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Annemarie: There was a woman in my Bible study last week that said, "I love listening to you. You guys are so relaxing."

Rebecca: Awww!

Annemarie: I thought, that's so nice to know.

Rebecca: <laughter> I have never felt relaxed a day in my life, but good.

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: First and foremost, thank you to everyone who has supported us on our Ko-Fi and Patreon accounts. That's Lee and Kim, Weta, David, Jennifer, Jerry, Melissa, and Liz. We're so appreciative of everything that you make possible. Annmarie, what's on your mind this week?

Annemarie: Well, as we go careening toward Christmas Eve and the end of Advent, I am giving a great thanks for musicians and lay people and all of the people that make worship and activities around this season happen. I had a really great staff meeting today with my new music director who just started a week ago. He's coming into this new environment and it's a trial by fire, and he is just so graceful about it and I'm so, so thankful for him.

And at the same time, I talked to a couple of different laypeople today who I was just making sure we had all of our ducks in a row as far as who's assisting and who's going to be at different services, and it's all coming into place and it always does in every context I've served in. The people and the musicians and the office staff, and gosh, we all just work so hard and it almost always is, it shows in everything that happens on those days, and so today I'm just really grateful that this work is not done. It's never done alone. It is obviously community and body of Christ kind of work, but especially at this time of year when there's so much that's happening, I'm really, really grateful for those support people and for the ones that just love doing this with us. So Rebecca, what is on your mind?

Rebecca: Well, I of course want to cosign all of that, the phenomenal ministry that is done by laypeople staff and volunteer church members alike. I don't know that we call it ministry often enough. I hate that ministry gets to be the label that you and I and ordained people have earned or something, but good lord is it all ministry! In the church and in families and in homes. So yes, beyond that, one of the things on my mind this week was a Amazon order I had come in. Since we are in the new lectionary year with Mark, I treated myself to a couple of commentaries for Mark that I'm hoping I'll be able to make use of this year. One of them is called *Call and Consequences: A Womanist Reading of Mark*, by Raquel St. Clair, and then I also picked up *Beyond Fear and Silence: A Feminist-Literary Approach to the Gospel of Mark*, by Joan Mitchell. So not necessarily recommendations because I haven't read them yet, but I'm looking forward to going through those and they sounded like the perfect kind of thing. So I just wanted to lift those up and encourage anyone who wants to get themselves a new resource at the beginning of a new church year.

Annemarie: Those are awesome. I love a womanist reading and I love that both of those are lifting up those perspectives in Mark especially.

Rebecca: For sure.

Annemarie: Really cool.

Rebecca: Before we move on to our conversation, we want to acknowledge that there is technically a gap in the alternate psalm for Advent 4. That's if you are not using the magnificat, however, we discussed that psalm in that gap way back in episode 14 for the fifth Sunday after Pentecost, and clearly that commentary wouldn't be located in the context of Advent, but if you happen to be using Psalm 89 and you really are looking for something to listen to, you can head back to that episode. But otherwise, we're going to jump into discussing 2 Samuel in this episode. So let's go ahead and have our reading.

Music: <piano music>

Annemarie: The first reading for the fourth Sunday of Advent in Year B is 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

Rebecca: ...meaning the gap we are exploring is 2 Samuel 7:12-15. I will be reading the assigned verses...

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

Rebecca: ¹Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ²the king said to the prophet Nathan, 'See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.' ³Nathan said to the king, 'Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you.' ⁴But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: ⁵Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ⁶I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle.

⁷Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people

Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?' ⁸Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; ⁹and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ¹⁰And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house.

Annemarie: ¹²When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. ¹⁴I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. ¹⁵But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.

Rebecca: ¹⁶Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.

Music: <piano music>

Rebecca: I had to check about three times when I was making the show notes page for us to read from because I kept thinking to myself, surely the most explicit verses that seemed to be foretelling a particular person and foretelling a messiah of some kind. Surely those aren't the gap, but for some reason, yes, they are.

Annemarie: Especially for the fourth Sunday in Advent when that is exactly what we're talking about.

Rebecca: Yeah, I don't get it. I don't know. This one truly does baffle me. I don't understand the thought process and it's just kind of weird.

Annemarie: Yeah, yeah. Well, let's take it from just the whole thing here, right? Take the broader view. We're talking about houses and dwellings for God, and in this moment David is trying to figure out how to honor God and realizing that somehow David thinks that having a house is what God really needs. The response from God is a little bit less positive, I believe, than David believes. It's almost like someone coming you with this grand idea, this idea that they believe will just fix all of your problems, and you saying back to them and going, well, actually I'm not interested in that at all, and I can only imagine the disappointment from David at that moment, especially when it's Nathan delivering that news on behalf of God as God's prophet. All of this leads to verses 12 to 15 and 16 where we have the literal,

