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Rebecca: Don't tell me what to edit.

Annemarie: Oh, shut up.

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 New York, and I've been serving in parish ministry for six 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 16 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: We're grateful to everyone who has supported us on Patreon and Ko-Fi. That's Lee and Kim, Weta, David, Jennifer, Jerry, Melissa, and Liz. Thank you for what you make possible, including transcripts of our episodes that can be found on our website, mindthegaprccl.com. Today we're going to be talking about a psalm for the second Sunday after Epiphany. But first as usual, we're going to chat about what's on our mind today. So Annemarie, what's on your mind?

Annemarie: It's just the very beginning of January and it's this time in the church, in your local congregations, I think where all of the things that you've been putting off during December for after Christmas are all kind of piled up. And now we have to sift through the wreckage and at the same time tackle all the new things that are coming at us. And I just want to acknowledge and say out loud that I am already exhausted and I am already struggling with whether my human best is enough. And I just want to say that out loud in case other leaders or other people in general who I think this happens in, not just church settings. I think when there's a break for a holiday we just had, when you go back to work after a time of either rest or just different work schedules and that kind of stuff and you kind of jump back in, it can be really overwhelming.

And yeah, it's hard to be firing on all cylinders. It's hard to just keep your head above water sometimes. And I'm really grateful for, and I've been personally feeling that way a little bit this week, but I'm grateful for my admin staff, for the people that are around me, my friends who remind me that my human best is still pretty darn okay, might be more than okay if I'm ever willing to admit that myself. And yeah, I just want to say that out loud in case anyone else needs to hear that others are having a moment of struggle right now. And not only are you not alone, but you're probably doing better than you think and it's really okay to give yourself a break and to also promise yourself and

whoever else that you feel accountable to that you will try harder. It's okay. It's okay to do that. It's okay to have both of those things happening at the same time. So yeah, that's on my mind today. Rebecca, what is on your mind?

Rebecca: I got to spend time today with one of the young adults from my congregation who is home from college on break between semesters. And I just think that's such an awesome part of our calling that we get to do. And I'm just so grateful for this young person and all of our young people and the insight that they have and the perspective that they bring this person. And I had a good conversation about a lot of things, but one piece of it that is sticking with me is we spent some time chatting about these labels of good person and bad person that for some reason have become the way we judge ourselves and other people. And trying to fit everyone into these mutually exclusive boxes is a of all futile, B of all, not helpful or even real in a lot of ways. And I just appreciated that chance to talk a lot. And I think our younger disciples have a lot of really beautiful things to share about the way they see faith being lived out, about the way they experienced sacredness in their relationships and in the world. Just really grateful for them. And that was on my mind since I got to do that today. That's awesome. Yeah, I loved it. And I feel like that kind of ties into the psalm that we're going to be looking at a little. So how about we go ahead and read the text together?

Annemarie: Sounds good.

Music: <piano music>

Rebecca: The psalm for the second Sunday after Epiphany in Year B is Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18...

Annemarie: ...meaning the gap we are exploring is Psalm 139:7-12. I will be reading the assigned verses...

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

Annemarie: 1 O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
3 You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
4 Even before a word is on my tongue,
O Lord, you know it completely.
5 You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

Rebecca: 7Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
9 If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
10 even there your hand shall lead me,

and your right hand shall hold me fast.
¹¹ If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night',
¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

Annemarie: ¹³ For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.
¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
¹⁶ Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.
¹⁷ How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
¹⁸ I try to count them—they are more than the sand;
I come to the end—I am still with you.

Music: <piano music>

Rebecca: Beautiful poetry, very thematically linked to the other readings that we have that day. Good stuff all around. We actually had different parts of Psalm 139 in an earlier episode, but the gap is different here and we're in obviously a very different time of the liturgical year and everything else. So I think it's a fun chance to get to spend more time with Psalm 139 for us.

