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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: Before we get going with our conversation, we want to say thank you to everyone who has contributed to our Ko-Fi and Patreon accounts. That's Lee and Kim, Weta, David, Jennifer, Jerry, Melissa, and Liz. Thank you so much for everything you make possible with your support.

We have a conversation today about the semicontinuous reading again, this time from Joshua. So we don't have a psalm. We've got, I think, a new book for us that we're looking forward to. But before we get too far ahead of ourselves, Annemarie, what's on your mind this week?

Annemarie: I am about to finish a book that I've really appreciated. I'm not going to say I enjoyed it because, well, it's about murder and other things, but because of the movie that had just come out, I decided to read *Killers of the Flower Moon*. And what really has struck me about reading this particular book is that nothing is new under the sun. First and foremost, the corruption, the systematic abuse and advantage taking of the Osage in Oklahoma by those who just wanted the wealth that they happened upon. So if you don't know, the Osage, their land was just like many other Native Americans in this country, was systematically shrunken down to this very small section of Oklahoma that was very rocky, very hilly that no one else wanted. And then it was discovered that it had oil under there, and so it became very, very wealthy and really through, like I said, systematic racism were abused and many of them were murdered.

And so this book is fascinating, not just because of the kind of murder mystery, it kind of feels like a little bit, but also the realities of what, not just the Osage, but so many other Native American communities where land is the thing that we are fighting over or the rights to the land or what the land produces or what we believe someone else is capable of based on their race is still something that I think that we struggle with as a people, not only in this nation, but across the world. So that's been on my mind lately and I am grateful that I've gotten to read it and I'm looking forward to watching the movie, but I'm grateful that I've just keep learning and trying to direct myself toward books that will

share with me something I might not have known or experienced myself. So that's where mind has been this week when it's not been on church work, which it is a lot. But Becca, what might be on your mind this day?

Rebecca: Getting back into the rhythm of weekly preaching, which I haven't done since 2020 probably, and I haven't even really hit that point yet because I have done stretches of a similar time that I've already been at this new call and everything. But I have a feeling that once I get to a month, two months, all of that, it's going to kind of hit me again how it is very different to build that practice spiritually and practically into the rhythms of our ministry and our life and so on. So I'm kind of being intentional about how I anticipate the way that's going to feel and working on trying to fit it in a way that is sustainable and healthy. I think over the past couple of years I've grown a lot in my preaching and I've come to preaching more and more each year and more certainly than I did as a seminarian.

And in my first years of ministry it was so intimidating and hard and vulnerable, which it still is in its own way, but I feel so much more comfortable and confident in it now that it's a piece I really like and love about ministry and I want to hold onto that. And so I want to keep that even as I go back into this pattern of weekly preaching and weekly message sharing. So I've just been kind of reflecting a lot on my relationship with that aspect of ministry over the last week and feeling grateful for all of the people and projects that have helped that happen. You yourself, Annemarie, the podcast, the text study that we have, but also just being stretched in my calls with new tools like using images and trying out different schedules and being on lectionary, being off lectionary. So yeah, just feeling grateful for the ministry of preaching and my own personal growth and that has been on my mind this past week.

Annemarie: Nice.

Rebecca: How about we head on into our reading. It's another long-ish one, so let's jump into Joshua.

Music: <piano music>

Rebecca: The first reading for the semi-continuous series on the 24th Sunday after Pentecost in Year A is Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25...

Annemarie: ...meaning the gap we are exploring is Joshua 24:3b-13. I will be reading the assigned verses...

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

Annemarie: ¹Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God. ²And Joshua said to all the people, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors—Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods. ³Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many.

Rebecca: I gave him Isaac; ⁴and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I gave Esau the hill country of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. ⁵Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt with what I did in its midst; and afterwards I brought you out. ⁶When I brought your ancestors out of Egypt, you came to the sea; and the Egyptians pursued your ancestors with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. ⁷When they cried out to the Lord, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and made the sea come upon them and cover them; and your eyes saw what I did to Egypt. Afterwards you lived in the wilderness for a long time. ⁸Then I brought you to the land of the Amorites, who lived on the other side of the Jordan; they fought with you, and I handed them over to you, and you took possession of their land, and I destroyed them before you. ⁹Then King Balak, son of Zippor of Moab, set out to fight against Israel. He sent and invited Balaam son of Beor to curse you, ¹⁰but I would not listen to Balaam; therefore he blessed you; so I rescued you out of his hand. ¹¹When you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho, the citizens of Jericho fought against you, and also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I handed them over to you. ¹²I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove out before you the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow. ¹³I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and towns that you had not built, and you live in them; you eat the fruit of vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.

Annemarie: ¹⁴ 'Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. ¹⁵Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.'

¹⁶ Then the people answered, 'Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; ¹⁷for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; ¹⁸and the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.'

