

This transcript was exported on Nov 11, 2023.

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 continue with our episode, we want to say thank you to everyone who has supported us on our Patreon and Ko-Fi platforms. That's Lee and Kim, Weta, David, Jennifer, Jerry, Melissa, and Liz. Thank you for everything that you make possible. Annemarie, what's on your mind this week?

Annemarie: Well, for many of us there was elections this week and I am giving thanks for, and just on my mind right now, is the power of local elections. So I was looking today on some of the results from the elections and realizing just how important voting in local elections is to being able to have a voice in how the things that are near and dear—and probably affect us the most in our day-to-day lives—can be changed or affirmed in the way that we vote in those local elections. And when I looked at the results, I realized that in New Jersey we always have this option for personal choice after the declared candidates, and in some of the races around the state, the personal choice votes, if they had gone to a declared candidate, the races were so close that some of those would've made a difference in who won those elections.

And I'm not saying you should or should not use the personal choice option. I just think that if we neglect to vote in our local elections, we neglect to realize how much of an impact we can have even just with our single vote. So I'm just giving thanks for living in a place that has elections that are free and fair, and I am grateful for the poll workers that I met when we voted and the welcome that my child received in coming with us to vote and the impact that civic engagement has on our whole community and the ways in which we can band together for the sake of the things we care about and the people we care about. Rebecca, what might be on your mind today?

Rebecca: Well, I really fell down some rabbit holes while I was preparing for this week's episode, and I don't feel like I totally have a handle on everything swirling around up there. So I wanted to share a memory and then some of the places that my brain went after that just really quickly. In 2019, I went to Bosnia and Herzegovina with the New Jersey Synod when I was a pastor there, and we visited the memorial graveyard for the Srebrenica

genocide. And I was thinking about and looking back at the pictures this week because of what's happening in Gaza, and there's a sign that I took a picture of in the Srebrenica graveyard that has a prayer in three languages and it says: "In the name of God, the most merciful, the most compassionate. We pray to Almighty God, may grievance become hope, may revenge become justice, may mother's tears become prayers that Srebrenica never happens again to no one and nowhere."

And I just felt called to kind of continue the conversation we've had over a couple of episodes about everything happening in Israel and Gaza and the deep prayers for justice there. Then like I said, there were some rabbit holes after that. I don't want to use this space as a soapbox, but particularly if you are a pastor who in your preaching and teaching has ever used the phrase "the other" or talked about God's call to love the other or that we should treat the other with compassion and kindness or anything, I just want to have a particular challenge or encouragement to read some Edward Said and look at his philosophy on Orientalism. He's a Palestinian-American philosopher and I know it's a lot to say like, oh, go read this 400 page philosophy text. I know that that's not accessible. With all the resources we have—podcasts, YouTube videos, summaries, articles, that kind of thing—just give yourself an hour to look up Edward Said. That's all.

And then like I said, a lot of rabbit holes. The last thing was the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, coincidentally also in October last month was releasing a reflection on and reworking of the longstanding Peace Not Walls program that we have had that has guided the way we approach Israel and Palestine. So especially if you're an ELCA pastor head online to the website, there's about two hour video that kind of summarizes and go overs what that reflection process was like. And I think it's a 33 page booklet PDF to read about the transformation into what's going to be called *SUMUD: For Justice in Palestine and Israel*. And sumud is an Arabic word for steadfastness. I think a lot of us are looking for resources and conversation starters and everything else, and I wanted to let people know that those are a couple of places to turn. If you also find yourself a little bit out of your depth or uncertain of entry points or need some resources to back up things that you're saying or ways to frame it within our faith tradition, I bring up those possibilities for folks.

Annemarie: I think that's awesome. Thank you for doing that.

Rebecca: We have a conversation that is coming from the complimentary series this week, which we don't get to do very often and I know that you and I are both looking forward to doing that. So how about we head into reading the scripture?

Annemarie: Sounds good.

Music: <piano music>

Annemarie: The first reading for the complementary series on the 25th Sunday after Pentecost in Year A is Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18...

Rebecca: ...meaning the gap we are exploring is Zephaniah 1:8-11. I will be reading the assigned verses...