Annemarie: I agree, and I think that the combination of this with the lessons that are attached to this particular Sunday, this is the second Sunday after epiphany and the story of the call of Samuel is the first lesson and the gospel is John, where what good can come from Nazareth. And I think that having this Psalm 139 and this poetic language around the, not just of the creation of all things, but of the creation of oneself and where God lies in all of that is incredibly powerful and beautiful.

Rebecca: I think that what I noticed about the verses that get taken out for the gap in this week is that they are what really locate the speaker in a larger context. To me, they were the parts of the Psalm that draw us out of ourself. It's important to dwell within and to consider a personal relationship with God and our personal experience with divinity. But I do like that those verses put it in a context of a geographical location in the context of an emotional reality that has ups and downs that put it in a context that has connections beyond this me in a vacuum. So I do think I miss those pieces of it when you remove them. And I think that actually they build a richer consideration as a whole, especially with the call of Samuel and the piece from John with Philip and Nathaniel and everything.

Annemarie: Well, and that's interesting because when I was reading on Sundays and seasons, the commentary they have for the texts, they talked a little bit about why this psalm would be placed in this week with these texts and it seemed to link the language about lying down from the psalm to what Samuel is doing as he lies there in the dark, listening for the voice that is calling him that he thinks is Eli, but turns out to be the call of God and obviously becomes Samuel's own call for his life as being one chosen by God to lead. And so I found it interesting that that's the correlation they made. And a lot of times with lectionary that's about as much as we get as far as why certain texts are paired together. Sometimes it's really obvious when you have a gospel text about a shepherd and you get some other texts that have the words sheep or shepherd in them, and that's why they're chosen to be put together.

And even if that is the reason that this psalm is lined up with this reading from First Samuel, I still think that you get this deeper with the verses seven to 12, which is the gap we have. I would argue that having those verses included would actually probably make this even more, as you said, personal about the personal relationship that we have in our actual being in our routines around going to bed and how we relate to darkness and how we relate to what God is doing for us and how God is with us from the farthest limits, from the moment we wake up to the moment we go back to sleep. Right? That's a lot of the language in this seven to 12 that is really kind of being born out here, that I think that there's space here if you wanted to really hone in on the first Samuel first reading, and I think it's a really fun one to do with kids. I think it's a really interesting back and forth and imagining being called out of your bed literally to serve God. I think there's space here to add the Psalm as part of that exploration. And to that verse 11, right, if surely the darkness shall cover me and the light around me become night, even the darkness is not dark to you. The night is as bright as the day, right? God, you are calling me even when I am asleep. You are calling me even when you are around me, you are surrounding me even when it seems as if it is dark like sheel, you are there.

Rebecca: I totally agree and see those thematic connections with pulling out a theme of vocation between all the readings. I do also think that particularly the gospel reading with the question it asks about can anything good come out of Nazareth? I think there's also a lot of room to steer this Sunday more towards considering how we judge and treat one another. Maybe it's a little bit more law driven than gospel driven, I don't know. But there's a way we can point towards not writing people in places off, which is what Nathaniel does, right? And I think the gap verses from the Psalm talk about that because the way I would summarize that gap is God is everywhere the psalmist is talking about, no matter where I go or how I'm feeling, you are still with me. But what that means therefore is that there is nowhere that God is not.

And I think that that is something we do let ourselves forget or something we don't want to always remember when we think about that particular street downtown or that country that's experiencing strife or just all of the places and communities that are assumed to have too much going against them to produce anything worthwhile. And I think that the gap verses from the Psalm contribute to the promise that simply isn't true, that God is everywhere, that God is at work everywhere, that the presence and the spirit there is nowhere they cannot be found. So I think that if that was also a direction a preacher wanted to go in particularly because the gospel was leading them there, I think the gap versus bring another element to the liturgy, whether you wanted to put them in so that you could sing them in the Psalm, whether you wanted to reference them in a

sermon, whether you wanted to use them somewhere else, I think that they're more scripturally based. It's another scripturally based location for going there if that's where the spirit's leading you.

