

This transcript was exported on Jan 15, 2024.

Annemarie: We're kind of barreling toward Transfiguration and Lent at the same time because we know it comes up pretty quickly.

Rebecca: No, don't remind us!

Annemarie: Sorry.

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: Thank you for listening to Mind the Gap today. We want to thank everyone who has supported us financially. That includes Lee and Kim, Weta, David, Jennifer, Jerry, Melissa, and Liz, who have made contributions on either Ko-Fi or Patreon that make extra items like our episode transcripts possible. Thank you so much for contributing and helping us out with this project. Annemarie, I would love to know what is on your mind this week before we jump into our commentary.

Annemarie: Well, as many people know, I am an interim pastor at the moment, and one of my tasks is to try to help the congregation prepare for a new pastor. And I don't have a lot to do with the actual call process and all of the visioning and the mission site profile and that kind of stuff, but I do have a responsibility to make sure that they are ready for whomever should come after me, and I take that responsibility pretty seriously. And I recently read a book called *Call to Allyship*, which is—it's really a collaboration, edited and kind of pulled together by the Reverend Angela !Khabeb, which is really about how churches can be more aware and some of the pitfalls that come with being in the call process if you are a person of color. It is a book that is, I think, 101 pages so it's not terribly long, which is perfect for congregations to use as a resource.

Each chapter is written by a different leader. There are multiple bishops who have contributed to this. There are personal stories of microaggressions of some of the really embarrassing and terrible things that congregations do sometimes intentionally and sometimes without malice. And at the same time, there are also very hopeful stories and some really helpful, I think, advice and strategies for congregations that are getting

ready to call a new leader, particularly in the Lutheran tradition, and to be ready for whomever that person might be. I think it's one of the best resources I've read for congregations. It's just a really helpful resource coming from with really practical advice, and I am just so grateful it exists because I am excited to be able to help this congregation prepare themselves for whomever the Holy Spirit brings their way.

Rebecca: How did you learn about that book, or is there any kind of way that call committees are informed about things like that book or encouraged to do trainings that challenge racial or gender bias or prejudice in any other areas?

Annemarie: I saw this book come through an email from Augsburg Fortress in the fall. It was released on Reformation Day in 2023, and so when I saw it was there, I immediately pre-ordered it because I knew it at least was something I wanted to read myself if not use for ministry. But I think you are naming something without naming it here that not all the time do we have these broader resources that are named for call committees and just congregations in general who are trying to expand and improve their ability to welcome and hear and listen to folks who have different experiences than the majority of those congregations. I think too often call committees and congregations have to do that legwork on their own. So hopefully that's one of the reasons I wanted to make this on my mind today. But also I just want to make sure that if we keep talking about these resources and keep talking about what's out there to help us better understand and learn, that's our first step.

Rebecca: It'd be really great if synods had a way to support and incentivize congregations to do some of that work and that research. Because, also, often it's the reluctant congregations that need to do it more than those who are already familiar with having those discussions and talking about those issues. But that's a digression!

One of the things that my week is focusing a lot on at church is getting ready to search for a part-time faith formation director. And that's a position opening that I came into. The congregation had that opening before I started, so I asked and they graciously gave a couple months for me to just observe the congregation, get to know it a little bit better so I could feel like I had more knowledge as we go into interviews and other parts of that search to be able to be effective. But I wanted to lift up the name Susan Beaumont, who does trainings for staff management and job descriptions, and I know that I have room to grow in this area and I'm still learning and just wanted to kind of name her as a resource that I know she has worked with ELCA synods before and I learned about her through other ELCA pastors.

I don't think she's an obscure name by any means, but if there's anyone listening who has that coming down the pike for their community or would also like to grow in administration, supervision, helping their setting interview and hire folks, that's a place to start that I wanted to mention.

Although we are in our Psalms era, for this week we are in our Jonah era, a small but mighty Jonah era. So how about we jump into reading the scripture together as we talk about the third chapter of Jonah for the third Sunday after Epiphany.

Music: <piano music>

Rebecca: The first reading for the third Sunday after Epiphany in Year B is Jonah 3:1-5, 10...

Annemarie: ...meaning the gap we are exploring is Jonah 3:6-9. 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>The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, <sup>2</sup>'Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.' <sup>3</sup>So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. <sup>4</sup>Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, 'Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!' <sup>5</sup>And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

Rebecca: <sup>6</sup>When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. <sup>7</sup>Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: 'By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. <sup>8</sup>Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. <sup>9</sup>Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.'

