

Music: <introductory music>

Rebecca: Hello and welcome to Mind the Gap, a commentary podcast about all those verses that get left out of the readings in the Revised Common Lectionary. I am one of your hosts, Becca. My pronouns are she/her. I'm a Lutheran pastor in Michigan, and I've been serving in parish ministry for five years.

Annemarie: And I'm your other host, Annemarie. My pronouns are she/her. I'm a Lutheran pastor in New Jersey, and I've been serving in parish ministry in the ELCA for 15 years.

Rebecca: You know how the lectionary pericopes occasionally skip over a handful of verses in the middle of a passage? We are putting those pieces back into the readings so that we can hear them in their entirety and give ourselves a chance to explore what they mean altogether...

Annemarie: ...how the exclusion of those verses does or doesn't change things, and what (if any) wisdom we can gain for our preaching by minding that gap.

Rebecca: We wanna start out our episode this week by giving a big thank you to our patrons on patreon.com: David, Jennifer, Jerry, Melissa, and Liz, who have helped us reach a level where we are now able to offer transcriptions of our episodes. They're hosted on our website, mindthegaprcl.com, and we really hope that this will be a tool that helps people find what they are looking for more quickly if you are interested in going back and referring to something you heard, um, that may be an accessibility feature that helps you follow along and understand us more clearly, uh, we're very grateful to everyone who has supported and encouraged us in being able to offer this service. Uh, but this is another week where we have two texts to talk about. So we're gonna jump into things and get going with our conversation as usual first by asking one another, What's on your mind? So, Annemarie, what's on your mind this week?

Annemarie: This week I have been, uh, thinking hard and with some colleagues about what membership means in church. And, uh, you know, there are ways to define membership in church that are very helpful. So when we're preparing for a congregational meeting, we often go to the Constitution and we talk about what defines a member. And it's usually someone who has communed and contributed at least once, once in the last two years. So it's a pretty low threshold as far as, you know, keeping your membership being Lutherans. It's very, very hard for us to, uh, put requirements onto membership when we believe that God has made us members of the body of Christ, uh, but in the management of our congregations, we have to have some kind of process. And the interim, uh, congregation that I'm serving right now, we have had kind of an influx of, of some cool new folks come into church.

And so this week I've gotten to prepare a course for those folks. I'm a big fan of, uh, uh, the Daniel Lander kind of brand of, of resources. And so we're gonna use baptize we live. And so I got to, what was delightful this week was that I got to read through that book and be reminded once more about the core tenets of this life of faith and what being a member of a community like a congregation really means. So I'm looking forward to having a pretty robust group of folks to discuss, uh, these ideas and some of the core tenets of our faith. So, uh, that's where my Pastor heart is. That's, that's kind of what

what is, uh, uh, making me joyful this week and reminding me that this work is, is, gosh, it just runs the gamut as far as, uh, the, the ways in which it, it both inspires and exhausts us. Uh, so with that, Rebecca, I'll ask you what is on your mind today?

Rebecca: I like the phrase you just used. Um, that's where my pastor heart is. Uh, that stood out to me and I really enjoyed that. I know I mentioned last week, uh, that I was in the middle of VBS prep week, which means this is VBS week itself. And I'm just feeling reminded of what a project events like this really are. Um, for me, VBS is every bit as involved and exhausting as a Holy Week or Christmas Eve and everything else. Um, and I just wanna encourage people to be generous and gentle with themselves during VBS Week, to be generous and gentle with volunteers, to be generous and gentle with the kids. It's a really big undertaking, and it doesn't take a lot of kids to make it feel that way. I am not speaking from a, a, a position that has 200 children, um, far from it.

I know we all care a lot about creating experiences, um, that will be safe and memorable for our kids, and we'll tell them that they are loved and valued. Uh, so I am tired, I am grateful. I, uh, want to encourage everyone to really acknowledge how much it takes to put on a vacation Bible school. Um, and if you have to put up an email response that says you'll get back to things next week, uh, do it. If you have to go home in the afternoon and sit in the dark and quiet for a while, I encourage you to do it. Uh, and that's what's, uh, on my mind. 'cause that's about all I have capacity for this week, except that we do have two texts we need to talk about.