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

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- Rebecca: ⁷ Be silent before the Lord God!
 For the day of the Lord is at hand;
 the Lord has prepared a sacrifice,
 he has consecrated his guests.
- Annemarie: ⁸ And on the day of the Lord's sacrifice
 I will punish the officials and the king's sons
 and all who dress themselves in foreign attire.
⁹ On that day I will punish
 all who leap over the threshold,
 who fill their master's house
 with violence and fraud.
- ¹⁰ On that day, says the Lord,
 a cry will be heard from the Fish Gate,
 a wail from the Second Quarter,
 a loud crash from the hills.
¹¹ The inhabitants of the Mortar wail,
 for all the traders have perished;
 all who weigh out silver are cut off.
- Rebecca: ¹² At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps,
 and I will punish the people
 who rest complacently on their dregs,
 those who say in their hearts,
 'The Lord will not do good,
 nor will he do harm.'
¹³ Their wealth shall be plundered,
 and their houses laid waste.
 Though they build houses,
 they shall not inhabit them;
 though they plant vineyards,
 they shall not drink wine from them.
- ¹⁴ The great day of the Lord is near,
 near and hastening fast;
 the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter,
 the warrior cries aloud there.
¹⁵ That day will be a day of wrath,
 a day of distress and anguish,
 a day of ruin and devastation,
 a day of darkness and gloom,
 a day of clouds and thick darkness,
¹⁶ a day of trumpet blast and battle cry
 against the fortified cities
 and against the lofty battlements.
- ¹⁷ I will bring such distress upon people
 that they shall walk like the blind;
 because they have sinned against the Lord,

their blood shall be poured out like dust,
and their flesh like dung.
¹⁸ Neither their silver nor their gold
will be able to save them
on the day of the Lord's wrath;
in the fire of his passion
the whole earth shall be consumed;
for a full, a terrible end
he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

Music: <piano music>

Annemarie: Well, you promised me a rabbit hole. Let's jump.

Rebecca: Let's jump and see where the rabbit leads. We have a very apocalyptic end-time text here. Like you have said, we are in that season. That is the tone that a lot of our texts are going for. This passage is actually the inspiration for the Dies Irae, which is a medieval Gregorian chant that's often used in funeral masses, in Requiems, and has been really influential through centuries in music. I actually think that that could be a place just to start from for people. Go on YouTube, listen to a Dies Irae recording. Listen, there's a lot of settings and versions. Find a really traditional Gregorian chant. Find the Verdi, find the Mozart. And then I even jumped a little further from that because I know how the Dies Irae has shown up specifically in musical theater.

The musical *Sweeney Todd* is heavily influenced by the Dies Irae, and also *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, the Disney version, uses and references the Dies Irae in "The Bells of Notre Dame," in the opening sequence. So this is a theme musically and a theme scripturally that is heavily connected to violence and consequences and yet also very heavily connected to concern for the poor and oppressed. And that's in this passage from Zephaniah and in the ways this has shown up musically. So if you are someone who finds music to be inspirational for preaching, I would suggest going and listening to any of those options. They might be sermon illustrations that you can bring in to talk about those things. I just think that that's a good angle, an accessible angle to come at things from.

Annemarie: Well, I love that rabbit hole. I'm jealous.

Rebecca: And that was one. I really, really fell down some passages.

Annemarie: I am jealous that we didn't get to go down together because especially, I mean, *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, I love that movie and all the music from it as well, but knowing more about that origin just makes me appreciate it even more. Zephaniah, I know both of us people might be shocked, both of us read from Jerome this week, but if we're curious about Zephaniah in general and where this—it's a minor prophet, it's not a very long text if you trying to find it in your Bible, you got to just keep going and going and going. It's before Daniel obviously. It starts, this is the beginning of Zephaniah. This is the first chapter, and so we have, it really does do this. It starts in destruction and calling and kind of saying all the reasons why God would be angry with God's people with the world in general and why renewal and threatening the people would be the beginning of this text.

