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Annemarie: Don't come for us, by the way! You don't want to. Our wrath is heavy.

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.

[Hi, Becca here. Yes, I know that the intro is outdated and needs to be redone. I have a convoluted excuse that involves hard drives and things being in storage and finding the time. It'll happen eventually. Thanks for your patience.]

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 jump into reading the scripture and having our conversation for today, we want to say thank you to everyone who has supported us on our Ko-Fi and Patreon platforms. That's Lee and Kim, Weta, David, Jennifer, Jerry, Melissa, and Liz. We so appreciate everything that you make possible, including transcripts of our episodes that we host on our website, mindthegaprc.com. Annemarie, after this holiday weekend that we have had, what's on your mind?

Annemarie: I am ready for Advent. I love Advent. It is by far my favorite liturgical season. I love holding Advent for as long as I possibly can. And one of the things I love about Advent is the hymnody. Advent hymns are some of the most interesting. They fluctuate between major and minor keys. They are filled with incredible images and calls to action that I think are unique and particular to the season. When I was in seminary, I had the great pleasure and privilege to learn about church music from Mark Mummert, and at the time the new hymnal, Evangelical Lutheran Worship, was still in development. And so we got copies of the Renewing Worship songbook and in that songbook was Come Now, Oh, Prince of Peace. And that has become one of my favorite advent hymns just to sing over and over again. "Make us one body, make us your people."

It's this call to God to be with us. Come now, oh, Prince of Peace. And I love the feeling of advent hymns. I just can't get enough. So I implore all listeners that if you are in communities where you are feeling really drawn to jump into Christmas, which I know we love Christmas hymns, I get it. Resist. Resist with all that you have or at least try to balance it out with some of the amazing advent hymns that is offered in our hymnal. And I'm speaking mostly to Lutherans, but I know that other faith traditions have

hymnals that are filled with similarly wonderful things. But if there's anything to embrace during advent, right now in my mind it is hymns. Rebecca, what might be on your mind today?

Rebecca: I have been watching the latest season of The Gilded Age, which is streaming on HBO Max. Part of it is filmed in my hometown, Troy, New York. So there's a local connection that I really get to enjoy when I watch it. I get to see places that I actually know and have walked down, but I am enjoying the fact that this new season has a priest as one of the characters. And having a clergy person or a religious professional is kind of a guaranteed way to get me to watch something or at least way more likely to watch something. Because it's so fun and sometimes infuriating to see how we get portrayed on the screen. But I've been liking how they have this priest on the show and he had a funny line about sometimes God's children are a little trying in one episode and then in another scene a different character said "Bless you," to him.

Not in response to a sneeze, but just like a God bless you moment. And this other character who's very stuck up said, "I don't think it's for you to bless the priest," or something like that. And there was just a really great moment where the priest said, I'll happily take it. It's not something that I would ever scoff at because of the source. And I just thought that that was a solid theological moment. It was humorous, and I've been enjoying that.

I know that we have some discussion to jump into for the second Sunday of Advent here. Our episodes are a week ahead of the actual church year schedule. If you are just getting into Advent, we do have an episode for the first Sunday that is already available. You can go listen to that and then come back to this if you are on the regular schedule. But either way, today we are doing commentary on the second Sunday of Advent.

Music: <piano music>

Rebecca: The psalm for the second Sunday of Advent in Year B is Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13.....

Annemarie: ...meaning the gap we are exploring is Psalm 85: 3-7. I will be reading the assigned verses...

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

Annemarie: ¹ Lord, you were favorable to your land;
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.
² You forgave the iniquity of your people;
you pardoned all their sin.

Rebecca: ³ You withdrew all your wrath;
you turned from your hot anger.
⁴ Restore us again, O God of our salvation,
and put away your indignation towards us.
⁵ Will you be angry with us for ever?
Will you prolong your anger to all generations?
⁶ Will you not revive us again,
so that your people may rejoice in you?

⁷ Show us your steadfast love, O Lord,
and grant us your salvation.

Annemarie: ⁸ Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people,
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.
⁹ Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.

¹⁰ Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
¹¹ Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness will look down from the sky.
¹² The Lord will give what is good,
and our land will yield its increase.
¹³ Righteousness will go before him,
and will make a path for his steps.