Annemarie: We do.

Rebecca: And they're from the complimentary, the Old Testament reading is from the complimentary series this week, not the semicontinuous. So it feels like there's, I know, a higher likelihood that, um, some folks may be reading that one during worship and so on. So let's let ourselves jump in and get going with our Isaiah reading.

Music: <piano music>

Annemarie: The first lesson for the complementary series of readings for the twelfth Sunday after Pentecost in Year A is Isaiah 56:1, 6-8...

Rebecca: ...meaning the gap we are exploring is Isaiah 56:2-5. I will be reading the assigned verses...

Annemarie: ...and I'll be reading the verses that are left out of the lectionary.

Rebecca: Thus says the Lord: Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed.

Annemarie: Happy is the mortal who does this, the one who holds it fast, who keeps the sabbath, not profaning it, and refrains from doing any evil. Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say, 'The Lord will surely separate me from his people'; and do not let the eunuch say, 'I am just a dry tree.' For thus says the Lord: To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.

Rebecca: And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered.

Music: <piano music>

Annemarie: Welcome to third Isaiah.

Rebecca: Yes, that was one of the first notes I made for myself as well. I, I try to remember when we have Isaiah readings to pay attention to that, because I think it matters a lot to the interpretation of things to knowing, are we okay? Are we, before the exile? Are they in exile? Have some of them come back from exile? Um, that kind of social location has a huge impact on how we read things.

Annemarie: It really does. And I think it's also important for us to note that at this point in Isaiah are really at the very, very start of third Isaiah. Um, third Isaiah really starts around 56, 55. Knowing what part of Isaiah we're in really does help us better interpret what it is that the prophet is telling us. And

Rebecca: I think for me, the, the lens it provides is really a lens that has me consider the role that trauma is playing in whatever I'm reading. Uh, when we're reading pieces that come from the exile or from the time when they have just come back from the exile, it's helpful to remember that these are going to be pieces that are being shared with an audience who has been through a forced migration, who has experienced being refugees, who are facing existential questions of how do we survive? What does our survival look like? What are our families going to look like in the future? What's going to happen to our language, our culture, our religion? Um, and being trauma-informed theologians, trauma-informed pastors is not something that I think professional religious folks have taken into consideration for very long in, in Christian history. Right? This is a fairly new thing to remind ourselves of.

This is a fairly new way that we are approaching not just academic studies, but life in general, in ministry in general. Um, so for me, the, the question of am I in for second or third Isaiah is a question of what role is trauma playing in what we're reading? And therefore, how should I be considering potential traumas? My people have experienced, um, traumas that are ongoing in the world around us, whether that is, um, people experiencing forced migration, asylum seekers, natural disasters, um, and other pieces. And I think that that can give us a, a strong connection to our, our past as the human family, right? These experiences that people have had for thousands of years. And the questions that have come along with it, of where is God in this? How do I respond faithfully to this? What does it mean about myself and the world to find myself in this situation and be searching for God's love in it?

Annemarie: I think you've hit something really important when we talk about trauma-informed preaching, and particularly this Isaiah text and the gap that we have, that's the, the part

that's been removed from the lectionary and being a trauma-informed preacher. This section that's been pulled out of Isaiah names a community that even now we are still wrestling with as a, as a American, as a United States society, as a global community, with how it is that we, we embrace and what does God do with folks who fit outside who or who, who exist outside of what we understand to be a gender binary. And, um, we have here this section where, uh, uh, Isaiah is referring to eunuchs, right? Eunuchs are people who do not possess reproductive, uh, organs any longer, uh, and often because of, uh, punishment or because of, uh, uh, a decision that was made for them, not by them.

Uh, and so we have this, this really interesting, uh, moment where <laugh>, Isaiah the Lord will surely separate me from his people. Do not let the eunuch say, I am just a dry tree. Do not let the eunuch say, right. This is, when I read this, I thought, oh my Lord, I did not know this was in Isaiah. I did not know that Isaiah speaks like this about eunuchs, and that the rest of this about eunuchs who keep the Sabbath and those who will live within my walls will have a name better than sons and daughters.

