

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.

Music: <introductory music>

Rebecca: It's so good to be back after taking a break for a couple of weeks. Annemarie and I are both really excited to be able to talk about scripture again together and with all of you. Before we get going, we want to say thank you as ever to everyone who has supported us on Patreon and Ko-fi: Lee and Kim, David, Jennifer, Jerry, Melissa, Liz. All of you are wonderful and we really appreciate the way you have helped us be able to do things like offer transcriptions for our episodes and we appreciate your support a lot. Before we jump into our commentary, we're going to get started as we usually do by asking one another what's on your mind. So Annemarie, I'm looking forward after a few weeks away to hearing what's on your mind.

Annemarie: I today am giving great thanks for teachers and librarians and people that work especially with young people to encourage them in learning. And last night I was at back-to-school night, and my child has started middle school, and I said a little prayer last night of great thanks, and for the steadfastness of spirit and energy for all of the teachers who teach, particularly middle school though, because man, that is a roller coaster. But I just met so many great educators and people who are passionate about exactly what they're doing, who are able to see all of these students for the potential that they have. And I'm grateful to be in a district where I know my kid is getting not just really solid education, but also is getting to meet some really cool adults. But yeah, no, so I'm grateful for teachers and administrators and librarians and all the people that make schools run, and I hope that they're already having good years wherever they are.

Rebecca: Amen. I think that when we often have backpack blessings and other stuff at the beginning of the school year for teachers and students, I just think that that's such an awesome ministry we can offer because it is such a blessing to our communities both directly and indirectly, whether we have a kid of our own in the school system or not, it helps bring up awesome young people that become our neighbors and other citizens and it's so cool.

Annemarie: Yeah. Yeah, it's really, really cool. Plus one of my parishioners is one of her teachers, so that was also cool. Rebecca, what is on your mind?

Rebecca: So over the past couple of weeks, I've been getting back into one of the kind of productivity apps, productivity websites that I have used on occasion. There's one that has worked really, really well for me. I do really well with body doubling or parallel working, and there's a variety of websites that you can do that online with. I use one called Focusmate, it's just at focusmate.com. If anyone else knows about themselves that they respond well to that kind of accountability or that kind of partnership when they're working, that's a recommendation for a particular website I can make. And I know that as pastors, we are often... when we're doing work it is a very collaborative and a very people-focused profession, but at the same time, often we don't have anyone that we're working with when we're doing things like sermons or research or newsletter articles or what have you. Emails and having a way to provide yourself with some structure for that can be really cool. So I just kind of thought that I would use this time to offer that up to people and mention it as a possibility in case anyone else might find benefit from it.

Annemarie: That sounds awesome. I really am interested in that, but you're right, we have to make up schedules. We have to prepare for Bible studies. There's just some office work that we just have to get done, and it is hard to focus when you're trying to just, there's so many things happening at once. So that sounds like a really cool tool. I'm glad you got back into it.

Rebecca: Yeah! And shout out to my seminary classmates who would do that with me in person back in the day, because that's when I learned that that helps me. Right?

Annemarie: Well, I feel like we used to do that at Starbucks.

Rebecca: Oh, absolutely. It's this total same kind of thing. Yeah. So I offer that to anyone if it's helpful, but I know that we have Psalm 105 again this week. We had an episode, but it's showed up in the lectionary a lot recently and we did one episode a number of weeks ago where the gap was kind of the first half of it, and then that got repeated. So this week we have a gap where there's a big gap in the center of it, but we're focusing on the second half of that, which is the verses that we have not discussed yet. So you can head back and check out our older episode if you want to be able to listen to that also and consider it in its entirety. But we're going to be focusing on the latter half of that piece today. So I think we should probably get going and read that together and jump on in.

Annemarie: I'm ready to go.

Music: <piano music>

Annemarie: The psalm for the semicontinuous series of readings for the seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost in Year A is Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45...

Rebecca: ...meaning the gap we are exploring, based also on verses we've covered in previous episodes, is Psalm 105:23-36. I will be reading the assigned verses...