Rebecca: The climax of the entire point of the passage, whatever. I mean there's definitely play on words going on. A house is not just one thing. In this whole passage we have almost a palace, the literal house that you assume David is living in, I don't know how palatial it really was, but the residents of the king, you have what will eventually be a temple in the house of the Lord, and then you have this idea of a dynasty, right? A line of people, the house of David for generations to come. So there's wordplay going on. There's an

acknowledgement of different kinds of dwelling and house in addition to the word house itself being played on. You have tent, you have tabernacle and everything, and I know for me, being someone who days ago as we record this, moved into a new house, moved into my first house that I have purchased and am not living in an apartment anymore, it struck me because of that I think in a certain way and just gave me the opportunity to think about what is the purpose of a house? What do we gain from them? How do they give us a foundation from which to live? I connected with the passage as a whole just because of my life at this point I guess, but I think that you could do a lot of different things with it because of that. You could go in a lot of different directions, but yeah, taking out the gap basically takes out that whole facet of meaning from the wordplay that's going on. Yeah, it's a weird choice. It's a weird choice.

Annemarie: So what's interesting about that is that both of us in the year 2023 bought houses and moved into our first house of our own, and I've noticed a change in my own family to how their overall wellbeing has improved being in our own home and the moving process is not easy or fun. I really hate moving, but the idea of dwelling, of taking up space somewhere when you're talking about God, I think is both, yes, we want God, we want to know where God dwells. We want to know that God is dwelling in a certain place, which is why when the arc of the covenant was moving around, they could easily identify this box holds evidence of God's presence. It exactly what God has told us to build. This is what we know to be true, and it's the surety of God being here, and if I put God here, then I can always know where God is.

The idea of having God in a place you always can find a map to or find a place to go. I get the idea of how that sounds good. It sounds safe. It sounds really nice because if God is moving all around, how will I know where God is at the same time when the writer is using all of these metaphors and really the wordplay, you're right, there's a lot of wordplay here, house of David and all of these things. There's also this constant reminder of forever, so the word forever comes up eight times in all of chapter seven in two Samuel and in this parca it happens twice, or I'm sorry, three times in this parca. And so when you think about having a dwelling and being there forever, there's this longevity of promise that's already starting to happen here in God's response to David through Nathan. And so it stresses that the permanence of David's house and that metaphorical house, right

Rebecca: Dynasty lineage,

Annemarie: The house, the dynasty, the lineage will be forever, that the permanence is the same as God's permanence and that this is about identifying David as the place where this line in human terms is going to be starting. Well, I'll stop there. Let's talk about that for a second and then we'll get to the next thing I have to say.

Rebecca: Yeah, I think it's so interesting because despite making it more tangible and physical to have a literal house where we can identify and place God, there's also a vulnerability that comes with that, right? We read in scripture about the arc of the covenant being stolen. It becomes something that can move between nations that if harmed, we have to ask ourselves, well, what happened to God then? And all this huge conflict that it brings with it, and part of what I hear happening is this counterintuitive movement away from that vulnerability to having the promise and God kind of located in this line in a house of David to come. I think that there's interesting play in there in that it's harder to see and

touch because it's not a physical thing, and yet it's almost safer and more protected and longer lasting for all of that, and I just think that's cool.

Annemarie: Yeah. Yeah, I think so too. The other piece of this right is the verse 15, which is part of the gap as well. Verse 15 talks about I will not take my steadfast love from him as I took it from Saul. So the rest of the gap here, and one of the reasons it may have been removed is that it does talk about iniquity and punishment, and that can be hard for a preacher to have to talk about, or at least it can be hard to read out loud and then not address in worship, and that there's this sense of not only is there this dwelling and this ancestral lineage, but the forever is not just about dwelling and indwelling. The forever is about God's presence and God's actual love for David will be manifested in this and it will be steadfast. So that in one of the places I was reading in a study Bible, it said that this is why this gap is so confusing. This is one of the most important statements in the Old Testament and the beginning of ancient Israel's hope for a Messiah or savior. This verse second Samuel chapter seven verse 15, that is not technically in the lectionary is the most important verse in all of the Old Testament when it comes to messianic prophecy.

Rebecca: I would love to sit down with the group of people that put together the lectionary and just pick their brains. It would be so interesting, but to keep going on what you brought up about the mentions of iniquity and punishment, and we're referring specifically to verse 14 there. I think also within this, it's worth spending some time on looking at how we approach Old Testament prophecy and their connection to the idea of an awaited messiah in general to how we interpret those fore tellings in light of our faith in Jesus. And it is not necessarily a one for one. We end up glossing over it frequently. I think the very fact that verse 14 mentions this sun figure, right? We're speaking very generically. We don't have a specific title like Son of Man or Son of God in this passage like we do in other spots, but we are using sun language here.

I think that there's room within that also to be like, see, this is not a literal crystal ball foretelling of things. Jesus did not commit iniquity. That isn't part of how we understand things and the gospel witnesses. So along with its importance in terms of foretelling a Messiah figure and its explicitness in terms of a person from the line of David who shall fulfill God's promises to the community, there's also wiggle room in there to say, Hey, we can hold all of that together in this kind of messy, squishy way without saying, okay, this is exactly what that meant in a one-for-one kind of way because it doesn't fit in perfectly like a puzzle piece that was made for it. So I think that makes it more interesting rather than less interesting and cooler to see how people have been listening to the Holy Spirit and finding God among them and hoping for God in the future and everything else. But that is a tricky part of preaching, especially in advent since we get all of those pieces of Isaiah, we get this piece from Second Samuel and everything and figuring out how to massage all of that and explain all of that and present it to folks isn't the easiest thing.

