and what are you saying to Jesus about them?

Peter: And the reason I find this kind of helpful is that it's easy to think about when you talk about the intimacy, the intimate Savior, it's easy to think about his intimacy with respect to you as an individual.

David: Right.

Right.

Peter: Kind of all go off now by myself to pray and he's intimate with me.

But his intimate love for you is matched by his intimate love for everybody.

David: Right.

Peter: And to be able to share that, that makes kind of a community of people who are engaged intimately

by the Savior.

David: Yeah.

So, that's the intimate part.

And then the next part of the sermon would also be that his ministry is infinite.

And I think you were picking up on this, Peter, when you were saying sometimes we can emphasize the intimacy so much that we lose sight of this much larger work of God, work of God that is beyond ourselves.

Right.

Peter: Right.

David: And so, Jessica, if, you know, we read verse 35 where Jesus goes out and prays.

And then if you could read 36 through 39.

Jessica: And Simon and those who are with him searched for him and they found him and said to him, everyone is looking for you and he said to them, let us go on to the next towns that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.

And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

David: Okay.

I love that.

I just love the ironic juxtaposition there.

Jesus, everyone's looking for you.

Okay, let's go.

But it really shows you the priorities of his mission.

That, if you think about the structure of the text, before this text began last Sunday, he was in the synagogue.

And then he went from the synagogue to the home.

And then he went from the home to the town because the middle section there is when everybody in the town are bringing people who are sick and he heals them.

And now he goes from the town throughout all Galilee.

And so we've got this mission of Christ that is infinite in its geography, infinite in its spatial landscape, where he's going to move from the synagogue into your home and from your home into your community and from your community, the ends of the world.

And so we think about ourselves as Christians, you know, yes, we come to church, we participate in worship, we receive God's gifts here.

But this is a God who's on the move.

And he's going to go from your experience in church into your home.

He's going to affect the way you relate with your own family members.

And then he's going to move from your home into your community, how you treat your neighbors, how you treat people at work, and he's going to go from the community all the way out into the world.

So we've got this infinite expansion of the geography of the kingdom of God.

And then the other part is the reference to demons also.

I think we see the infinite spiritual realms that Christ is going to rule over.

It's not just going to be the realm of Capernaum, the realm that we can see with our eyes, but it's actually going to extend into the realms of the forces of the principalities and the

powers that are fighting against us.
And he's going to rule over all of those things.

Peter: Yeah, he's not just visiting these places.
He's ruling over these places.

David: He's casting out the demons.
So he's kind of making that safe space for his people as he brings that kingdom to the ends of the earth.
So for me, this would be the second sermon that's kind of taking that discovery of the cosmic Christ and bringing it home.

Peter: You know what I like about this, kind of just with respect to the liturgical church here to the calendar, is that next week is transfiguration.

David: Right.

Peter: When Peter, James, and John are given a glimpse of Jesus' glory.
And in a way, these two readings from Mark last week's and this week's almost prepare, they kind of give a preview of who Jesus is.
And then I think you could even kind of unpack some of these things or draw back on these things when you preach on Transfiguration Sunday.

David: Yeah.

Jessica: Thanks, guys.

That's all for today.

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He's got a lot of time.