

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 we are looking at the lectionary texts for August 4th, 2013. We are going to take a look at Psalm 107 – the first part of the Psalm, 1-9.

[not read aloud]

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those he redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to an inhabited town; hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress; he led them by a straight way, until they reached an inhabited town. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind. For he satisfies the thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things. [NRSV]

Brian, what do you think when you read this Psalm?

Brian: The first thing that jumps out at me when I read this is that I remember it being a song from my childhood. [both laugh] But then the second thing that sticks out to me is that when I read it, I really get swept up in it. It's a beautiful vision of God gathering up people from the east and the west and the north and the south, and then it goes on to describe these people. Some of them wandered and they were hungry and they were thirsty and their lives ebbed away. They cried out and they're distressed. I love this idea of the people of God being this collection of wayward wanderers who were not all the same. Though, in many American churches, we're all very the same. It's very racially segregated and broken along class lines. But I love the idea that, in this Psalm, it's this mixed group of people from all over that God has brought together. And then not just

brought together but “satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.” That God takes us and gives us what we need, and brings us together and helps us give each other what we need.

FS: I think that so many of the Psalms are written in – well, a, in a context that we don’t really live in anymore, written by oppressed and marginalized people, often facing experiences of exile and war. I think it’s helpful to remember that when we read the Psalms, especially when we read the violence in some of the Psalms, and realizing that – these aren’t the people who have the power to do violence, in a lot of ways.

B: Right.

FS: What I love about this is this idea of hanging on to hope, even in the midst of a situation of exile. Even in the midst of a situation of being scattered, this idea that God is going to gather the community back together. I think that’s a really beautiful vision and a beautiful thing to hold on to, even in the midst of situations where it doesn’t seem like that’s playing out yet.

B: As someone who does a lot of activism in my personal and professional life, I certainly have a tendency to read scripture with that sort of activist lens, that anti-oppression lens. Which is – you know, obviously there’s a bit of that here, too. But I’m often looking for ‘action items’ in scripture, or like, support for my points. And I think that that’s true. And one of the things that I find deeply fulfilling about religion – not just spirituality but religion – is the tradition and the legacy and also the worship. That it can be really comforting to the soul and soothing to say, you know, this is where we come from. This is our history, this is our lineage. It might not be our actual descendants, but sort of our spiritual history.

Sometimes it’s just good to celebrate, and say, ‘Lots of crappy stuff has happened to me, and somehow I’m still here. I’m still holding on and I’m still hoping, and God or a higher power or the community around me continues to support and sustain me. And I think that what I like about the Psalms is that, you know, they’re psalms – sometimes it’s laments, sometimes it’s celebration, but it’s less a history book or treatise and more this emotional text.

FS: Yeah, and every time I think of the Psalms I think of the monastic tradition of chanting the Psalms every day. [Brian *mhm*’s] And how much they enter into all of the Psalms, including the ones with violence and tragedy – the ways in which that practice of being in community together and saying and singing these words really grounds the community. And gives them a really rich – both tradition and

also, it really feeds them spiritually throughout their day and throughout their lives. I think that's a really powerful thing.

B: Yeah, sometimes – [smiling] as anyone who knows me knows, I have shifting thoughts on my religion and God. But someone asked me, “Oh, are you spiritual but not religious?” And I said, “I think I might be religious but not spiritual.” [laughs] I don't really mean that. But I agree with you that there is something important about coming together and grounding ourselves in this sort of shared experience. Whether for you that's the Psalms, or doing yoga – but as queer people and as activists, it's important that we find community and that we take care of ourselves. Perhaps because I grew up in this tradition, this really sort of speaks to my heart in that way. It's comforting and reinvigorating for me to remember that God is bringing us together and fulfilling our needs.

[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