Rebecca: That part. Yes.

Annemarie: Where has that been?

Rebecca: It feels important to me to acknowledge that I'm speaking as a cis person who gets to fit in to that. Yeah. Um, so I, I do know that there's a complexity of feelings about kind of always having well-intentioned theologians read about eunuchs now and jump to like, oh, here's representation of trans people, or, um, gender non-conforming folks and everything. But I think there is something in the fact that even scripture itself acknowledges that, um, there are eunuchs who were born. So eunuch is this word that we get from antiquity, right? That can apply to a lot of different situations that we label and understand differently now. So there can be people that fall under this label that just have natural born differences in their bodies that have earned them this label, label or given them, um, uh, a situation that they have ended up in.

As you pointed out, sometimes it has been against their wishes. It has been an act of violence, um, which brings us back to this trauma-informed reading and preaching. Um, because we can also, um, have this reminder that eunuchs are not just people who are gendered differently, but have the potential of being people who are violence survivors. Um, and therefore, there are also going to be people who have different family structures who have not fit into these molds of what is expected or respectable, um, as a single person in the church. I even kind of hear a little bit something in there for myself as someone who often doesn't see a lot of, you know, programming geared towards singles or a lot of experiences, um, for people who are dating, being lifted up or any of these kinds of things. So I think that there is a way in, um, through this mention or, or any other, you know, we have the Ethiopian eunuch from Acts, um, in, in these witnesses, these witnesses of gospel in both testaments in various books, um, about the expansiveness of God's love and inclusion. It's not a big chunk of extra verses to add in, uh, if we wanted to. Um, and it does, uh, create a scripturally sound opening for talking about some of those opportunities to experience god's, um, the diversity of God's love and God's kingdom, um, and everything else in a way that could, um, be either

eyeopening for someone who hasn't thought of it that way, or be affirming for someone who could see themselves in that group.

Annemarie: Precisely. And I, I wanna make a a an a strong point too, to say that, and we, the writings we have from this time period don't give us a lot of, of Im of perspective on how life looked for these folks. And that what we know of today is that anyone who can read themselves into this, and I really appreciate you reading, you know, yourself into this position, because I think when we see the word eunuch here, we can start at that place of the definition of what that means. But I also think that scripture is always kind of inviting us to, to figure out, you know, who else fits into that, that def that moment, right? Who else fits into this? And what I was reading in, uh, the new Jerome commentary, uh, 'cause, you know, I love my Jerome, uh, was that eunuch were denied access to the temple, into the assembly of the Lord, because it seemed improper for a person deprived of the power of transmitting life to associate with the God of life.

And my intellectual brain understands that, right? And at the same time, I also can hear in what Isaiah is saying, that this is a correction to that, that this is where God is saying to all of God's people, right? And in particular in this moment, making an example out of a eunuch or out of the community of eunuchs. But to say that the, um, the way in which we are going to be, um, bringing and including and, uh, growing this community of life, right, this, this, uh, assembly of people who are here because of the God of life, is to say that life is going to be something that we're not gonna define for you. Mm. You know, we're not gonna be telling you how, what your life needs to be in order for it to be life. And I think today, right? So again, trauma-informed preaching, I think tells us that we can't stop at just talking about Unix and say what they were lacking, because what my, my trans and non-binary friends would tell me is I lack nothing.

Right? That, that it is not about, about what we lack, but that our lives might not follow the same pattern that has been scripted throughout all of history. But it is no less blessed and no less full and no less holy than anyone else's life. And I think you and I, over and over again, because we get a lot of psalms in the gaps and we get a lot of, of prophets, we have continuously been, uh, uh, called to point out the places where there is, there is real living word happening in these places. And I think this is just one of those, I was excited when I saw this was our, our text today, one of our texts. And I thought, wow, what a great opportunity for a preacher to, to embrace what God, the just embrace what God is embracing here.