Music: <piano music>

Rebecca: It's not a particularly long psalm that feels like length would be a reason to remove a bunch of verses from it.

Annemarie: I feel like this was another week where I am not sure why these were removed. The other lessons are not particularly long, so it's not as if you're making space or making time because of other readings. So I think it's a good opportunity for us to dive into this gap and see what it could flesh out for us, not only for this particular Psalm, but for the rest of the Sunday of the lectionary readings for this day.

Rebecca: Something that occurred to me was that there are other liturgical opportunities to use the psalm. So in my congregation, we don't typically use the Psalm, we just go from the first reading to the second reading, and if we have any special music, it goes in between there kind of as a replacement for the Psalm. But if you wanted to get the gap verses into the worship service somehow, but already had things printed or something, I actually think that as an entirety, or especially the gap verses, this could work as a confession and forgiveness. I could see breaking it up and using it at the beginning in that way. This kind of acknowledgement of sin and judgment, acknowledging God's disappointment and anger and then moving into the forgiveness, the salvation, this beautiful imagery about steadfast love and faithfulness meeting, and righteousness and peace kissing one another. Liturgically, if you don't use the psalm or you want to figure out another way to use it playing around with the gap, think about a confession and forgiveness.

Annemarie: I love that. I love that. Especially when you're thinking about confession and forgiveness. If you're changing it each week or you want to just kind of center around the Psalm a little bit more, I think especially the questions within this gap, will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations? Will you not revive us again? I think these are really human questions and I think they really express this fear for those who are writing those who are praying this, that God will God continue to forgive. Will we have to endure God's wrath, God's anger over a longer period of time? As a parent, I

can hear this from my kids sometimes. Are you angry with me? How long will you be angry with me? What can I do to make it better? Those kinds of questions. And so that's I think maybe why I hear these between verses five and six, these questions as just so utterly human, so close to how not only we interact with the divine, but also how we interact with one another.

Rebecca: I love that really practical example that you just had taking out the gap versus really does feel like it removes this acknowledgement of brokenness and sin from the Psalm as a whole, and especially with the gospel reading being the very beginning of Mark and being about John the Baptist and John the Baptist's call to repentance. I think there's room to bring in this whole psalm and especially the gap into a definition or conversation around repentance. There's a Christmas movie that I really enjoy called Last Christmas. It stars Emilia Clark from Game of Thrones and Henry Golding from Crazy Rich Asians and the main character in the movie has to, she's in a very bad place in her life because of illness, because of grief and a lot of other things. And she goes through this process of having to acknowledge the hurt that she has in turn caused others and sometimes literally repair things that she has broken in order to end up reconciling with her loved ones by the end of the movie.

And yeah, conflicts still get wrapped up quickly. It's a holiday romance. It's not that deep. But I do really enjoy the way the movie acknowledges that it's more complicated than just saying, I'm sorry. There is effort put into things that the pain and brokenness really had to be felt and looked at before the amends could be made. I was thinking about that one because we're moving into the holiday season and it could be a sermon illustration that some folks might have seen or may be able to go see afterwards in order to view some media with repentance on their mind, practice some of that interpretation of the world around them and their life through a lens of their faith.

Annemarie: I think that there's so much about the human experience that is wrapped up in what we are walking and kind of wading through an advent. And that might be one of the other reasons why, aside from the hymnody that I love this season so much because I think it's so relatable. I think it's entirely relatable to be one of those who are gathered around John the Baptist who is preaching repentance in the midst of the wilderness to be attracted to this spectacle that John is, and at the same time maybe be carrying the same that are being posed in Psalm 85, right? So what do I do with this guilt that I'm carrying around with me? Mending and solidifying relationships is what this life of faith really is all about. Some of these practices that we expect adults to be doing have to be practiced.

They have to be taught such as forgiveness. We have to practice asking for forgiveness, apologizing. We have to practice acknowledging when we hurt somebody else, whether we intended to or not, and what it means to let that person decide whether to forgive us or not. And that person's emotions, their feelings, the things that they are going through are theirs. And I think as people of God, when we come back to the text like this, Psalm 85 and getting into this introduction of John the Baptist at the beginning of the good news in Mark, we need to hear this as both hearers today and hearers then, right? We need to let scripture not only talk to itself, but to speak to us in the moment that we're in right now. And I think that the combination of this gap and these questions and even the rest of the Psalm that really promises steadfast love and faithfulness, righteousness. There is promise here. There's law and gospel. It's just that the law got cut out a little bit

and we get this reminder of relationship, that relationship is necessary and that it has to be worked at. It has to be practiced. If we don't teach each other how to do these things, we will be bad at them.

