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[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.

Brian: This week we're looking at Luke 8:26-39, which is one of the lectionary readings for Sunday, June 23rd.

[not read aloud]

Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn[b] no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me"—for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they

came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him. [NRSV]

Alright, Shay. What comes up for you in this passage? What do you want to preach on?

FS: So I think the first thing that comes up for me is how often this passage is misinterpreted, and how it's made to be about demon possession and/or Jesus healing someone of mental illness. That's not at all what this passage is actually about. It's really about – it's an anti-empire text, right? Legion is a Roman military term. The fact that this man, who is possessed, calls himself – or the demons in him call themselves Legion, should resonate with the people hearing the text that this is about Roman military occupation. And the fact that Jesus casts them out into swine, that swine were the symbol of one of the legions that was in this area. This was really about Jesus symbolically casting out the military occupiers, and I think in some ways it's also about healing people from having an occupied mindset.

B: Yeah, that pairing of both a community healing, the casting off of these occupied forces of a community, and also casting off the forces of an occupied mind, really resonates with me. One of the things that we talk about in our Reading Queerly course is the interplay between the personal spirituality and then the embodied communal spirituality, and how they really feed each other. I can't do the work of liberating my community until I've liberated my mind. Those two go hand-in-hand. I know, as a queer person, I've really internalized the messages around what it means to be a man, or what it means to be in a relationship, or what the gospel says, as someone who's grown up evangelical Christian. I'm constantly unlearning these things that I was taught about myself and my belief and my friends and my community members and the world around me. I need to do that work within myself. No one else is going to do it for me. I

need to do that work myself, and as I do that work, I'm able to help throw off those occupied forces in the world around me.

FS: I think for me, often I feel like I have a handle on having unpacked a lot of the messages that I got about my queerness and my gender identity, but I often still internalize messages that I get about being an American, and about what it means to be white, and all of that stuff in this society. And so that's a lot of the unpacking that I found myself having to do, about not buying into the dream of the white picket fence and the nice house and making lots of money, and instead focusing on, like, what does it mean to live a life of following justice and of working for the liberation of all people? So this idea of un-occupying your mind is something that really resonates with me in this passage.

B: Yeah, as someone who is reading this passage by myself but will also perhaps be hearing a sermon about this, I think one of the messages that I need to hear is – it's not just me and Jesus. It's not just my personal salvation. I get to be a part of this larger movement, this community. Listening to you talk about it, to think of a person who would hear this back in that day at this time, that this affects all of them – they're in it together. This is an invitation to be a part of this Jesus movement, something bigger than themselves, a community, and together to make a real impact in their lives. It's not just a nice story.

FS: It's a beautiful image of being able to resist these occupying forces, and to be able to say that we can have liberation, that we don't have to just accept the fact that we are occupied. We can instead think about what it means to cast that out, and what it would mean to take care of one another. And that's a really beautiful visual.

B: It's inspiring for me to think of this as a rallying cry.

[outro music]

B: I'm Brian—

FS: And I'm Shay. And you can find out more at QueerTheology.com.

B: If you'd like to connect with us, send us an email to connect@queertheology.com.

FS: Thanks for listening.

PODCAST END

Transcript by Taylor Walker