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**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: We're taking a look at the lectionary text for April 2<sup>nd</sup>. We're going to look at John 11:1-45. It's another really long passage, and it's the story of the death of Lazarus. If you want to read that, you can go to [QueerTheology.com/173](http://QueerTheology.com/173). We'll link it in the show notes. If you don't know the story, maybe pause the podcast, go check it out, and then come back. We're in the midst of Lent, which means really, really, really long gospel readings. We're not able to read them all on the podcast or we'd be here all day!

“A certain man, Lazarus, was ill. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (This was the Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped his feet with her hair. Her brother Lazarus was ill.) So the sisters sent word to Jesus, saying, ‘Lord, the one whom you love is ill.’

“When he heard this, Jesus said, ‘This illness isn't fatal. It's for the glory of God so that God's Son can be glorified through it.’ Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus. When he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was. After two days, he said to his disciples, ‘Let's return to Judea again.’

“The disciples replied, ‘Rabbi, the Jewish opposition wants to stone you, but you want to go back?’

“Jesus answered, ‘Aren't there twelve hours in the day? Whoever walks in the day doesn't stumble because they see the light of the world. But whoever walks in the night does stumble because the light isn't in them.’ He

continued, 'Our friend Lazarus is sleeping, but I am going in order to wake him up.'

"The disciples said, 'Lord, if he's sleeping, he will get well.' They thought Jesus meant that Lazarus was in a deep sleep, but Jesus had spoken about Lazarus' death.

"Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus has died. For your sakes, I'm glad I wasn't there so that you can believe. Let's go to him.' Then Thomas (the one called Didymus) said to the other disciples, 'Let us go too so that we may die with Jesus.'

"When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was a little less than two miles from Jerusalem. Many Jews had come to comfort Martha and Mary after their brother's death. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, while Mary remained in the house. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died. Even now I know that whatever you ask God, God will give you.'

"Jesus told her, 'Your brother will rise again.'

"Martha replied, 'I know that he will rise in the resurrection on the last day.'

"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'

"She replied, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, God's Son, the one who is coming into the world.'

"After she said this, she went and spoke privately to her sister Mary, 'The teacher is here and he's calling for you.' When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and

went to Jesus. He hadn't entered the village but was still in the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were comforting Mary in the house saw her get up quickly and leave, they followed her. They assumed she was going to mourn at the tomb.

"When Mary arrived where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died.'

"When Jesus saw her crying and the Jews who had come with her crying also, he was deeply disturbed and troubled. He asked, 'Where have you laid him?'

"They replied, 'Lord, come and see.'

"Jesus began to cry. The Jews said, 'See how much he loved him!' But some of them said, 'He healed the eyes of the man born blind. Couldn't he have kept Lazarus from dying?'

"Jesus was deeply disturbed again when he came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone covered the entrance. 'Jesus said, "Remove the stone.'

"Martha, the sister of the dead man, said, 'Lord, the smell will be awful! He's been dead four days.'

"Jesus replied, 'Didn't I tell you that if you believe, you will see God's glory?' So they removed the stone. Jesus looked up and said, 'Father, thank you for hearing me. I know you always hear me. I say this for the benefit of the crowd standing here so that they will believe that you sent me.' Having said this, Jesus shouted with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his feet bound and his hands tied, and his face covered with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Untie him and let him go.'

"Therefore, many of the Jews who came with Mary and saw what Jesus did believed in him."

So Brian, this is quite the story.

B: [laughs] Yeah.

FS: Where are you at with this?

B: Man, I just don't know. It's stories like this where I'm like, "Oh, hold on. Maybe I'm not a Christian." [laughs] I just don't know what to do with this. It's so... weird. It's so weird and John is such a weird gospel. It's a weird story. I am super skeptical when it comes to resurrection of anyone – of Jesus or of Lazarus. I don't know what to do with that whole bit! This is the story that has Jesus weeping in it, so that's sort of touching, but it confuses me because it really pushes the boundaries of what I feel comfortable in when it comes to my faith, and asks me to look super critically at what I believe and also look super critically at the Bible. I don't necessarily have an answer as to what this passage means to me other than... aaaah!! [laughs] What about you?

FS: Yeah, I mean I think all of that is super fair. Like you said, John is a super weird gospel. It's the latest written of all of the gospels, which I think matters and makes a difference. The writers of John, the community for whom it was written, they are really really really really *really* focused on Jesus's divinity. It almost seems like they need Jesus to be kind of this super-human divine being, and they want to, in some ways, erase his humanity. But even as I say that, right, we also do get this picture of a really human Jesus in this passage – who grieves for his friend, who weeps, who tries to comfort the sisters. And yet, at the same time, he ends by bringing his friend back to life. [laughs] Which, like, none of us have the power to do. So I have questions, too, about this passage, about what this passage meant to the community in which it was written. Like you, I don't know that I have good answers. I am someone who *does* believe in resurrection, and believes in the resurrection of Jesus, even if not literally, but that something happened. Something miraculous enough happened to change the course of the disciples' lives and the course of human history. I think that something big happened there, whether that is literal resurrection or something else. That, I'm not entirely sure on. And it does leave me with questions about this passage too, like – I think growing up, people would have talked about how, like, "This passage is important because it shows that Jesus had power but Lazarus still died again, so he wasn't as special as Jesus who also was resurrected..." which is just not a super compelling argument.

B: Yep. I totally heard that argument growing up.

FS: [laughs] But I do think that this passage, and passages about resurrection, do say something important about what God thinks about death. Right? Death is not a good thing, it's not our friend, it's something to be defeated. Somehow, through the work of Jesus, it has been and will continue to be... which does not leave us with a lot of concrete and scientific answers.

B: Yeah... [laughs] So, coming up on Saturday, April 8<sup>th</sup>, we're going to be doing a webinar on reading the Bible queerly, looking at Father Shay's *Walking Towards Resurrection* trans passion narrative, sort of giving tips and tactics on how you can find your queer self in scripture, queer the text, and find meaning. As I look at this passage, one of the things that comes to mind from a queer perspective is HIV-AIDS patients who, in the early days of the epidemic, were literally wasting away and dying, covered in bandages. And then, in the mid-90s, with advances in treatment, people came back to life. You can look at pictures of people before their treatment and after treatment – wasted and had lesions on themselves, and they sort of came back to life. That wasn't a supernatural occurrence by any means. There was science that brought those people back from the brink of death. But I certainly see echoes and parallels between queer folks dying and battling. I mean, it was a death sentence. If you've seen *How to Survive A Plague*, they were fighting for their lives, and then fighting with their lives, because they just had decided that they were going to die and so why not live a life of meaning before then. And then they didn't, the impossible happened. I see echoes and parallels there. On Saturday, April 8<sup>th</sup>, we'll be digging more into finding echoes and parallels and writing queer narratives in scripture, and we would love for you to join us. You can go to [QueerTheology.com/queerbible](http://QueerTheology.com/queerbible) to get all the info and sign up for that.

[outro music plays]

B: The Queer Theology podcast is just one of many things that we do at [QueerTheology.com](http://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](http://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