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

Rebecca: O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples. Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually. Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgements he has uttered, O offspring of his servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen ones.

Annemarie: Then Israel came to Egypt; Jacob lived as an alien in the land of Ham. And the Lord made his people very fruitful, and made them stronger than their foes, whose hearts he then turned to hate his people, to deal craftily with his servants.

He sent his servant Moses, and Aaron whom he had chosen. They performed his signs among them, and miracles in the land of Ham. He sent darkness, and made the land dark; they rebelled against his words. He turned their waters into blood, and caused their fish to die. Their land swarmed with frogs, even in the chambers of their kings. He spoke, and there came swarms of flies, and gnats throughout their country. He gave them hail for rain, and lightning that flashed through their land. He struck their vines and fig trees, and shattered the trees of their country. He spoke, and the locusts came, and young locusts without number; they devoured all the vegetation in their land, and ate up the fruit of their ground. He struck down all the firstborn in their land, the first issue of all their strength.

Rebecca: Then he brought Israel out with silver and gold, and there was no one among their tribes who stumbled. Egypt was glad when they departed, for dread of them had fallen upon it. He spread a cloud for a covering, and fire to give light by night. They asked, and he brought quails, and gave them food from heaven in abundance. He opened the rock, and water gushed out; it flowed through the desert like a river. For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham, his servant.

So he brought his people out with joy, his chosen ones with singing. He gave them the lands of the nations, and they took possession of the wealth of the peoples, that they might keep his statutes and observe his laws. Praise the Lord!

Music: <piano music>

Rebecca: So probably not most people's first homiletical choice or even liturgical choice with the psalm from the semicontinuous series. I was struck this week as I was prepping that Working Preacher doesn't even do commentary for the psalms from the semicontinuous series, but I think it gets back to that piece of this project that has been just about dwelling in the Word for us, and spending extra time with scripture and seeing what these overlooked gaps—within overlooked readings, sometimes—what they have to say to us. So we've got more of the story of the Exodus and particularly the plagues in the gap this week. So kind of—not particularly uplifting.

Annemarie: Yeah so, in the semicontinuous series... If you were going to do the semicontinuous first lesson that has to do with the manna, right, in the wilderness as part of this, obviously the Exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt. But in the Psalm then you have this whole kind of recounting of how God took the people out of Egypt and sent all this punishment upon the Egyptians for enslaving the people. So you have this connection between the

two as far as in the semicontinuous, if you were still kind of walking your way through Exodus, this psalm is a good callback to where they were, and especially as you move further along in Exodus when they get tired of the manna, because the manna is a response to the complaining. The complaining has begun. And so the reminder of what God has done for them in the Psalm could be really impactful here.

Rebecca: When I read through it, if I had to guess, I feel like these verses get taken out because they are... they're heavy. That's difficult subject matter. I think the story of the slavery in Egypt and the plagues and the Exodus is one that is, I mean, you can't talk about the scripture or the foundations of Judaism and therefore Christianity without acknowledging this story in its totality. I think that it's fair to consider this story from our perspective and be troubled by it and find ourselves asking questions like, well, what does it mean to have this foundational story where some people's suffering matters, but then the suffering that's caused by these plagues is supposedly just and all of that. And I hesitate sometimes to approach scripture in a way where, oh, we have to figure out how to make it all fit or how to justify it instead of letting it prompt feelings and questions for us. But I can see where liturgically, these are verses that you don't go to first.

Annemarie: Yeah, no, and I think you're right, and I think they also, they're very repetitive and that sometimes we can lose focus. I do like though that there's these different verbs, God does this work by: God sent, turned, caused, swarmed, spoke. Actions of God. It's powerful action from God, but I can also see that we can name those powers of God around the gap as well. That's the remembering, it's the calling back. And so this section is just naming them outright when we're already talking about them, referring to them in the sections around it.