Annemarie: <sup>10</sup>When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

Music: <piano music>

Rebecca: The book of Jonah is just such a nice, concise short story. It's got a lot of humor in it. It's just kind of a fun one.

To remind ourselves what's going on, Nineveh was the capitol for a while, but nevertheless an important city, in the Assyrian Empire. So this predates the Babylonian captivity before a major prophet like Isaiah. But Nineveh would have been—Jonah's reluctance comes from the fact that Nineveh is not a friendly city to a Hebrew person, to an Israelite. Nineveh would've been seen as kind of the heartland of the enemy in that way. So that's the basis for his reluctance. And we have skipped over the time in the belly of the great fish and the storm and the ship and everything and come to when he has finally made this trip into Nineveh that Yahweh has been trying to get him to do. But I think you still hear a little bit of his reluctance. I like to kind of picture him dragging his feet reluctantly walking a day's walk in the city. And I don't know, the tone of the story is funny. So you can read this pericope with humor.

Annemarie: I have always understood that Jonah is a comedy. It's kind of dark. There's some darkness to it, but as someone who loves comedy the way that I do, I think it is really just one of my favorite books of scripture, no matter what part of scripture you're talking about. And I just love how Jonah is. He's his own straight man, right? I mean, he is his own worst enemy in that God asks him to do something that is on the surface quite simple and he turns it into this huge ordeal. And then I just recently this week posted

something on my stories that was kind of like I just did something that took me 11 minutes and it took me six months just to pick up the phone and do it.

Rebecca: So real.

Annemarie: This happens all the time. It took Jonah, okay, it took him a day to walk to the center of the city. He had to say one sentence.

Rebecca: Was it worth the shipwreck, the storm, and the ship? Was it worth the being swallowed by the great fish? Yeah, you're right. That is so relatable, the things that we build up in our mind. And then it's like, it was not worth all of that emotional energy.

Annemarie: And doesn't that make us feel better that before the Babylonian captivity, ps happened in 537, before the Babylonian captivity, humans were humaning in ways that we are still humaning. If we want to turn humaning into a verb.

Rebecca: We love to verb the words.

Annemarie: I love verbing words. That is so relatable. And so I think that's why I love Jonah because, and it's why we love Peter in New Testament in all of the Jesus stories. We love a relatable character. We love someone who shows us that our ridiculousness is indeed ridiculous and in fact can be used by God to do things that are miraculous because let's talk about this gap. Let's talk about what does this gap do for this section. There's a couple of things it does, right? It does something for the narrative, it expands the narrative, but it also, as I was reading, gives us almost a framework and a formula for what repentance looks like, which I think is really important.

Rebecca: I think there's a framework for repentance, and I also think that as a whole, the passage has a really fascinating framework for justice and advocacy that I feel frustrated by the gap because I think taking out those verses actually really weakens it. So if you don't have those verses in there, you go from chapter [sic] five where the people of Nineveh believe God and they fast. They put on sack cloth, and then we jump to verse 10 where it says, when God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changes God's mind, fine. But in that gap is all of this focus on the king and the rulers and the leadership of the nation, and I think when those stay in there, there's an amazing vision of a bottom up cry for change and justice that is totally lost when you skip them.

It also has the only verse that talks in any kind of concrete way about what are they repenting for? What are these evil ways that they're talking about in verse eight where it mentions the violence that is in their hands? As I was digging into it, I just felt more and more like taking these out really removes a lot of the teeth of the passage. I think it's such a more applicable and more interesting and more hope-filled vision when you have them in this, to me sounds like a reminder that change is possible, that when the people cry out, it's not necessarily futile. You can have hope that there is going to be change for that, and I need that. I'll claim it for myself. I think everyone needs it, but I need that. So I really like this gap.

Annemarie: Me too. So I want to point out just a couple things about what you just said about the ways in which the belief, right, the trust, and I would even say that the possibility for change is happening twofold here. So you have in verse five, I want to point out that it

says, and the people of Nineveh believed God, that reference to believe happens two other times so far in Old Testament scripture in the Hebrew scriptures and once is in the first time is in Genesis at the sacrifice of Isaac. When Abraham believes in gets the Lamb instead, and at the other time is in Exodus chapter 14, after the crossing of the Red Sea and the people of Israel believed in God. God does something for the sake of the people, and the people believe that God is in fact on their side, that God is in fact protecting them and wants life for them, wants them to be well. You have then this moment of the king and the king doesn't know, doesn't do any of this with the assumption that God is going to change God's mind. The king changes his mind when confronted with—

Rebecca: I like that distinction.

