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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 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: Hallelujah. Christ is risen.

Annemarie: Christ is risen indeed. Hallelujah.

Rebecca: Before we continue with our commentary for Easter, we're going to start off by thanking everyone who has supported us financially. That includes Lee and Kim on Ko-Fi, and Weta, David, Jennifer, Jerry, Liz, and Melissa on Patreon. Thank you for helping us have fun with this project and grow closer to scripture and to one another and to the church through it. Annemarie, what's on your mind?

Annemarie: Well, Easter is one of my favorite days for a lot of reasons. In the church, the day of Easter on Sunday of all of Holy Week to me as a presider and leader of worship is the easiest day because it is just Sunday, right? The liturgy is very predictable. There's not a whole lot of extras or special things happening except for we're going to say, oh Lu on a ton. And one of the things I love doing on Easter Sunday, particularly with children and the children's sermon, is to give them something that's kind of noisy. This year I'm giving out these handheld bells that are like the jingle bells you would use for caroling at Christmas time, but they're all different colors and there are four bells on them and they can put the little hands in there and shake them and make lots of joyful noise.

And one of the things I tell them is that during service that day, I want them to shake those bells and make as much noise as they can every time we say the word or sing the word hallelujah. And I have done this a few times in the course of my career, and every time, whether it's an egg shaker or it's some bells or a little wand with a ribbon on it, every single time, the response from children and adults alike actually has been overwhelmingly positive. It makes the kids get excited about listening for those words. It forces me as the planner of worship and presider to make sure that we have lots of opportunities to shake our bells and make lots of noise. But it also brings about this extra layer of celebration to our Easter worship. And I think after a long season like Lent where we've been kind of suppressing those celebrations a little bit and intentionally

trying to make sure we're focusing on all the things that we have challenged ourselves to focus on, that there's this pure and childlike celebration of what God has done on Easter, and we get that viscerally in these bells.

Rebecca, what is on your mind?

Rebecca: One of the fun things about having lived in so many different places, not just across the United States, but in the world, is learning the different climates and weather patterns in those places. And I can safely say that Syracuse, New York is the windiest place I have lived so far. Or maybe it's just because I'm a homeowner, that the wind stresses me out more than it has anywhere else because all I can picture is limbs on my roof or shingles flying off. But it has had me thinking, especially this past week about the way, one of my favorite things about the language of scripture is the way in Hebrew and Greek, the words for wind and breath and spirit are all the same *ruach* in Hebrew and *pneuma* in Greek. And I think there's something so beautiful in that and the way it can remind us that our very bodies and the world around us hold sacredness and the spirit and the presence of God for us and the way it is active and alive among us.

And for every time I do feel that stress about what the wind might do to my home or just its very noticeable presence around us, it reminds me of how the Holy Spirit has an energy, and I don't know if danger is the right word, but this significance to it that we need to pay attention to that as much as it is life and beauty and inspiration, it also has real consequence. And I appreciate the way creation itself can remind me of that when I listen to the wind and I notice the breezes around me. So that's been on my mind because we have had a resurgence of winter recently and have had some very gusty weather, and it's true that getting those lake effect breezes is something that Syracuse experiences in a way that I haven't had even in Chicago, the windy city, and even in Detroit, in Michigan, it feels different here whether it actually is different or not. And so that's what's been on my mind going into the season of Easter, but I know that we have a for this day as we celebrate Christ's resurrection and get to preach that good news together, so let's head into reading the scripture.

Music: <piano music>

Rebecca: The psalm for Easter Sunday in Year B is Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24...

Annemarie: ...meaning the gap we are exploring is Psalm 118:3-13. I will be reading the assigned verses....

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

Annemarie: <sup>1</sup> O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;  
his steadfast love endures for ever!

<sup>2</sup> Let Israel say,  
'His steadfast love endures for ever.'

Rebecca: <sup>3</sup> Let the house of Aaron say,  
'His steadfast love endures for ever.'

<sup>4</sup> Let those who fear the Lord say,  
'His steadfast love endures for ever.'

<sup>5</sup> Out of my distress I called on the Lord;  
the Lord answered me and set me in a broad place.

<sup>6</sup> With the Lord on my side I do not fear.  
What can mortals do to me?

<sup>7</sup> The Lord is on my side to help me;  
I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.

<sup>8</sup> It is better to take refuge in the Lord  
than to put confidence in mortals.

<sup>9</sup> It is better to take refuge in the Lord  
than to put confidence in princes.

<sup>10</sup> All nations surrounded me;  
in the name of the Lord I cut them off!

<sup>11</sup> They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side;  
in the name of the Lord I cut them off!

<sup>12</sup> They surrounded me like bees;  
they blazed like a fire of thorns;  
in the name of the Lord I cut them off!