And then by the end of Zephaniah, you have a balance, right? You have this renewal, you have some more hope and celebration that Zephaniah has. And so we have just this beginning piece and this gap I thought was interesting. And we try to figure out sometimes, sometimes it's obvious why there's a gap, why something is pulled out. I have to tell you, I don't know why. Once again, if we're already going to read verses seven and then 12 to 18, why these four verses can't be included if only because it's a little bit more violent or it mentions things like the fish gate, which maybe you'd have to describe is really just it's along the northern wall known for fish markets. That's why it's called the fish gate. I wanted to just dig in a little bit into what we think and why this gap would be skipped over. I don't know if you had any thoughts about that.

Rebecca: No, my best guess is similar, that maybe it was just distracting that current listeners would be like, "What's the fish gate? What's the second quarter?" And this kind of thing. I also can't find a really solid reason, like you might as well! It doesn't add a whole lot of length and there's nothing really that goes off in a different direction. It's very consistent. So I'm not sure entirely. I liked what you and I were talking about briefly before we started recording with that Fish Gate, Second Quarter, the Mortar in verse 11 is another piece that they're not sure exactly what it's geographically referencing, but it might be another opening for preaching to have you and your folks think about, okay, what are the geographic locators in our town, in our city, in our area? How can you make it real and visceral? The example that was easiest for me to come up with was like, okay, if you're in New York City or if you're in Manhattan, it would kind of be like saying from Times Square to Battery Park and having those references.

So it's just a question for us as preachers, what are the places that would let people put this into their context and start to imagine what are the cries that we hear from those places that in the text the Lord is hearing, but what are the cries maybe in those places that are currently being lifted up that we are not attending to or are falling on ears that will not listen, and that kind of thing. So I think that's another way that you could go and tie a sermon pretty solidly into the text here.

Annemarie: There's a sense of Zephaniah speaking to the need for faithfulness, the need for being faithful only to God and that the unfaithfulness is really about just putting God last. The unfaithfulness is how we treat one another, and I think that the call for trust in God here and the silence before the Lord, the verse seven for the day of the Lord is at hand. There's that cadence throughout this whole prophecy about the day of the Lord. And we talked a little bit about how this is a pre-Advent time for some of us. I know this is a growing trend that folks have extended Advent. I have not done it yet. I haven't been in a context where it made sense to do so, but I really like the idea of extending Advent, especially this year because of Advent 4 falling on a Sunday. I know some of us have already decided to start Advent earlier because of that so that we don't have to do Christmas Eve and Advent 4 in the same day, and I respect all those choices.

But even if you're not starting Advent yet, you *are*, if you're reading this text because the day of the Lord is near right and you have these, this is paired with the parable of the talents. This is Jesus's final parable before his crucifixion and resurrection. We have such trouble with Advent. Sometimes it's not long enough, it's not a long enough season and I think sometimes we miss the chance to dive into some apocalyptic language in a way that doesn't feel terrifying or sitting in something that feels terrifying and recognizing that you are still safe because of what God has already done for you and what God has

done for us in Jesus. I think that there's this Zephaniah text paired with the gospel text gives us a chance if you really want to take a step toward Advent, if you're really tired of the season after Pentecost, you really could kind of lean into that a little bit and start to talk about it in ways that recognize the realities of the world.

Rebecca: Just, I think that this Zephaniah reading pairs so well with the parable of the talents because it's another challenging one where if you read it with the assumption that God is the authority figure as we often impulsively do, but is so troubling so often, then it's so hard. But it is a parable that addresses really directly this confrontation between someone who is powerless or has little and then this authority figure that has the ability to deal out wealth in whatever manner he wants to. It connects really strongly for me to a text we had recently the one where Jesus says, give to Caesar the things that are Caesars and give to God the things that are God's. I know you've heard my one sermon that I have on that text, that one way of interpreting it that I have.

Annemarie: I love it. It's a good one.