¹⁹ But Joshua said to the people, 'You cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. ²⁰If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good.' ²¹And the people said to Joshua, 'No, we will serve the Lord!' ²²Then Joshua said to the people, 'You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him.' And they said, 'We are witnesses.' ²³He said, 'Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.' ²⁴The people said to Joshua, 'The Lord our God we will serve, and him we will obey.' ²⁵So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made statutes and ordinances for them at Shechem.

Music: <piano music>

Rebecca: Well, before we started recording, you sounded excited and you had various thoughts to share. Would you mind getting us started with something?

Annemarie: Not at all. So I am thinking about how, yes, this is a longer text, however, I am really glad that we get a bigger chunk of this last chapter of Joshua. So a couple of things about this chapter that I got from our good buddy, Jerome, the Jerome commentary. I like to talk about our sources and how we learn these things. This section of Joshua is likely a later addition to the whole of the rest of the book, the summary. It sounds like what they believe is that it was an originally independent narrative of a covenant that is happening between Joshua and the people. So Joshua is a successor to Moses. He is leading the people and just like anyone else who's leading God's people hasn't been perfect. And so this moment at Shechem is important as a closing moment in the book of Joshua to line up all of what God has done and what the people are promising and that Joshua makes them take it seriously.

You have to know what you're getting into with this covenant and that you are getting into a covenant not with me. Joshua says, right, it is with God and you, after all of this history we've just gone over, you know what God is like. So take this seriously, this new covenant that you're going to be making. The summary in the gap omits two things that most summaries don't when they talk about the actions of God across salvation history or at least the history for the Hebrew scriptures, it omits Sinai and the wilderness traditions. So doesn't talk about the covenant they received on Sinai, the commandments and the events that happen there and then doesn't talk about God providing in the wilderness. So the wilderness traditions of water, manna, quail, all of the things that kind of solidified God's presence for them throughout. The other things that are a little bit different are an additions to this narrative are the darkness between the Israelites and the Egyptians.

That is a new language that only happens here for the description of the relationship really at the end between the Egyptians and the Israelites because in this text, it comes after the Red Sea, but puts darkness between the two of them, meaning I think they couldn't see each other, couldn't perceive each other, that God has made this separation really clear between the two groups. And we only have that really here in this moment in Joshua, which I think tells scholars before us that this was a later addition to Joshua and an intentional addition so that the covenant that they make here could be the final thing that happens at Shechem because Shechem is one of the only places where they did not have issues with land control. It was not fought over. That kind of makes Shechem this really neutral place almost to start over and make these covenants with God. So that's just a little bit of what, I don't think that's all I learned, but those I think were the significant things about this moment in Joshua at Shechem and more covenant making. So these promises between God and God's people and the realities of, I don't know how much faith Joshua has in the covenant of this.

Rebecca: Well, it's already part of a pattern of repetition that he's jumping into by doing this in the first place. And it in of itself is evidence that this isn't a thing that again, on humanity's end tends to just be done once and for all time. It's something that they have to return to again and again, it reminds me of baptism in terms of God's promise is assured and steadfast and and is for once, but then we come back to it again and again. That's why we do remembrances of baptism and affirmations of baptism because we in our human frailty need that. We need the reminders. We need to recommit ourselves, we need to have the ritual of doing it or doing something like it again and again. And hearing all of that, the PPE reminded me of a lot of the texts that we have looked at in this project of

the gap that ends up getting taken out is so often this historical recitation of where have the people been?

What have they done, how has God shown up through it all? And that's starting to just be an interesting pattern for me of noticing. And I don't know what there is yet, but there's something to notice in the fact that what we keep taking out ostensibly for time or repetitiveness and other pieces, but what we keep taking out are these histories and reflections of how God has shown up through salvation history and the various stories of genesis and Exodus in these early foundational stories to the Hebrew people and therefore to Jesus and the Jewish communities of the New Testament and therefore on down to us that feels like it says something just about what we're comfortable going over again and again and think worthy of going over again and again, I don't know.

Annemarie: And I mean obviously I totally agree with you and I think that's definitely what we've been seeing in this project that we've been doing together. And I have to wonder, and if you look here the pattern, I think, I don't know if this is going to be, nothing ever is totally going to line up completely because scripture, but the part that's when we have a history like this or a reminder of what has happened before and this when that's been taken out, oftentimes what's left behind what's left without the gap is we should revere the Lord, serve the Lord all about the characteristics of God, but instead of hearing why that should be the case you've taken out the evidence for, which would convince God's people to take that seriously and just jump right to so behave.

Rebecca: Yeah, we're only left with our response or the demand for a response period. And we lose the fact that this is always grounded in the fact that God has already shown up. God's grace has already been poured out. God's blessings have already been proclaimed. And you're exactly right. It turns the focus onto the way we have edited it. It turns the focus onto what are we doing and what are we supposed to do and not how this is a piece of a relationship. This is a reaction, this is a living out and a response. I'll go back to the word response. This is a response to what God has already done for us where there's absolutely a pattern appearing of how we're left with this one specific piece or aspect instead of this whole relationship together.