<sup>13</sup> I was pushed hard, so that I was falling,  
but the Lord helped me.

Annemarie: <sup>14</sup> The Lord is my strength and my might;  
he has become my salvation.

<sup>15</sup> There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous:  
'The right hand of the Lord does valiantly;

<sup>16</sup> the right hand of the Lord is exalted;  
the right hand of the Lord does valiantly.'

<sup>17</sup> I shall not die, but I shall live,  
and recount the deeds of the Lord.

<sup>18</sup> The Lord has punished me severely,  
but he did not give me over to death.

<sup>19</sup> Open to me the gates of righteousness,  
that I may enter through them  
and give thanks to the Lord.

<sup>20</sup> This is the gate of the Lord;  
the righteous shall enter through it.

<sup>21</sup> I thank you that you have answered me  
and have become my salvation.

<sup>22</sup> The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the chief cornerstone.

<sup>23</sup> This is the Lord's doing;  
it is marvelous in our eyes.

<sup>24</sup> This is the day that the Lord has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Music: <piano music>

Annemarie: Makes me want to sing Sunday school songs. "This is the day, this is the day that the Lord has made, that the Lord has made..." Yeah.

Rebecca: We're starting off with a verse that isn't even necessarily in the gap, but it's the way theology is in the prepositions and it's being glad in something, not for something necessarily that we aren't required to be grateful or glad for every single thing, especially for the struggles and the sorrows and the grief, but that there is a way through the Holy Spirit and through faith and God to be glad in the midst of it.

Annemarie: For as much as yes, it is not technically part of the gap, I do think because it is within the Psalm, it does I think illuminate the gap a little bit. The writer of the Psalm is really just kind of quoting things from other pieces of scripture in a way that makes you understand that they attribute their victory in battle to God and that God has favored them over another. And just like God has favored the Israelites as they left Egypt and in their exile and the exodus, and I think that the gladness in what God has done is important here.

Rebecca: It reminds me of how someone asked me this week to talk about why the Easter vigil was important, and I had to sit and reflect about how that service is different from Easter morning, and I came back to the way that the vigil on Saturday night asks us to proclaim faith in the resurrection while it's still dark out and kindle the new fire in the midst of night and have faith in life when it seems to be dead around us. And I think that the faith that it takes to proclaim this is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it feels similar to that and there's something so beautiful and so moving about that if you can't tell, I'm really excited to have a vigil this year for the first time in a little while. So I'm looking forward to that and I'm looking forward to having that be a part of our Easter celebrations in my current context.

Annemarie: I'm excited for you. Actually, this is the first time in a while I'm not at doing in vigil, so I'm jealous, and that makes me just even more, the way you've described it made me think of the readings that we do during the vigil and all of the readings are basically like the lead in arguments for believing in the gospel when it's read. It's just preparing you over and over again for all the ways that God has brought life from death or life from chaos, life from the dry bones, life from the fiery furnace life, from all the stories that so many other generations have been telling around campfires and for the sake of at night, and that the darkness does not overwhelm, right? The darkness does not overwhelm what God is doing even when we can't fully see or fully, and sometimes it's hard to fully trust, but I think that that's incredibly powerful and I think that Perry is over into Easter morning, right?

This psalm is appointed for Easter, and I know that on Easter Sunday, I mean, I'm thinking about when I was preparing for this pod today, I was thinking, when's the last time I even remember hearing the psalm on Easter Sunday? Right? I mean, unless a choir is singing it, and I haven't been in contexts where the psalm has been a featured piece of worship in general, let alone on a day like Easter. Though in the current context we will be at least chanting together the Psalm and how the Psalm fits into that echo of proclamation, the continual proclamation of what God has done in Jesus, the wise foolishness of the cross. But the Psalm I think, and even the gap is if you wanted to add the gap back in, I think you would be adding back in the law. I will say the law that says even in times of distress, even when I called out to you and I wasn't sure that I'd be

victorious, I wasn't sure that you were with me. You, oh God, were there. And I think on Easter morning, we still need to hear the law and the gospel, and we have to state that in order to get to the place of celebrating resurrection in a way that actually has meaning for us. And those hallelujahs that we shout and ring bells for are even more celebratory,

Rebecca: And I think verse four of the psalm in the gap really captures that this old idea of fearing the Lord, the verse says, let those who fear the Lord say his steadfast love endures forever. I think that's such a complicated idea for us, and as I grow in faith, the more I have come to understand that as the understandable fear of the vulnerability and intimacy that deep love and trust requires of us. Think of the John version of the Easter story that a lot of us will read on Sunday morning. The fact that it is Christ saying Mary Magdalene's name that makes her recognize him, that kind of familiarity and that kind of being known is incredibly vulnerable and intimate, and I think that always has an element of fear because it asks us to risk something. There's a chance that the way we know it and share it among humans, there's a chance it could be rejected or there's a chance that it could be disappointed.