Annemarie: —the real consequence, which is you have let things get out of control. Your people have violence in their hands and even down to the animals, which is part of this comedic kind of motif that Jonah has, but the king gets up from his throne, takes off his own robe first, doesn't command everyone else to do anything until he does it himself, puts on the sackcloth, sits in ashes, which sounds gross, and then had a proclamation to Nineveh to say, this is what to everyone by the decree of the king and the nobles. So this isn't just the king, it isn't just him making an example of himself and putting himself up as the one to This isn't, I don't think this is as close to a Jesus equivalency here. The sacrifice is not the same thing. This is the king saying, I'm stepping down from power in a way that is demonstrative for you, and I want you to do the same.

I want you to step away from what we've always been doing and we're going to do this because we know that it's the right thing to do, and I love that. In verse nine, it says, who knows, God may relent and change God's mind. He may turn from his fierce anger so that we do not perish, but we don't know, but their belief, their belief is already there. That's what we had in verse five. The belief is already there, and so now they are doing this action whether God forgives them or not. If you don't have this gap, you don't know how monumental verse 10 is.

Rebecca: I mean, history suggests it is not usually the common folk who have the harder time making change or giving things up. The common folk are asked to give things up all the time, are forced to give things up all the time. The fact that there's a genuine example of someone in a position of power, someone with privilege and wealth who goes through this conversion is quite something, and it feels like a shame to not have that in what we read and to share that as part of the story. Definitely. I like that you drew out that connection that the king is not necessarily the Jesus figure. Jonah is usually the one who is linked to being a Jesus figure because he's got three days in the belly of the fish and then comes out to share God's message and that kind of thing. So especially through the Middle Ages, that was a big thing to use that to kind of bring us towards a connection to the gospels and to Jesus's ministry and everything.

I think that with the gospel reading being the calling of the disciples and them leaving their nets to follow Jesus, combining that with this Jonah passage, I feel like it prompts questions of what are we willing to leave behind, and it's not the go on a grand adventure. It's not the hike to to vanquish evil. It's not the give up your job and every penny in your savings account. It's what assumptions about your rightness are you willing to give up? What assumptions about justice, how are you willing to listen to the

cries of the people? How are willing to let go of the violence that is in your hand? I think they play really well with one another, especially with the gap versus

Annemarie: I completely, I think we're right. I think we're of the same mind in a lot of this, and I think that especially because in this gap you have this formula for repentance in that you need to, I mean, you have this demonstration of denying oneself, right? Denying your own power, denying your seat. Literally, he gets out of his chair and acknowledgement of guilt. You have to acknowledge that something wrong has happened and a change in attitude toward your fellow humans. You have to do something different. Repentance means turning around and being different, and then finally this acknowledgement that your salvation is up to God, that God's freedom to forgive you or not is up to God and not you, that you will do what you need to do, which is to acknowledge your sin and turn around and be different, and you're going to leave everything else up to God.

That's the third act that this king does, and you see Nineveh shift from being overthrown in evil and rebuilt in goodness, right? Because God decides to save Nineveh. God decides that, okay, yep. The repentance is true. They have fulfilled what I was hoping that they would do, and we're going to see how this goes, which is good news. This would preach on its own. Amen. That is good news for Nineveh, and whether Jonah likes it or not, it's good news for him too, and we know what his response is. We did another episode about the end of this. I think we did another episode about the end of this chapter. I've preached about the end of this chapter before or the end of this book.

Rebecca: Go take a nap, Jonah.

Annemarie: Sit under this tree. That doesn't belong to you anyway. Yeah, and I think the connection to be able to line it up with the call of the disciples and fishing for people is that what we're—

Rebecca: Yeah, yeah.

Annemarie: —is I think it's a really great opportunity to draw that out a little bit and see how the practicalities of our life of faith and what it means for us when we turn around.

Rebecca: There's also, I think to also place this within the season after Epiphany. There are ways to call the King's conversion an “epiphany” in itself. If you want to continue to build that theme across the season. I think there could be interesting comparisons between the King of Nineveh and Herod from the Epiphany story itself. If you are a preacher who likes to emphasize the continuity of these stories or if your community just appreciates being able to find a grander narrative and everything, there's definitely ways that you can harken back to where we have just come from and the journey we have been on through Lent Christmas and now after Epiphany with this reading.

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.

This transcript was exported on Jan 15, 2024.

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: We're kind of barreling toward Transfiguration and Lent at the same time because we know it comes up pretty quickly.

Rebecca: No, don't remind us!

Annemarie: Sorry. Valentine's Day's going to be fun this year. "I love you and you're going to die."