Annemarie: No, and one of the things I read on Sundays and seasons, which I find that their text details and some of the ways that they go into some more just interpretation help and sometimes some sermon ideas. One of the things that I read there talked about how the next step after this, the messianic promise that comes with the house of God and the dwelling of God and the dynasty is that Jesus is the dwelling of God. Jesus is the house of God, and so the House of God comes among us, not just the arc of the covenant coming among us, not just a prophet, again, not John the Baptist, not all those things,

but the very being of God in God's self. The very housing of God comes among us, and that embodies God's presence here on earth in a way that is startling. And you're right.

I mean, I think it even more sends the point home about you were saying about how the prophecies in the Hebrew scriptures aren't always exactly what we find in the witnesses to Jesus, in the way that Jesus is living and the witness of what he and who he is, but that the next step after Jesus being the house of God is that we become the dwelling for God in our baptism, in our connection with God in such a way that we become heirs that same language of dynasty and throughout generations because have in this same Sunday you have the Psalm appointed. Psalm is not a psalm. It's in fact the song from Luke about generation after generation will be blessed. There's a generational understanding of God's action here, but you also have this sense of this communal nature of God's presence. The whole body of Christ is beginning to be formed in this one body, and that I think preaches into Advent four, especially on a year where if you're like me, I'm technically not preaching that morning, but if you were trying to preach that morning and that evening, meaning we have Advent four is technically on the day of Christmas Eve, this could be one of those ways where you can talk about that a little bit and then say you can lead into later that night and say, come back.

We'll talk more about what God is doing in this form, in this way of God appearing in this dwelling.

Rebecca: I love that. And to add another link or two to the chain as if we didn't have enough already. I think that like you were saying in terms of tying it to the bridge between Advent four and Christmas Eve, I think I could see doing something with the way the Christmas story talks about the shelter or the homelessness of Mary and Joseph and being able to talk about that aspect of the Christmas story and kind of foretell it in your advent for message there, and then like you were saying, even bringing it into us and being the dwelling of God and being grafted into this line and being the royal priesthood because of that, I think you could also take it even further forward, especially if your context has any kind of ministry that deals with shelter, with folks experiencing homelessness with around housing, what a great way to be able to bring that in as well.

Is it literal maybe, but the discussion of the dignity and power that comes along with having a home, having a dwelling and all of those pieces, I could really see pulling that out and talking about the importance of those kinds of ministries for people because of the second Samuel, because of the nativity story and how they're all playing together to show us that where God dwells matters and where God dwells calls us to be attentive to the dwelling of the shelter and the dignity given to our neighbors as well. I'm not saying that super articulately, I'm just talking off the cuff, but so many different branches and directions to take that

Annemarie: Well, and this is I think why this is a conversation between both of us. You've just demonstrated exactly why I love doing this with you, because we get to help each other complete those whole thoughts, right? Yes. So one more step beyond what you were saying, right? Do it about that is that it's not just about God dwelling in me, right? God dwells in my neighbor the same way my homeless neighbor, my hungry neighbor, my, and so that's the next step in knowing that God dwells in me and that I can't, that's forever the way that this is forever in Second Samuel, if that's forever for me, that's forever for my neighbor, whether I want that to be true or not. That's what God

promises, and so that's what I now get to wrap my mind around and what Jesus is going to help me with and that community that I'm part of, that whole body of Christ that hopefully I'm worshiping with on Advent four and Christmas Eve.

Well, we're all going to work on that together, right? This isn't about shame. This isn't about pointing out our iniquity and saying, well, you don't think of your neighbor with all of that involved. Well, yeah, it's hard. We're fallible. We do our human best to follow what God wants for us. But the final step, I think with talking about the needs of those for whom it doesn't feel like God is near for whom they believe God can't possibly dwell with them because things are just too hard or they don't have a dwelling of their own or they don't have a safe place to be, that they are no less a dwelling for God than anyone else.

Rebecca: We should take a moment to acknowledge for our listeners that there is not in fact any gaps over Christmas itself. There are optional verses, but there's nothing in between anywhere. So the next time we will show up again will be for epiphany where there is a gap in the Psalm, so a little bit of a break, but we wish everyone a very merry Christmas. Blessings on your preaching. We will be back in 2024. We wish everyone a merry Christmas and a safe and happy new year. We wish you all the best.

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: There was a woman in my Bible study last week that said, "I love listening to you. You guys are so relaxing."

Rebecca: Awww!

Annemarie: I thought, that's so nice to know.

Rebecca: <laughter> I have never felt relaxed a day in my life, but good.

Annemarie: <laughter> You know, the two of us share that. We are not the most relaxed ladies, and we're okay with it. It's fine, but it's fine. Everything's fine.

Rebecca: <laughter> This is fine.