

PODCAST START:

[intro music]

Brian: Welcome to the Queer Theology podcast!

Fr. Shay: Where each episode, we take a queer look at the week's lectionary readings. We're the cofounders of QueerTheology.com and the hosts for this podcast. I'm Father Shay Kearns —

B: And I'm Brian G. Murphy.

FS: Welcome back! Today we are taking a look at the lectionary text for September 11th. We're going to look at Exodus 32:7-11 and 13-14. It's some good stuff, so I'm going to go ahead and read it.

The Lord spoke to Moses: "Hurry up and go down! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, are ruining everything! They've already abandoned the path that I commanded. They have made a metal bull calf for themselves. They've bowed down to it and offered sacrifices to it and declared, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" The Lord said to Moses, "I've been watching these people, and I've seen how stubborn they are. Now leave me alone! Let my fury burn and devour them. Then I'll make a great nation out of you."

But Moses pleaded with the Lord his God, "Lord, why does your fury burn against your own people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and amazing force? ... Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, whom you yourself promised, 'I'll make your descendants as many as the stars in the sky. And I've promised to give your descendants this whole land to possess for all time.'" Then the Lord changed his mind about the terrible things he said he would do to his people. [CEB]

B: *Mm.* I – [laughs]

FS: There is some *stuff* here.

B: Stuff on stuff on stuff.

FS: Yes. [laughs]

B: One of the things I appreciate is that I've been reading the Bible for [laughs] decades, and it's really cool that, oftentimes when I come to it, there's something new to discover there. *Obviously* what strikes me is this last sentence – “Then the Lord changed his mind about the terrible things he said he would do to his people.” I remember in sometimes Sunday School we had the list of attributes of God, and it was like, omniscient and omnipotent and everlasting and unchanging, and blah blah blah blah blah. And it's like, not really. In Exodus, we have it saying that the Lord changing his mind. And so I think that, you know, there is something there about change being good, and giving yourself space to evolve in your deeply held religious beliefs, quote-unquote, is sometimes an important thing and a Biblical thing. That's one of the things that sticks out to me in this passage.

And the *other* thing that sticks out to me in this passage is like, there's just something about this God that's like, “Let my fury burn and devour them.” It's like, what does that say about the nature of God, but then also, what are the authors of this passage trying to tell us that God changed God's mind and did not, in fact, do that?

FS: Right.

B: It's easy to stop, right, after the ‘God's fury and righteous judgement’ – but it seems like this line about ‘and then the Lord changed their mind’ that seems to be an underline of some sort. What about you, Shay?

FS: Yeah, it's also really interesting to me that God is kind of super petulant [Brian laughs] and kind of ridiculous, in this whole passage, right? ‘Your people, who you brought out of Egypt, are ruining everything.’ This does not seem to be a God who's actually in control of the situation. [both laugh] This seems to be a God who's having a bit of a temper tantrum. And like you said, I wonder what message the writers are trying to give here. And more, like – you know, I really believe that scripture is a collection of people trying to make sense of their own world and the world around them. And so what is it that they are working out about [laughing] their relationship with God in this passage? And I'm wondering –

I mean, this is a community that's, like, in exile and on the run and probably feeling that nature is pretty capricious. Their destiny is uncertain and unsecure, and so it makes sense that they'd feel maybe like God is having some *whims* [laughs] about their existence.

And I do – I mean I really love this idea, that God changed God's mind. And the reason that God changed God's mind in this passage is because Moses reminded God what God had promised, right? I think that's another thing. We were taught that God remembers everything, and then we have this moment where Moses has to remind God what God promised. Like, "You *promised* that we were going to be a great nation, so if you wipe us all out, you're making yourself a liar!" So I love both this pushback that Moses has with God and the way that it actually changes God's mind. There's something really rich in this passage.

B: Yeah, I think that that's what queer people have to offer the church, right? We serve to remind the church of what the church promised. When folks decide to be Christians, or to follow Christ, what does it mean to be a Christ-follower, to spread the good news? Well, what was the good news of Jesus? [laughs] Jesus lays it out in his first sermon – I have come to preach good news to the oppressed, freedom for the prisoners, for the poor, blah blah blah. There's that sort of clichéd saying, 'you might be the only Christ that a person meets.' So what does it mean? The church says all these things – that we will be good news, that we will be the salt of the earth, the beacon of light, hope for the hopeless. We call our places of worship sanctuaries, right? Sometimes queer folks have to be like, "You said this would be a sanctuary. This needs to be a sanctuary. You said that you came to proclaim the good news of Christ's message. Proclaim that good news."

And you were talking about earlier, to just wrap this up really quickly, about what this passage might be trying to get at... feeling at the whims of God, finding themselves in exile. You know, when I read the Bible, especially the Hebrew Bible, and you see these conversations between people and God, it's *really* tempting for me to be like, "Ugh, it would be so easy if God would just use words and talk to me like God did to Moses." And like... *perhaps*, an anthropomorphized version of God appeared and spoke to Moses. Or *perhaps* God used voices in Moses's head. Scripture doesn't really tell us how God spoke to God's people in the past. It is entirely possible, and perhaps more likely than not, that God was speaking to these people in the same way that God speaks to us now – through still small voices, through things in our life. Sometimes we have to wrestle between, what is *God* speaking to us in our life and what is our own

stuff in our head, either our own agenda or our own doubts, insecurities and neuroses. I have sometimes felt like God has abandoned me, or I've worried that maybe God is furious at me. You can see in this passage not just Moses wrestling with God and asking God to change God's mind about Moses and his people – but perhaps Moses is wrestling with himself, and asking himself to change what *he* thinks God's judgement is upon him and his people, and how God has or has not abandoned him.

If you're a queer person or otherwise listening to this and you're sort of like, I think God just doesn't love me, or God is mad at me, or God is disappointed in me because... I have doubts, because I have sex, because I'm queer, because I want to change my body, because I'm depressed – whatever it is, remind yourself of the promises God has made throughout the Bible, and throughout human history, of grace and compassion and justice and solidarity. Challenge yourself to say, well, if Moses could see God changing God's mind from fury to grace, perhaps I can give myself space for that in my own life.

[outro music]

B: The Queer Theology podcast is just one of many things that we do at QueerTheology.com, which provides resources, community and inspiration for LGBTQ Christians and straight cisgender supporters.

FS: To dive into more of the action, visit us at QueerTheology.com. You can also connect with us online on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and Instagram.

B: We'll see you next week.

PODCAST END

Transcript by Taylor Walker