Rebecca: Amen. It's, it's scripture being in conversation with itself to continue discerning God's will to not ever come to a point of thinking, we've got it all figured out now. No need to keep working on that. That's not a relationship, right? That's not how a relationship with people works. That's not how a relationship with God works. We keep praying, communicating, um, at all times to continue discerning God's will. Um, I, I like that we get this message through Isaiah from the point of view of the Lord. I like that we can remind ourselves that it did indeed come through a prophet. That this is what prophecy is. That prophecy is a way of looking around the world as it is, and discerning God's presence in it. And where God is calling us to, um, in the future, not in a way that does fortune telling, but in a way that asks us to, um, be intentional and be compassionate and all of these other things that bring us closer to God and to the way God would have us live.

Um, and I didn't want to move on too quickly from our conversation about this, um, without also looking at the repetition of the importance of Sabbath in it. Um, maybe 'cause I'm really tired from VBS, but I really, uh, find a lot of, I find a lot of challenge, but also a lot of grace in exhortations to keep the Sabbath and remember the Sabbath. I think that it is a commandment well worth taking seriously. Um, and that these verses in particular remind us that who has access to Sabbath is a matter of justice and is a matter of faith. Um, that we, and I'm speaking, we as in kind of modern 21st century people, particularly 21st century American folks, um, have not built ourselves a society where Sabbath, um, is accessible to all people. And that that burden falls more heavily on these oppressed communities, these outcast communities, these groups of people that get deemed less than by society. Um, and I think that these verses help us to see the importance of letting all people celebrate Sabbath, um, experience the blessings of Sabbath, and that we are called to be intentional about building that world together.

Annemarie: Indeed, indeed. And I think when we, um, think about the, the accessibility of Sabbath, and we hold that intention with trauma and in trauma informed lives, right? We talk, you mentioned when you mentioned kind of a, a, some of the ways in which we experience trauma, so especially collectively, right? So natural disasters and migration, forced migration. And, um, I'm thinking about, uh, uh, I'm thinking about Hawaii right now, right? The island of Maui is on fire, right? So now there's trauma happening in, um, finding Sabbath in the midst of something like that is, is incredibly difficult. And I would argue nearly impossible. All of that is trauma. And even if you literally have a day off from work, it's not a day off from your trauma, right? It's not a day off from the the things that you are facing each and every day that are just holding you back from living a life that is be able, that is gonna be able to embrace what it is that, um, God has hoped for you.

And when we have a, a, a moment like this in, in the go in, in the prophet Isaiah, I almost call it the Gospel of Isaiah, right? Uh, don't tell Isaiah I said that. Um, but, uh, we have this moment where there is, there's an opening, right? There's almost sunlight coming through in a moment where, where so many have been cut off from, from the, the community, from, from the, the life that God is giving. And now Isaiah is proclaiming to them, and I think to all of the remnant, right? All of those who have been in going back and forth between captivity and exile and, and all those things, that there is a place for you. There is, there is space for you, and there is Sabbath for you. Um, I think it all kind of is, is coming together in this really interesting way.

And I'll remind us that the gospel lesson for this Sunday is Jesus and the Canaanite woman, where the Canaanite woman comes to Jesus as he is eating and asks him to heal her daughter. And he says, I only came, he, he really rebuffs her and says, you know, I came for the, the sheep of the house of Israel and not for the dogs. And she has this, uh, line back to Jesus that says, even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the table. And, and Jesus's, you know, compassion obviously, uh, comes, comes to her and, and her daughter is healed. But this is another moment where I think all of this is adding up to a pretty impressive opportunity for preachers to kind of speak into some of these places and some of this trauma and to say in, in this, and we'll talk about the Romans reading too. Um, there's so much here from scripture that is calling on us to see where God is, is healing, where God is, is bringing us together, where God is, is embracing and not pushing away, uh, that it's, it's gonna be hard to, to, uh, it's gonna be hard to ignore

Rebecca: And to use the metaphor that Paul ends up using, if we are all members of one body in Christ, then we are not healed as a whole until all of our members are, um, that it's not even so much about doing a kind of selfless charity for people that need it, but that we truly are not whole and well and experiencing God's shalom until all of us are.

Annemarie: Amen.

Rebecca: Let's jump into our next reading.

Music: <piano music>

Rebecca: The second lesson for the twelfth Sunday after Pentecost in Year A is Romans 11:1-2a, and 29-32...

