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**PODCAST START:**

[intro music]

Fr. Shay: Welcome to the Reading Queerly Queer Theology Podcast, where each week, your hosts Brian Murphy and Shay Kearns will offer a reflection on the week's lectionary readings. This week, Brian and I are going to talk about Psalm 23 for the lectionary text. It's one that's super popular and well-known to people. So, what do you think, Brian? What resonates with you from this text?

Brian: Yeah, you know, I was rereading it again yesterday, which was on my way back from the Boston Marathon. I remember reading this passage at my grandfather's funeral. I think my cousin and I sort of alternated and read it together. And so obviously what happened in Boston was weighing on my mind, but I was also seeing it again in a new light this time, as someone who had survived, and who was confronted with darkness and despair and death. And how I choose to react, knowing that goodness was on my side, and the Lord is my shepherd – what does that mean for me, when I'm **facing** a reaction? Before I had thought, how does this relate to me as I'm confronting death, and sort of to be comforted in dying. But as I was reading it on the way back from Boston, it was more of an acknowledgement to the living.

FS: I think for me, as a preacher, one of the things that is always difficult with texts like these is that they're so well known. So how do you manage to preach something that's new in the midst of that? I think in the wake of tragedy, too, how do you preach something that's not trite?

B: Yeah. In general, with pastors and preaching, I'm always wary of the famous ones and the clichéd sayings, and so, yeah, I don't want some sort of stock story about God being good, right?

FS: Yeah. [laughs]

B: I think that, you know, so often when I'm sitting in the pew with my friends, we'll sort of be like, "I don't believe that this story happened. I think this is all made up. This is bullshit." People have bullshit meters, right? I think people are looking for what's real. So to pull upon real experiences, to ground this famous passage, I think is really important.

FS: Yeah, definitely. I think one of the pieces of this passage that sticks out to me is this idea at the very end about God preparing a table for us in the presence of

our enemies, and that just being a really striking image – and wondering what it is about that image. Is it God feeding us and making our enemies look on and be hungry? Or is it God inviting all of us to a table together to eat together? That, to me, is a really challenging piece of this passage.

B: For me, as I become more and more comfortable in myself as a queer person, I've sort of become less and less comfortable tolerating people and places that don't respect my whole person. I've been much better at setting boundaries and saying you know, no, I don't need to go to a church that doesn't affirm my whole person; there are churches out there that do. Or, you know what, these people say things that make me feel bad about myself; I don't have to be around them. I'm sort of wary about things. I can only compromise so much and stay happy and healthy and protected. So, what does it mean to be at a table in the presence of my enemies? Is that a safe space for me? Is that some place that I want to be in? The call of faith can sometimes be to take up those challenges and be in spaces that we might not feel space or we might not go normally, but to go there anyways because something powerful could happen there.

FS: For sure, for sure. And I would hope that, you know, when we're at that table together, if that's what's required of us, that somehow there'd be some reconciliation that would be happening. That it wouldn't be just, we're going to pretend to be nice over dinner, but that there's really something deeper and more healing happening in that moment, and in that space, that transforms enemies into something different.

B: Yeah, I think that the second half of this really juxtaposes itself against the first half, or the last third with the middle third, about the oil and goodness and love overflowing in comparison to the dark valleys, right? I know, as a queer person, there have been sort of emotional dark valleys: of friends and loved ones who I thought were going to be there not being there for me, turning away from me; my own self doubt about 'is it okay to be gay, am I damned' – going through those spiritual dark valleys. But also sometimes literal dark valleys. My roommate in college was sucker-punched in the face on our street at night for being gay, by people who called him a faggot and punched him. Physical violence is a very real fear for LGBTQ people. When we talk about what are the sermons that we want to hear, I think that it can sometimes be tempting to get **stuck** up in these ideas about God and reconciliation and coming through a common fable. But I also am wondering, what does that look like practically? How might we live that out today? What are some real ways that people are coming together? Not only what are ways that people are walking through those dark valleys, but also what are real ways that people are coming together at tables in the presence of their

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enemies? I would be interested to hear a real life example of that in a sermon. I think that would be really a powerful message.

FS: Yeah, absolutely. It really resonates with me, to think too about how often queer people, simply by existing, have to walk into some of these dark valleys. And what courage that takes – in order to just simply live, and to not be afraid.

B: Yeah.

FS: And not kind of the trite idea of God as shepherd in those moments, but something more profound, of having the courage to be all of who you are, even in the midst of violence. There's something really powerful about that.

B: I hear ya. I know, before I came out to anyone other than my dog, Max, I came out to myself and to God. Even as I knew that the church and society had some really nasty things to say about queer people, there was something profoundly comforting about God is love, and together we will get through this. And sort of trusting, in the moments when my family in the beginning was not accepting, sort of just trusting that reconciliation was possible, and to continue on in that path. Over the years, really being fortunate enough to see that reconciliation play out in real life has been really an amazing experience for me. To go back to my parent's house and being in the same bedroom where I remember laying, closeted, no one knowing and not knowing how things would turn out – and to come back years later and be in that same room, surrounded by the love of my family, has been a really cool **profit** for me as a queer person.

FS: That's really powerful.

B: My parting words are – keep it real. People want to hear what's real, and that we live real lives outside of the church doors. We can bring some realness inside, especially in times of tragedy when we're sort of prone to being grandiose, or when faced with historically-famous verses that we might be tempted to wax poetic – just keep it real.

FS: And I would say, sit with the pain, too. Don't rush to the resolution, but allow there to be pain, both in your sermon and in your congregation.

B: Mhm. Amen to that.

[outro music]

April 21, 2013

**Pilot**

**Psalm 23**

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B: We would love to hear your response to this week's reading. If you would like to share that with us, send us an email at [connect@queertheology.com](mailto:connect@queertheology.com). If you would like an update each time we post an episode of Reading Queerly, the queer lectionary podcast, you can sign up at [QueerTheology.com](http://QueerTheology.com) and we will shoot you an email each week.

FS: This is Shay.

B: And this is Brian.

FS: Thanks again for listening to Reading Queerly, the queer lectionary podcast.

**PODCAST END**

Transcript by Taylor Walker