Annemarie: And I completely agree with that as well. I think that's really, we sometimes don't think of a Sunday after epiphany, right, as having the depth of possibility in preaching. I think as this one does, we think of big festivals and we're between bap of our Lord and transfiguration. We have these couple of weeks because things are a little more condensed this year calendar-wise, that there's actually a wealth of what we could be pulling out from these texts this week. Jerome, I always consult Jerome. Jerome, the only thing that Jerome had to say about verses seven to 12, and I thought this was really interesting given that often there's a lot to say about some things, but this is what Jerome had to say, often regarded as some of the most exquisite poetry in the Salter, perhaps unsurpassed as a description of the incapability of God's presence.

So this just seven to 12, just this gap is what Jerome says about this psalm. I mean, it has other comments about the rest of the Psalm, but the only thing that the commentator writing in this volume had to say about these verses was that really what this gets down to is what you were saying right, is that the incapability of God is both long gospel. It is both the comfort of God being there, even when we believe God to be far far away and are worried that God is not with us. And at the same time, God is with us and we really wish God wasn't. When we're fearful and worried that something that we have experienced or done or has been done to us somehow separates us. And another place I was reading actually referred back to Romans 8 38 and 39, that talks about the inescapable of God's, God's presence. Nothing separates us from the love of God and Christ Jesus. And so again, we have in Hebrew scripture a moment of real gospel of real good news that says, Nope, God's going to be there even when you think you are. The darkness is in fact death. Even when you think the darkness is sheel, Nope. God's presence is going to bring light and actually is there even more than you believe it to be? And that'll preach that does a lot for us as preachers.

Rebecca: Yeah. I just want to say it again because I loved it so much when you just busted out with this. The incapability of God is both law and gospel. What a concise thesis statement. Thank you for that. And also, I was also thinking of Romans eight too, so we are on the same brainwave there and it made me, I'm pretty sure I have brought this up as a children's sermon or something possibility before, but here's another time if you didn't already do it or something, you could use a song Ain't No Mountain High and just kind of sing a little bit of it with the kids and teach them some simple hand motions and everything, and it's got that same message and that same essence. So that could be another way to bring this into a spot in the liturgy if you were looking for something like that.

Annemarie: Yeah, that's awesome. I mean, just drilling it down into our very core, right? That's the thing we need more than anything else when we leave. I mean, that's my goal as a pastor most of the time people leave church is I hope they leave with a sense of no matter what happened that day, that the promise of God's presence, the promise of God, having made them exactly as they are wonderfully, intentionally, and there's no mistakes, right? There's no fixing that God is insisting on that God loves them exactly as they are no matter what the rest of the time. I really hope that that's what they leave with because I think the thing we need to hear every single day.

Rebecca: I was also struck as we were reading it that this would've been a really good Psalm to use in a darkest night service or a longest night worship service trying to, I might put that in my back pocket or stick it on my brain shelf for future years. I think that this would work really well in that context, and I think it's good for us as we move into a brief season of ordinary time, as you were pointing out to us, I try not to let ordinary time be a season where, well, nothing's really going on, or we couldn't think of anything better to name it or something like, no. Let's start with what we have just been through together, this journey through advent, this huge celebration of Christmas and then epiphany, which we are in the time after now. So we're in the season after epiphany, but how do we keep carrying that forward?

How do we let that inform this supposedly ordinary time that we're moving into? And I think that this Psalm works really well for the ordinary time following epiphany in particular, even more than the ordinary time following Pentecost or something. I think it works really well here, and especially the gap versus connect with Christmas, connect with Epiphany, have this sense of revelation and unveiling of God's presence in our lives, of God's presence in the world, even beyond the limits of where we assumed we might find the sacred and the illumination of the places and times that are shadowed in the world, in our lives, that God touches them and holds them even when it feels like that can't be true. God promises that it is.

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>

Annemarie: Yeah. Cut off what I said at the end there. Just end with you. I'm going to give you editing notes, Editor. End with yourself.

Rebecca: Don't tell me what to edit.

Annemarie: Oh, shut up. Sorry, boss lady.