
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 taking a look at the lectionary texts for September 20th. We are going to look at Psalm 54. It's fairly short, so I'm going to go ahead and read it. This is from the Common English Bible.

God! Save me by your name; defend me by your might!
God! Hear my prayer; listen to the words of my mouth!

The proud have come up against me; violent people
want me dead. They pay no attention to God. *Selah*.

But look here: God is my helper; my Lord sustains my
life. He will bring disaster on my opponents. By your
faithfulness, God, destroy them!

I will sacrifice to you freely; I will give thanks to your
name, Lord, because it's so good, and because God
has delivered me from every distress. My eyes have
seen my enemies' defeat. [CEB]

Mm!

Brian: Mm.

FS: What does this do for you, Brian?

B: This just feels like something that fourteen-year-old Brian might have prayed. [both laugh] Or a slight variation. I don't know. This really resonated with me on sort of a deep emotional level, in a way that the scriptures we've picked for the podcast don't often. I like a lot of them; I'm intellectually passionate about a number of passages in the Bible, but this one just sort of hit me right in the feels. I think that, what I really relate to is this idea of just praying to God when the world seemed to be conspiring against me. That God would defend me, and God would hear my prayer, and I could count on God. In this passage, it says 'they pay no attention to God' but oftentimes in my life, it was the people who

presumed to speak for God were the ones who, in many ways, felt like they wanted me dead. Or they at least wanted to kill parts of me. I don't necessarily want disaster [laughs] on my opponents, or for God to destroy them, but I do want God to destroy the systems of oppression that folks – too often Christian folks, but not exclusively Christian folks – have set up that keep down queer people, trans people, poor people.

So, yeah. I remember feeling like it was me and my dog, Max, and God, and somehow we were going to get through me being queer together. That's what this reminds me of. It's nice to find comfort in scripture and to remember that the folks who wrote these books of the people that we consider sacred, sometimes they were scared or lonely or uncertain or fearful, and from them, great things happened. It's also sort of comforting and inspiring to know that that could be the case for me.

FS: I really appreciate the Psalms for the way that they give space to hard emotions, and especially the way that they give permission for us to feel what it is that we feel. I kind of love that the writer of this Psalm is talking about bringing disaster on his opponents and, you know, being thankful to have seen his enemies defeat, right? Because I think there are moments that all of us feel that way, whether we would like to admit that or not. [laughs]

B: Yeah, that's real.

FS: There's something really cathartic about being able to say those things and being able to think those things and being able to have a space where you know that you won't be judged for saying or thinking those things. The other person may know that you don't mean it, but there's still space there, and it's cathartic to be able to say it out loud. I think that's really important, to be able to be angry, especially – I mean, the Psalms were written by an oppressed people. When you're being oppressed, you're angry and you're hurt and you're scared and you're lonely. This kind of anger, that you don't really mean, might be your only outlet. I think it's really important that our sacred scriptures give us permission to do and to be that.

B: Right. And when someone who is politically and economically disenfranchised says, like, 'I want my oppressors destroyed' – that means something and carries a different weight than someone who has the backing of government and the military and the police, and they say, 'I want my opponents destroyed.' Right? I think it's so important to remember those positions of power, and who has the

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A place for anger

Psalm 54

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actual power to enact that. And like you were saying, sometimes there's just a catharsis there, in sitting in that anger or despair.

[outro music]

B: This has been Reading Queerly, the queer lectionary podcast. 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