Annemarie: ....meaning the gap we are exploring is Romans 11:3-28. I will be reading the assigned verses...

Rebecca: ...and I'll be reading the verses that are left out of the lectionary.

Annemarie: I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.

Rebecca: Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? 'Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars; I alone am left, and they are seeking my life.' But what is the divine reply to him? 'I have kept for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.' So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, as it is written, 'God gave them a sluggish spirit, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.' And David says, 'Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling-block and a retribution for them; let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and keep their backs for ever bent.'

So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means! But through their stumbling salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their stumbling means riches for the world, and if their defeat means riches for Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!

Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead! If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; and if the root is holy, then the branches also are holy.

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, do not vaunt yourselves over the branches. If you do vaunt yourselves, remember that it is not you that support the root,

but the root that supports you. You will say, 'Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.' That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity towards those who have fallen, but God's kindness towards you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And even those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree.

So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written, 'Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob.' 'And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins.' As regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors;

Annemarie: for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

Music: <piano music>

Rebecca: This is a very uneven ratio of assigned verses and gap verses. It feels pretty rare that we have so many skipped in between, especially such a small number that do end up getting read.

Annemarie: And I feel like our listeners should know that you're the one that assigns who reads what? So you gave yourself that giant gap.

Rebecca: I, I did. But they should also know that I just copy and paste and it's the same order every week. So I wasn't paying attention. <laugh>

Annemarie: I, I think it's clear first why this is a gap.

Rebecca: Yeah. Fair.

Annemarie: But I also love, uh, verse 12. Now, if they're stumbling means riches for the world, and if the defeat means riches for Gentiles, how much more will there full inclusion mean? Yeah, full inclusion. Yeah. Thank you. Scripture.

Rebecca: There's definitely a, I mean, these are from the complimentary readings, so it makes sense that we are finding themes and connections. Um, but the Isaiah and the Romans and the Gospel do go together particularly well this week. I think, um, I find the horticultural metaphors challenging. I think that that is just so far from, uh, anything I've experienced firsthand. I'm a bad millennial. I'm not even a plant mom. I can't grow a darn thing. Um, so it's, it's not something that I find easy or that like emotionally connects with me. But I do really appreciate this rather long section of wrestling that



Paul is doing, not just even in, in this pericope, but throughout the letter to the Romans in general, um, about questions of inclusion, about questions of assimilation. Really, uh, this is a fraught topic that early Jesus following communities are having to work out from both sides in a way. Um, do Gentile Jesus followers have to assimilate into Jewish culture and ritual? Do Jewish Jesus followers, um, you know, in their own way have to risk some of their identity to develop these new communities in a way? Um, that's hard stuff. And I think that it serves us well to take it, take seriously how hard it would be.

Annemarie: Yeah. I think that there's this sense of, I mean, you hear this in, in almost every letter that Paul writes to different communities. This, this question of assimilation and how do we create community when there's di such diversity of, of, of people in all the places, but particularly Rome and in Rome, there, there's just this danger attached right? To being a a Jesus following community. And so when you have just danger for being a community that follows Jesus to begin with, and now you're gonna ask us to include people that we've never even considered, including there, there is some Paul, it's almost as if they're saying to Paul, you're asking us to go a bridge too far. You know, you're, there's only so much risk we're willing to take on. And this g this this resurrection message, this Jesus message is still really new.

Think about the last time we had to get a new worship book in worship, right? And how hard it is for us to adapt new things or new hymns, or, uh, just a new way of, I don't know, taking communion for crying out loud. Uh, we have a hard time changing our patterns. This idea of assimilation that Paul is kind of, is not kind of, but is really encouraging and, and basically saying you have to, for the sake of following the gospel that Jesus has laid out here, um, this is one of the most radical things that he is putting in front of them and saying, you need to give up a couple things about what you have always believed a life of faith looked like. And embrace something that's new and still believe that this is what God has always wanted for you.