Annemarie: What I found interesting was the other place I like to look for just some insight when it comes to the gaps. And I know for semicontinuous weeks like this, sometimes we wonder about who needs this, right? I mean, I know there are people who are preaching semicontinuous series, so I hope they're able to listen and hear and get something out of this Sundays and Seasons for those of us that are in those resources from the ELCA on the resources like the text resources, there's always at least a paragraph about each of the semicontinuous lessons. And what they said this week was that the gap outlines the gap. I mean, I said the gap, but the piece that's missing here is outlines the ways God has continuously saved, preserved, provided for, and protected God's people. Meaning that without this, why are we going to listen to this God? And I think that's a basic question of our faith is why tell me more about why this God is the one I should follow. Tell me more about why this God is the one I should follow when the gods of the world, money, power, capitalism, which is both at the same time, why are those not the ones to be assigning myself to? And if it's just threat, right, if it's just do this or else, well, I can see why people would be like, well, you didn't answer my question.

What am I supposed to do with that? And the other thing that stuck out to me too about the significance of this is if you take out the gap, you lose the work of God to connect God's people. So Yahweh is the one who is doing the work, right? Yahweh is the one who is acting on Yahweh's people in order to bring them together, to keep them safe, to preserve them from harm, to give them land, to continue to give them what they need, even if they don't always hold up their end of the bargain. And it's not a secret that they really never do and we still don't. But that it is not actions by the people, not actions by Joshua, not actions by anyone else except God. I think it's one of those places where, and I think you and I both, and this has come out in my ministry more often, I think because of the work that we're doing with this project, but this is the place where I think it's possible for us to point out to our people what good news looks like in the Hebrew scriptures, what it is that God is doing and how it is that God continues to be sal for God's people, whether they hold up the covenant or not,

Rebecca: In a time of such alarming antisemitism, it's important to be explicit about undermining the areas of our theology that suggest that the Hebrew people, the Hebrew scriptures, the Jewish people today have some kind of primitive faith—that suggests, erroneously, that when we use words like law or talk about legalism in faith, the Hebrew scriptures aren't about earning. That's not what the law is for the Hebrew people. It's not about earning God's blessing or earning God's love or favor. It's a response to the love and favor that God has already shown them. And we just get that so terribly wrong and that has devastating consequences, and we have to be better about communicating it, and we have to do better theology and preaching around it.

Annemarie: Which I think sustains our argument for in moments like this, when we take out a gap, when you take out part of scripture that can hold that up and help us see that more clearly, we need to add it back in or find a better way in order to talk about it so that our listeners, our people in the pews, and I don't know about you, but the people that I have experienced in 16 years of ministry few times has anyone said to me, oh, I wish you read less. I wish I learned less. And I think this comes down to preaching. The preaching task is one that can be daunting, as you mentioned in our what's on your mind. Yeah, we do it every week. It's a constant, if you're expected to do it every week, there is a rhythm to it that can feel exhausting at times and sometimes it can be exhilarating, but the task is one where we not only have to communicate what it is that God is saying in these very important scriptures, but we also need to communicate what our people need to hear from it as well.

That's the task. The task is opening up scripture in a way that allows people to hear it, to experience it, and to believe in a God that has love for them or has care for them in a way that they might not have expected. And that the experiences of previous generations going back as far as we have to the very beginning is relevant to them. Even now

Rebecca: For the sake of going back to this question of how we feel about when we have the semicontinuous first reading and just the texts that do not get as much attention liturgically, I wanted to at least spend a little bit of time thinking about like, okay, let's start with the assumption that we are using this or that we want to find a way to reference it in a sermon that's still primarily about the gospel and everything else. I think the gap actually brings in some easier ways to link this to the gospel than you get without the gap in this first reading. So the gospel reading is the parable of the foolish

and wise bridesmaids. The gap for the Joshua reading does have the verses that you already drew our attention to about when they cried out to the Lord. He put darkness between you and the Egyptians and made the sea come upon them and cover them. And I think it just thematically links it where you can start asking some questions about what role is darkness playing in the parable and in this gap.

I don't know that I know where that goes exactly, but I think that that is a starting place to ask questions and see where the spirit might take you from there. These things about the peril of darkness or just how it might work in terms of isolating or separating people in these texts. I just think there's a way to spend some time considering that. And then back to the whole idea of God's salvation history and everything, the parable of the foolish and wide bride maze is not an easy one. And I think that grounding that in the centuries and books upon books and generations upon generations of God's faithfulness can give us a more confident and solid foundation from which to ask hard questions. So it can even just be a reassurance of like, yeah, this is a hard parable. We don't know exactly where we're going with this all the time. What does it mean for you? But if the foundation of that is this long history of God's steadfastness, I think that it gives me, anyway, a little more comfort and confidence to ask hard questions and to go all the places that a parable like that might lead you, because beneath it all is just God's everlasting love.

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, 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>