Rebecca: But I think that this is really the same. I see so much continuity between what he was saying there and what he's still saying in this parable, in these parables right here. Because at the end of the gospel reading, when he talks, he literally, the slave in the text, gives back to the master this one talent. He buried it and he didn't hold onto it and he didn't let it make its home with him and he gave it back to him. And I just hear that being the same thing as in the confrontation with the religious authorities about giving to Caesar, what belongs to Caesar, give back to the empire the things that are coming from the empire. Give back to that cruel master, as in the parable he's described, the unjust cruel master, give it back. Those things do not make their home with you.

You don't have to invest in them and with them. And that was actually a lot of what had me continuing to fall down those other rabbit holes because then I was thinking about... It's probably not worth it to explain the rabbit holes, but the Dies Irae connection through particularly how it shows up in Hunchback of Notre Dame like you said, which is about a community that is otherized and faces orientalism, which is how I got into the Edward Said and everything. I don't know, they were just all building a web together when I was sitting here reading about them.

But I think that this gospel parable that basically reiterates not holding onto what is dealt to you through injustice and exploitation and giving it back, and the honesty about the fact that there will be consequences to that because empire and cruel masters will always respond negatively. Which again links back to this, what are we doing here and how are we responding to the cries and the violence that are around us? And the apathy, I heard apathy in Zephaniah's text as well being one of the main things that he's calling out in verses, where is it? Especially verse 12, which is in the assigned reading, "Searching Jerusalem with lamps and punishing the people who are resting complacently and who say in their hearts, well, the Lord will not do good nor will he do harm." This kind of willingness to sit in the status quo and comfort in the face of everything else. I just hear urgency being brought into that situation and judgment and honest reflection on how what we think is nice, innocent complacency will reap violence because it *does*. That's what empire does. That's what cruel slave masters do. That's what orientalism and colonialism and everything else end up doing.

Annemarie: And honestly, that's what Zephaniah is addressing. That's exactly what this is about. And I think that's so real for us and it's so I think we sometimes struggle with what to do with minor prophets like this when they're speaking into some specific situations and it doesn't always make sense right away, how it speaks to us at the same time. And I don't think that we have to go very far to hear where selfish apathy is a bad thing and not just because God's wrath will—because the consequences of selfish apathy will come for you no matter what, the consequences of selfish apathy will be there. Sometimes they come after generations, sometimes they come right to you because of your own missteps or bad decision-making or unjust policies and decisions. The amount of suffering that you have brought on yourselves will be heard from the fish gate to the second quarter, that the wailing and the weeping and gnashing of teeth, if you really want to relate it to Matthew, will be there. And that's not about scaring us about what God's wrath is. That's just the wrath of our decision-making. We bring that on ourselves. Zephaniah isn't saying anything that is somehow magical or otherworldly about the suffering that people are about to endure. It's the consequences of their decision making because you can only decide so frequently for yourself before the house falls down. And I think history bears that out over time. Scripture bears that out over time. I mean the rabbit holes are real here.

Rebecca: I know! Once I got started I couldn't stop. And I think what's so confronting and scary about the parable is how honest it is about, at the end the slave who is deemed worthless because he won't participate is thrown into outer darkness where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth, that there are consequences for standing up to injustice and that's hard to internalize and hard to live up to. And the Zephaniah echoes it, or was the original that the parable ends up echoing, in this call to realize that sitting in comfortable neutrality is an illusion. That there are no fortified cities strong enough, there are no lofty battlements great enough—to reference verse 16—that will keep out all of the cries and all of the consequences of what we have done and not done.

Annemarie: I don't know if there's anything else to say.

Rebecca: I know. Yeah, it's heavy hard preaching. This is the time of year that this happens, and what we're doing is getting real about the desperate need for the savior that we're going to welcome and recognize on Christmas. If we don't go to these depths, if we don't talk about these things that we don't want to talk about, if we don't acknowledge the hurt that we live among, that we experience and we cause, then what's all the rest of it for? Oh, come Emmanuel, God be with us because of these things. We have to look them in the face in order to know how meaningful it is that God came to be with us.

Annemarie: Preachers, you can do it.

Rebecca: You can do it.

Annemarie: You can do this. Lay people, encourage your preachers. I'm also not preaching this weekend in this text either.

Rebecca: The two of us!

Annemarie: I just realized!

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Rebecca: <laughter>

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>