Rebecca: I can't tell if we're reading it the same way or we're coming from slightly different angles. I, I, I read it not as a message that, well, we're all gonna have to assimilate a little bit, but that assimilation isn't necessary. That gentiles can still be gentiles and follow Jesus, and Jews can still be Jews and follow Jesus. And Jews who are not following Jesus are by no means left out of God's plan or God's grace. Um, that this is a revelation that these communities have received and are running with and are finding grace within. But that, I, I guess it's that struggle between what does it mean to come together and can you do that without assimilating? Because I guess I hear assimilating as a, a kind of, uh, giving up of markers or cultures where the kind of community that Paul is trying to build is a community where people bring these pieces of themselves with them, um, and aren't expected to, to give them up in order to build a, a, a group, um, a cohesive faith-filled, um, grouping in that way. I don't know if we're saying the same thing in different ways or if we're saying the same thing.

Annemarie: I think that we are saying what we're saying.

Rebecca: We're saying what we're saying. I like that. I think--

Annemarie: It's helpful for you to, to make that distinction, though. Yeah. I I'm not sure that either of them is altogether. I mean, I think there's a lot of similarity, which between the two of

those things, and I think it, it always is when we in try, try to interpret scripture right? It, the hardest part is, is that we're not there. Right? Right. We're not, we're not in those, those places. And I think, uh, context matters where we're coming from and where we're reading it from in our own lives really matters. Uh, but I also think that this is just one piece of Romans, right? If you really wanna preach on Romans this on this particular week, I would encourage you to read the rest of this chapter.

Rebecca: At least read the rest of this chapter and read the resource that I am always lifting up, Preaching and Teaching with Love and Respect for the Jewish People. 'Cause this is, this genuinely is a passage that gets referenced quite a few times in that document. Um, and you can probably see why, I mean, this is kind of the, the fundamental questions of, um, what is God's relationship to the, the Jewish people, um, in light of the incarnation and the resurrection and so on. Um, and, and it's important to be nuanced and have a lot of care in the way we talk about that because the impacts, uh, are really meaningful for Jewish communities, for our listeners. Um, and being able to say, um, that, that God's grace and blessing and like you were, you were lifting up the, the lines about full inclusion are, are not revoked. Our starting place has to be the everlasting nature of God's promises.

Annemarie: Yeah. And I think you could even, I mean, I don't know if you caught this too at the very beginning, uh, the very beginning of the gap where, uh, references Elijah, uh, in fact, that's from the week before. So we'll have had that, that lectionary text in the, the complimentary series, uh, with Elijah calling out to God and saying, I'm it, God, there's no one left. Uh, I think Elijah's being a little dramatic, I mean, shocker, that Elijah's being dramatic, but there's this moment where God's where Elijah thinks that this ex, this whole thing has failed. And Elijah's like, Hey, I'm it. And God says, oh, you're not <laugh> first. Let's go to this mountain and be, be quiet for a minute, Elijah. And then, um, nope. You're gonna, you know, there's gonna be more to do, but it's not gonna be perfect. Right. But it's not gonna be, you know, the, the remnant that is, that is around, is going to be one that we're gonna have to work on, and we're gonna have to, you know, it's, it's gonna be an adventure, Elijah. So get that mantle back on and get outta the mountain.

Rebecca: Which is a true thing through the ages for every people that has been trying to follow God and to experience the divine in our world, um, and be compassionate and build communities of faith that serve one another and the world God created. You know, that's never just a onetime <laugh>, a never a onetime project. We're still working on it.

Annemarie: I know that you, uh, really lean more toward, uh, you know, um, uh, sowing and quilting and other kinds of references, references. I know you, uh, however, I think we could talk about some grafting just for a moment. I think there's, there's some, some more to talk about that the, I'm not good at plans either. I always joke on plant hospice. I'm where plants come to die, and not even with dignity. Uh, I'm just terrible at plants. I forget about that they exist. Um, so they die horrible deaths with me. But--

Rebecca: But you did more research than me, <laugh>.

Annemarie: I don't think that's true either!

Rebecca: No, I do think it's true! Share with us!