Rebecca: I like that, the repetition of the verbs kind of prompting us to think about God being active and maybe even getting to a point of wondering for ourselves, where do we see God being active? Do we see God being active? How do we experience God in our own lives? So because, I think the Psalms in general don't always have as much commentary to lean on by other people and particularly because of how this Psalm ends up in the lectionary, there's very little, that I ended up going back to Augustine for this. So Augustine has an exposition on the Psalms that you can just find online and all that kind of stuff. And as I was reading through that, I liked that he was dwelling with a lot of the questions that I had myself. So even when he really goes through things verse by verse, and he was wrestling with verses 24 to 25 about this question of whether God made Egypt sin, even in quotes from Exodus itself about God hardening Pharaoh's heart, and what does that mean?

I liked first of all knowing that Augustine himself was asking those questions. I think that that gives us something in common, and I liked where he went with it. So I have no idea what translation this is or how many translations there are or anything like that. But where I was reading it in publicly available internet land, it said, "Is it to be in any wise understood or believed that God turneth man's heart to do sin?" as the focal question. And then his point of view ended up being that these verses together, especially followed by a remembering of the blessing and promise that God has made to God's people really frame it more as hatred and particularly Egypt's hatred or sin being this response to other people's blessing. Augustine said, "It was not then by making their hearts evil, but by doing good to his people that he turned their hearts that were evil of

their own accord to hatred. For he did not pervert a righteous heart.” And forgive the gendered language, et cetera, et cetera. That is a perspective that I appreciate. It's not so much God as a puppet master of, well, I need these people to be evil right now so that the story works out the way I want. It's a kind of acknowledgement that as human beings sometimes we see the prosperity of other people and we respond with envy or with hatred or with injustice and all of this. And I thought that that was nuanced and thoughtful in a way that I liked seeing from something written so long ago from a Christian perspective.

Annemarie: I really think that that's important for us to hear not just in this Psalm, but when we read scripture in general. So the assumption of where evil originates is not always as obvious as we think it is, and usually because we're humans and we never want to assume that we are the origin of evil. It's always an other, it's always a someone else is doing the evil and I'm just responding to their evil. Whereas I think Augustine here is really kind of naming all of it and saying, no, there's really no clear cut way of identifying this, especially when it comes to people who believe they're on the side of God, believing that they couldn't possibly be the origin of such things. And I also think that that does something for how we think about the Egyptians. I think it does something for how we think about the leaders of the Egyptians, maybe not the power wielders, maybe the people that had to obey the power wielders.

And if we think about it in a modern context just how sometimes it can be really difficult to figure out where the origin of evil practice or misguided sinfulness really comes, meaning that we actively struggle with how to deal with others and the things that hurt people we love. And sometimes the things that hurt someone we love are also done because someone else has been hurt or because someone else is trying to do the right thing, but they don't recognize or they're doing the thing that they're being told to do and don't understand that what they're doing is actually evil to somebody else. And I think that's part of the heart of this very Lutheran understanding of sin or “reverent best guess” which is really kind of the way that it's been taught to me, which is a callback to a pastor in New Jersey, Reverend Frank Fry, who used to teach with this phrase and talk about your reverent best guess is how we try to navigate the world in a way that we try to avoid it at all costs actively participating in things that are evil, but at the same time, knowing that we can never fully a hundred percent avoid it. And so we make our reverent best guess knowing that that could also be sinful and we pray all the more, right? We do our human best.

Rebecca: There are medieval midrash that talk about the Exodus and the complexity of the justice that was found and the freedom from slavery with what the Egyptians experienced. I found, again, I don't know about translations and all that kind of stuff, but the specific piece in a particular quote I found was, “the Egyptians were drowning in the sea at the same time. The angels wanted to sing before God and the Lord God said to them, My creations are drowning and you are singing before me?” And I think that that same kind of perspective comes up a number of times or there are multiple translations and framings of that question, but it's the acknowledgement of that difficulty in reconciling what happens in that story as being a foundational tale of liberation that does also involve suffering of others. And I think that that's a really interesting thing to lift up for people.

