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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: Welcome back! We're looking at the text for October 26th. We're going to look at Exodus 22:20-26. It's short enough, so I'm going to read it out to you.

Whoever sacrifices to any god other than the Lord must be destroyed.

Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt.

Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless.

If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not treat it like a business deal; charge no interest. If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it by sunset... [NIV]

Okay, Shay, so we've got this passage. This verse about not mistreating the foreigner is one of my favorites. I love 'don't take advantage of the widows or the fatherless.' But then also in here we've got, "If you sacrifice to any other God, you must be destroyed," and if you do take advantage of someone, then you're going to get killed with the sword. So [laughing] you went to seminary, Shay. Help me make sense of this, o wise one. [Shay laughs] Because it feels a little... all over the place to me.

FS: [laughing] Yeah, I mean, this is so tricky, right? A, I think, Exodus is not necessarily part of my scholarship [laughs] in a lot of ways. I spent a lot more time focusing on the New Testament texts. This is where we get into potentially really dicey ground, as people who are theologians. In some ways, they would say, "Well, this is the Old Testament. We don't have to pay attention to this

anymore.” I think that that’s a really anti-Jewish way of reading this text, and it’s also not a very helpful way of reading this text.

B: Yeah, it feels a little lazy. [laughs]

FS: Yeah, so let’s name that up front. But then we do have these kind of complicated mixed messages, and also, let’s be real – there’s a lot of complicated mixed messages in the newer testament, too, so this is—

B: Par for the course. [laughs]

FS: From Genesis to Revelation, we’ve got mixed messages. I think partly what we have to understand anytime we’re reading a biblical text is that, this is a human community trying to make sense of their surroundings, of their religious understanding, of their understanding of God, of their understanding of themselves as a community, often in opposition to other communities, simply because that was how things were set up. Especially for marginalized people, sometimes defining yourself in opposition to another community is a survival mechanism. That’s actually really important, and a valid thing to do. I think that we see some of that in this, this idea that whoever sacrifices to any other god than the Lord must be destroyed. This is an idea of who’s in and who’s out, in ways that maybe aren’t completely healthy, but that are also protecting the community. I think that that’s important. But overall, the tone of this passage is a move towards justice, and that’s what’s really exciting to me. This idea of not mistreating or oppressing a foreigner, because they remember that they were foreigners in Egypt. And to not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless, and that God will look out for the widow or the fatherless. And even these practices around money – like how often have we heard about lending practices and interest?

B: Mm.

FS: We don’t really talk about that in church.

B: [laughs] Right. We don’t talk about those payday lenders. People talk about, you know, gay marriage or abortion as being immoral, but no one’s going after the payday lenders as being immoral.

FS: Or, some people are.

B: Well, some people are, but [laughs] usually not the conservative Christians.

FS: Yes, very true. I think the liberal church does not do a very good job often in tying the work that they do around justice to their faith, which is something that is frustrating for me.

B: We're trying to change that. [both laugh]

FS: We are trying to change that. And also, they don't do a very good job of getting press. You know, there are people in Minnesota where I live who have done lots of work around payday lending. They've done that work out of a faith perspective, and yet, have not mobilized nearly as much of public support as people did around the marriage amendment that was here. So I think that that's really telling, and really interesting for me.

B: This passage is helpful for me in a few ways. One is that I certainly didn't hear about these passages about not mistreating a foreigner, or not lending with interest, or taking advantage of the widow and the fatherless – perhaps that in the Christian charity sort of way, but I'm sure that most of the people at my church growing up would have been against any sort of meaningful immigration reform. Like you said, it was cool for me connect the social ideals that I cared about, and say like “Oh, these are Biblical ideals, also. Faith and justice can and do go together.” Just in the same way that faith and science can go together – you know, they're not competing. So that was really cool for me. I think, also, the complicated nature of this passage was helpful for me. I like to think in black and whites, and I like to be able to quote, you know, “do not mistreat or oppress the foreigner.” I like to be able to quote these sort of things that seem to bolster my perspective, and I think it's important for me to see, right next to it, whoever sacrifices to any god other than the Lord must be destroyed. At one point, I wanted scripture to make one case. And now I often want it to make another case. I think it's important for me to see that it's more complicated than that – it's not quite so easy. There's some analysis that goes into it. There's some context that goes into it. There's some history that goes into it, and there's some bringing your own personal experiences to it. And Biblical literalism is not even real, and it's certainly not helpful. As much as I would like sort of a neat bow to put on this, at the end of it, I think not having one is a way to grow and mature as a person and as a person who looks to these texts for meaning.

FS: Yeah, absolutely. I think that that's really a vital piece of this, and I think it's a vital piece of all of the work that we do at Queer Theology, this idea that we bring ourselves to the text and that there is this multiplicity of voices and experiences –

both that we bring to the text, but also that are already embedded in the text. That's important to remember.

[outro music]

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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 at connect@queertheology.com.

Fs: Thanks for listening.

PODCAST END

Transcript by Taylor Walker