Rebecca: There's so much vulnerability in this too. The psalmist is being vulnerable by asking those questions and putting this in their psalm, their song, their hymn and confession and asking for forgiveness, apologizing. Those are vulnerable things because one, they ask us to acknowledge that we're not perfect and none of us enjoy that. None of us enjoy looking at where we've fallen short in admitting mistakes, but also with each other because there's a fear of rejection. Because we're always going to still be afraid that even if we make the apology, we might still come up short and the harm done might be too great for forgiveness when we confess in church and hear God's words of forgiveness, when we ritualize that, when we read scripture that acknowledges that brokenness and then always still turns to God's restoration and God's promise in that we don't have to have that piece of the vulnerability.

We don't have to wonder whether that forgiveness is coming. It's promised. And that's a really powerful thing to have to internalize, to have at our backs in the face of all of the other vulnerability. It doesn't mean the vulnerability isn't there. We still have that piece about struggling to look at where we've fallen short, but realizing the depth and strength of that covenant, that forgiveness is really something and is really good news and is a gift that we have to share with one another, with ourselves, with the world. That's the gift of advent of Christmas of our faith writ large.

Annemarie: Yeah. Yeah. Another reason why I'm so glad that this is the season that comes first in our church year, there's this sense of, there's so many themes in Advent that I love. One of them is that Jesus has already come, but not yet that already, but not yet. Paradox that we get to sit in for this time. And I think we need to think, need that. And one other thing from the text, when I was reading from my resources, Jerome, Jerome pointed this out, but also not just Jerome, but the other Robert Altar book I have. So in verses, if you look at verses one really to seven or one to six, there is a tense change. So it goes from past tense to present tense, and it's almost as if what is reported as a completed action is precisely what the speaker prays for in the beginning.

So there's this already, but not yet happening in the Psalm, but only if you read verses three to six. And that's a very advent, very good pairing to bring us into this. We know what God has done already, and remember, this is Hebrew scripture. We know what God has done already. You were favorable to your land. Verse one says, you restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of your people. You pardoned all their sin, you withdrew your wrath, you turned from your hot anger. Restore us again, oh God, of our salvation. It's interesting that the question would come after that reassurance instead of sometimes we expect the questions to come first and the reassurance to come second. And here again, why I think this Psalm 85 is perfect for this second week of advent is you really get this reminder and then the question, no matter how many times, oh God, you are going to do these really good things that you're going to forgive us, that you're going to restore us. We're still going to mess up and still have these questions and be worried that that was the last time because surely, oh God, there's an end to this. Surely you can't be this good over and over again.

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Rebecca: One commentary I read pointed out, we better not suggest or be thinking that God just started forgiving people when Jesus showed up. Scripture fully attests that that's not the case. You're absolutely right though it has this rhythm of a cyclical nature of a spiral nature, this coming back around again and even the nature of having these apocalyptic texts like we had with the Mark 13 and Advent 1, putting those at the beginning of the church year as this feeling of endings being beginnings and starts being finishes and everything else. And we really do find ourselves brought outside of time a little bit. It's part of why I didn't mind shuffling the schedule this year with my congregation and moving advent up. It's such a time of being outside of time. It's a season of being outside of time anyway, that it just feels like a little bit deeper of the thing it already is.

Annemarie: Okay, now I'm going to think about a season of being outside of time for the next week. That is some really cool, cool stuff. The season of being outside of time.

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: I love that, by the way. Like that movie. I love the way you're using that too, and it makes me want to go watch it again. And preachers, if you watch this movie because you're doing research for sermon writing, that's work.

Rebecca: Yes.

Annemarie: Not enjoyment. You are just using work time to watch a fun movie.

Rebecca: You can enjoy things during work time, but it's work.

Annemarie: Yes, it's totally work. Okay, so now after that little PSA to all the preachers out there... Don't come for us by the way! You don't want to. Our wrath is heavy.