Annemarie: Yeah, I think it's one of those ways we don't often get a chance to think about this story, and this is maybe the wisdom in some ways of engaging with the semicontinuous lectionary, is that you really get to dig into things that we often only get to hear on the surface or often only get to—when I teach it in confirmation, I don't know that we always get this deep into it. We don't think about, we used to do this story at confirmation camp. We used to do a two year rotation where one year was the Jesus year and one year was the Exodus year. And so we would kind of live out the Exodus story. And if I think about the process of how we engaged in the plagues and crossing the Red Sea, I don't remember at least a whole lot of questions from the young people about, well, what happened to the Egyptians?

Why didn't God care about them? And I think that it's a place that we don't often want to go. And I think it goes down to this question of deserving that I think we often wrestle with, and that actually ties us to the gospel for this Sunday, for this particular Sunday as it's the parable of the workers in the vineyard where no matter what time the workers arrive for work, they all get paid the same. There's this question of there's just been this series of gospel texts as we are really getting into the meat of Matthew, where Jesus is really pointing out that the grace of God is going to be delivered in ways that are going to make us uncomfortable and that God's ability to love and forgive is going to be so extraordinary that we're going to be really confused by it.

Rebecca: Yeah, I guess you could frame it either way. What does it mean to be deserving of pain and what does it mean to be deserving of reward? This particular Psalm gap and the parable from the gospel play with each other in that way, even the verse at the end of the gap, so it's not in the assigned readings, but it references in verse 36, the Death of the Firstborn of Egypt. And I don't know that I ever specifically linked that for myself to the overall preference of scripture for second sons or the particular gospel verse about the first being last and the last being first, and the way that those are going to be turned upside down and backwards for us. I don't know where to go beyond: Yes, it plays with that. It makes us ask ourselves questions about that. When we assume privilege and safety, what actually comes about? What complications are there for those assumptions? I think that those are good questions for us. I think that the gospel makes us confront our own limits of generosity, our own limits of retribution, our own limits of how we perceive God being at work around us, to go back to that even idea of verbs and God being active in our lives. And that's more than fruitful, right? That's the journey of a lifetime of faith.

Annemarie: Yeah. No, I think you're absolutely right. I mean, I think about the ways in which we engage in congregations around scripture, whether it's in Sunday school or it's in confirmation or just today I was doing Bible study with my mostly seniors. The same questions are being asked in all of those places, right in different ways and maybe with different language, but they're all asking very similar questions about what is the nature of God and how do I engage with this story? Or how does my faith shaped by these stories and by this moment in scripture that we're engaging with? And I think that there's always going to be a sense of mystery. Finding comfort in mystery is I think, the hard part, but there's this sense of, yes, we have scripture to remind us of what God has been up to and what God has done for God's people. And at the same time, we don't get all the answers all the time, and so we have to still rely on those questions and the community of faith to ask them with and to kind of figure it out together.

Rebecca: Well, and I like that you brought us back to community. That none of this is about, it's not even really about you specifically or me specifically or anything like that. Even the parable is about how people perceive each other and interact and work in a community. The Psalm is about communities and systemic justice and injustice and everything. And maybe there's comfort in that, maybe reminding ourselves that we are connected in that way, that we are bound together, that we are united as God's people, as God's creations. To go back to this idea of the blessedness of just being a creature of God, of the creator is a really, really beautiful thing and can give us that, bring us back to that perspective of appreciating things from a wider vantage point than just what I think I deserve or what I think you deserve.

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.

Annemarie: Now, your job is to find us @MindtheGapRCL on Instagram. Visit our website, [mindthegaprcl.com](http://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.

Music: <outro music>

Annemarie: So I want to give a special shout out to my nephew, Oliver, who I know listens to our pod with his mom in the car when they're driving around Charlotte, North Carolina. And I know recently he told his mom that he thought our podcast was very, very complicated. It was very—which you should know Oliver is seven.

Rebecca: I think from a seven-year-old, I think complicated as a generous description.

Annemarie: I am just grateful that he listened. He's a cool kid and I miss him. So shout out to Oliver.

Rebecca: Hey, Oliver!