
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. Welcome back! Today we're looking at the texts for September 14th. We're going to take a look at Exodus 14:19-31. If you want to follow along, we'll put a link to that on the website.

[not read aloud]

The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. At the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt."

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers." So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and

the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses. [NRSV]

Brian, you've done a lot of thinking about this Exodus text. So, what does this bring up for you?

Brian: "A lot" might be an overstatement, but a little at least. [Shay laughs] Yeah, you know, the story of the Exodus was part of a defining moment for me in the evolution of my faith. My freshman year of college at UFC, I took a class called 'reading scripture as a skeptic and believer' because I was an evangelical Christian at the time and I wanted to study religion in an intentional way and also secretly because I was gay and I knew it and I wasn't out and I wanted to maybe find in that class – or learn more and make sense of what was going on. I was really into studying Christianity then because I just needed to figure it out. And I remember being in a class and my professor was talking about the exodus from Egypt. He said something to the effect of, "Well, the exodus from Egypt didn't actually historically happen. There was not actually an exodus. There's nothing about it in Egyptian writing and there's no archaeological evidence. They set up camp for forty years in the wilderness – there's nothing anywhere ever to indicate that this actually happened other than this religious text, and it's a religious text first and foremost; it's not a history book. It didn't happen." He just sort of kept on going as if that was not a big deal, when in fact that was the bomb that was dropped! He went on to talk about how there's the Truth of what happened, in that experience and in this text, and what that means for the Hebrew community at the time that this was written and what it means for Jewish and even Christian folks throughout the ages. And I remember thinking, like... *no!* If this didn't happen, this is all bunk. What is the point of any of this? Growing up, my faith had been so closely tied with everything recorded in the Bible actually historically happening in this exact sort of way. I didn't know what to make of it. I thought he was a heretic. I couldn't even begin to process that. And now, it's this really cool text that I love. I love the story of Exodus, and this passage in particular too. It's cool to see how it has evolved for me. What about you, Shay?

FS: I love that comparison of what factually happened and what is true. I think, for me, too, there was a big – it wasn't this passage in particular, but there was a big shift that had to happen in my faith when I stopped believing that scripture was literal, and that God basically dictated it and all of the people were scribes writing down every word.

B: Yep. I got the same thing.

FS: Yeah! And there was a time when I thought, well, if this isn't literally true, then nothing about my faith is real, and I'm going to need to walk away from all of it. And then really coming to terms with the fact that my faith is more than the literal words on a page. It's more than just history. It's also the stories of people and the stories of a community's journey back to God. That's what really matters, and that's what really excites me. And then on the other hand, there's also been times where learning the actual history has made scripture make—

[FS and B in unison]: —even more sense!

FS: And be more powerful. Understanding what the situation was like when Jesus was living like that has brought the gospels alive in a much more powerful way. Right? There's this double-edged sword here.

B: Mm, yeah. Totally.

FS: About historicity and facts and truth and power – I think that that's what's kind of a gift that queer people have to offer the church. None of us have really been able to take the Bible at face value because it's been used against us so often. We've had to dig underneath the text and find out what is actually true and what holds meaning and how the stories speak to us and how we can speak back to the stories. I think that that's really an important thing, and it's a gift that we have to give the church.

B: I know as I was questioning my sexuality and my faith and all of that, one of the passages that I found was in 1 Thessalonians. "Test everything; hold fast that which is good." That was such this anchor for me, that I held on to as I was questioning my faith and trying to ask questions about – is homosexuality really a sin? What does it mean to be a gay Christian? I held onto that to sort of say to myself, it's okay that I'm questioning. Whether I decide it is or is not, that doesn't matter, but this process of questioning is okay. I know that most LGBTQ Christians have to sort of question their faith in ways that oftentimes straight

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How do we know what is true?

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Exodus 14:19-31

Christians don't. And that's not to say that only LGBTQ people question their faith – of course people question their faith for all sorts of different reasons – but sort of really inspecting their faith and coming out on the other side, like you said, is totally a gift. For me, when I was taught this passage growing up, it was all about sort of the miracles, the miraculous parting of the seas. The Israelites were special because they were God's chosen people and would later birth Jesus. There was nothing about their status as slaves or as oppressed people, there was nothing about Pharaoh as being powerful. This story just became about Moses being magical and not about this pitting of what side is God on. Is God on the side of the powerful or is God on the side of the oppressed? As you say, in some ways, the historicity of this passage not actually happening seemed like a big deal but ended up not mattering. In other ways, the historical context that I didn't get is what ended up really mattering. I like the nuances that we can bring to faith as we queer it.

[outro music]

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FS: And I'm Shay. And you can find out more at [QueerTheology.com](https://queertheology.com).

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

Fs: Thanks for listening.

PODCAST END

Transcript by Taylor Walker