The difference is that Christ is always reaching for us, and Christ always catches us, and God always steadfastly loves us, and God steadfast love endures forever. These are the promises of scripture, but that is so hard to live out when the ways we experience that love among ourselves are just the human fallible love that we know day to day, which is still beautiful and also does end up disappointing us and being difficult sometimes. So I hear in verse four from the gap, a real encapsulation of that kind of intimacy and vulnerability and joy at the resurrection that we hear in John's gospel of Eastern Morning with Christ and Mary Magdalene in the garden.

Annemarie: Yeah, I totally agree. It was funny because when I looked up, so in many contexts the Psalm appointed for Easter does not include verses one and two, but the verses one and two, when I looked up in the common, the comments on the common lectionary, they added one and two to give tone to establish the tone of the psalm for when you started up at verse 14, and when I read it again and I read it a few times verses one to four, it occurred to me, I thought, if you're trying to set the tone of what this Psalm is about, why would you leave out verses three and four? There's this kind of intentional naming of these particular communities and these peoples that have these identities that I think you miss by not having verses three and four and whether you added five through 13, I don't know if that is necessary, but if you were thinking about maybe taking a little bit of this gap and adding some back in, I think if you went one to four and then 14 to 24, you would be adding more meaning behind what this psalm is, what the psalmist is really proclaiming here and why by the time you get to verse 24, this is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Who is being is rejoicing, who should rejoice in this and that there is this all nature. It's Israel, it's the house of Aaron. It's all who fear the Lord

Rebecca: With you. Drawing our attention to this stanza of verses one through four and the repetition it brings if you consider them altogether. When I read through it this time, it really reminded me of one of my favorite pieces of Christian writing, which is St. John Chrysostom's Easter sermon from way back yonder in the fourth century. This is old stuff

and good old Johnny is a complicated figure. Most of those people from back then, we have to hold like—

Annemarie: Jerome.

Rebecca: Yeah! We have to hold the intention, the beauty of their insights with really just bad writings against Jews and for good old Johnny writings against same sex sexual activity. But his Easter sermon is something that honestly, I could hear every Easter morning for the rest of my life, and I think that would be all I need. There's something about it that speaks to me, something about the repetition, the cadence, the emphasis on God's action and our need of it, the depth of our yearning that just fills me every single time or read it. There's a whole bunch of translations you can find online.

I go back to that every year and sometimes I end up quoting parts of it, which is funny because he's just quoting scripture for a lot of it, but the way he puts it all together is so moving and speaks so purely to the promise of the resurrection and of God's grace to lift up the lowly, to make sure there is enough for all and for that abundance to not be based on our worthiness, but on God's very nature, God's nature of wanting to give graciously and give lavishly. So if it's not a writing that listeners are familiar with, I really encourage them to look up St. John Chrysostom's Easter homily and just sit with it for a while. Whether it helps you ho automatically or is just something that maybe your spirit needs, who knows? But it's something that I hold very dearly.

Annemarie: The only thing I want to add more is for preachers, especially preachers who are either just starting out or trying to figure out the pressure of Easter. It's a lot of work. I think by the time we get to Sunday, we feel like this is somehow is your shot to get all of the words that you want to say to the visitors and the new people and the families you rarely see. But what I will as a pastor who's done this now 16 times, Easter doesn't need you to be more than exactly who you are. You as a preacher will preach Christ crucified and risen. That's what people need to hear. They do not need to hear the best sermon ever, but Easter does a good job of preaching on its own. Don't kill yourselves trying to craft a perfect sermon that was somehow going to change the whole church in that one day, Jesus is going to be there no matter what. Things will go wrong and your preaching will be great because it'll be faithful and be yourself. Do the things that you do, be who you are and don't put a lot of pressure on yourself that isn't fair or isn't needed.

Rebecca: Our actions are not going to get Jesus out of that tomb. God already did it. We can wave. Palms are not wave palms. Jesus still died in rows. We can wash feet or not wash feet. Jesus still died and rose. Even to go into some of the verses from the Psalm that are outside the gap, verse 15, "There are glad songs of victory in the tense of the righteous." The music will preach for you. The prayers of the people will preach for you. The scripture itself will preach for you. You're not in this alone. The whole of the liturgy has your back in this and it is good and right for you to lean on that. Say things as many times as you need to say, Christ has risen as many times as you need to. Say hallelujah as many times as you need to. The Psalms never worry about repeating themselves. We saw that in the verses that we were just talking about. Say it over and over because we need to hear it over and over. It's good news every time you say it. If it was worth saying once, it's worth saying again.

Annemarie: Amen.

This transcript was exported on Mar 23, 2024.

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>