Annemarie: So, uh, I think that the idea of, of grafting on olive branches is, is not to be missed here. If you're gonna talk about this gap and you wanna talk about the way in which they're, they're talking about grafting and, uh, joining a wild branch, which is meant to be the, the Gentiles, uh, to, uh, cultivated olive tree. Um, that is, I think there's a couple things that are significant with that, right? So first we have just the, the joining of those two different kinds of, of olive trees. So wild and a cultivated in my mind. I don't, again, I am not a plant expert. I am talking out of my expertise, and I'm, I, if you have a comment, please, please interact with us about this if I'm wrong. But it sounds to me like there's this, when you mix those two kinds of things, the risk you run, I would assume is that the wild shoot could infect the, the cultivated one.

You could really have some, some, some damaging effects from that cross pollination or that cross unity, whatever that is. I can't even have the words to talk about this. But when God talks about it, when, when the, when Paul is writing to the Romans, Paul is saying, no, no, we're gonna add these shoots. And God has said to us that that's gonna actually give life. And that, I think the other possibility of grafting onto other, and I think we know this through, um, uh, cross pollination and, uh, the ways in which we've engineered, um, food and plants to thrive in different kinds of settings and, um, different kinds of, of climate conditions, is that oftentimes when you do graft two different kinds of, of plant together, it could make it stronger and it could make it more robust and more able more able to, to survive in harsher conditions. So I think that there's, there's some room there for, for talking about how to be inclusive in community and that yes, it's a risk, right? Opening yourself up to and, and declaring yourself to be a place and a community that is going to be grafting into your place, uh, all kinds of, of people... What are you gonna say?

Rebecca: Well, I, 'cause I think this is where we're reading slightly differently. Because this is directed primarily to the Gentiles. This isn't a message of open yourself up to, oh, having something else grafted in. This is Gentiles, you are, um--

Annemarie: Right, verse 13!

Rebecca: --speaking to you. It's, yeah, it's almost like a, a, a direct warning against supersessionism and what kind of ended up happening with Christian history in, in relation to the Jewish people. That this is really more of a, a warning about do not forget where your roots, that the, the roots are where God, like first developed this really deep relationship that you .Yes. Be careful of becoming haughty. Um, and all of these other pieces--

Annemarie: Do not vaunt yourselves!

Rebecca: I knew it was a weird word. Do not vaunt yourselves. Um, so I think, I think that's the different angle that I was seeing, especially emphasized that this wasn't about open yourself up to having others grafted, but for those of you who are grafted, um, especially because these are people in Rome, um, there's probably a particular fear of, um, of, of carrying that imperial. And, and it usually wouldn't be like upper class folks or anything like, it's usually pretty lower class people. Um, but because it's directed to the community that is coming in from the outside, I just hear it differently.

Annemarie: So that's interesting and that's really helpful. This is, everyone should know that this is why I love you. Um--

Rebecca: This is why I like doing this with you. We're doing it with each other.

Annemarie: I know that's why we love doing it together. But what I wanna ask is then, if that's the case, I'm wondering about how, how does, so if we understand this to be both invitation and warning yes. For gentiles to see themselves in this way, right? Yes. Invitation to see yourselves as included invitation to see yourselves as part of, of this. Yes. And at the same time, understanding that you're being part of something that's been established for all this time, and that you're not to vaunt yourselves over someone else because you're coming into their, their house, essentially. You're coming into their territory, and I still have to work on them to begin with. Sure. But so you have Jesus who's at this meal and this Canaanite woman, right, who is Gentile, correct?

Rebecca: Mm-hmmm. <affirmative>

Annemarie: She's coming to him for healing. This is obviously pre Romans, right? This is pre Paul and all those things. She's--

Rebecca: But written after, I think is the tricky thing, right? That is the tricky thing, like taking place before, but being written after and being heard by an audience that has already had a lot of these conversations and struggles for several decades.

Annemarie: Right. So I guess that even like, just makes it even more, I think I just wanna keep thinking about that then. Yeah. I wanna keep thinking about what does, what does having this gap. And I think that's why, you know, we, this is part of why we do this, is to think about what does this gap give us, and does it give us anything to help bring something out of what I think a lot of us feel like is a really tough text. I think a lot of us struggle with the Canaanite woman because of the way Jesus responds to her. Uh, we have a hard time hearing Jesus rebuke someone, or at least that's what some of us here, some, I've heard some preachers try to like, you know, uh, figure out a way in which Jesus isn't rebuking her. I have trouble with that. But, um, but how does this gap, and especially the, you know, between 17 to 28, um, versus 17 and 28, I mean, how does this help inform our preaching of that, of that moment that Jesus and the Cana woman have? Because she still does receive what she asks for, right? She, she comes back at him and says, no, I, I am I am part of this with you. Um, I, I, and even a crumb will give me what I need, and he acknowledges her faith.

I guess my, my question is, can we, can we make a bridge here?

Rebecca: I do think we can make a bridge, and I almost feel like the conversation we are having right now and the way we're dwelling with the question might be the point. In fact, um, I'm just gonna read part of what I wrote in my notes for myself for this. I wrote that Paul resisted ideas of assimilation in his theology. Gentiles did not have to practice the way Jews did. Jews who did not become Jesus followers were not left out of God's plan. He probably could have had a tidier theology with easy boundary lines if he refused to let it be a messy argument, but instead he embraced that. Um, and then I asked myself, what lesson could that hold for us? And maybe it's the exhortation to be a little more

comfortable with blurry lines. Maybe it's the exhortation to be a little more comfortable with, um, building relationships with people that we thought we couldn't do that with.

Um, I think it does have a bridge with both the gospel and with back in the Isaiah reading, where there is an acknowledgement of the complicated dance between valuing and protecting tradition, the things we've known, cultural identity, these pieces of where we come from and who we feel we are, um, with also bringing in new people, new ideas, um, with avoiding either cutting ourselves off or being domineering. Um, I, I kind of wanna come--for me at, at the point I'm at with reading them, I kind of wanna come to a place where the complicatedness is the point. Um, which isn't the most satisfying thing to arrive at. But again, I, I, I have a feeling in my uncomfortable heart that maybe it is indeed the, the point of it all.

Annemarie: I think that's pretty brilliant, uh, not shocked that it came out of you. Uh, but I also think as preachers, we want so much for things to be tied up in a neat little bow. Yes. And our willingness to let things be blurry, uh, to let kind of paradoxes or to let complex theological <laugh> ideas or, or texts that make us leave us with more questions and answers. I think those make us uncomfortable because we, we think we're supposed to have all the answers. And I think it really does invite our, our people and the people that we assemble with and worship this opportunity to say, okay, well this week we're gonna just keep thinking about this. Mm-hmm. Right. We're just gonna keep wondering and praying, and we'll probably come back to it at some point. But, but next week, come back next week so we can keep thinking about this, but that this is what church is for. Mm-hmm. Right. At the end of the day, step part, this is what community and Christ is all about, is yes. Is that we get to hold, we get to kind of make space for these questions and, and be able to say we don't know together. But no, I think, I think you're absolutely right. Uh, I think this is one of those weeks where we, even with the gaps or without the gaps you have, there's just not a lot of of clear cut answers.

Rebecca: The other tool we have as preachers and as pastors, um, can be to let the sacraments preach for us with these texts. And in this week, um, especially if we've got a baptism, um, especially if we're in a community that has Holy Communion Weekly, um, if you don't, um, please do that. Please, please, uh, maybe, please do that. Maybe have communion. I don't know. Um, I feel like the sacraments could do a lot of preaching for us with these texts, um, in terms of the way that Christ's presence in those binds us together. Um, even among all of those questions and the blurriness and the everything else, if, if the conclusion we have to come to is: Hey, this is fuzzy and hard, but at the table, at the font, we are one and we are one with God, and God is with us. That's still really darn good news. And that's something to go home with and take throughout the coming week.

Music: <outro music>

Rebecca: Thank you so much for listening to our conversation this week. We hope that by minding the gap, you heard something that gave you a new insight, appreciation, or question about scripture.

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Annemarie: Now, your job is to find us @MindtheGapRCL on Instagram. Visit our website, mindthegaprcl.com, and if you really love us, support us using Ko-fi or Patreon. Share us with all your friends and colleagues.

Rebecca: Blessings on your preaching friends. And may the word of God dwell in you richly.