
PODCAST START:

B: Hey there, it's Brian Murphy here, one of the cofounders of QueerTheology.com, and before we get into this week's episode, I want to take a quick moment to ask for your help. QueerTheology.com has been up and running for four years now, and it's been an amazing labor of love for Shay and I. Over the past few years, we've worked through our program Sanctuary Collective to make that a little bit more sustainable, but we could really use your help. When you add things up like hosting and the email list and the podcast, and other necessary tools to keep this site up and running, it costs over four hundred dollars each month just to keep the lights on, and that doesn't count any of the time that Shay or I spend working on the podcast, on creating articles, on creating resources, on hosting webinars. We're spending at least thirty hours each month, sometimes up to a hundred hours each month – that's time we're not working on other paying projects. And we love it – every moment of it, or just about every moment of it. We love serving you, we love being a part of this community – but we could really use your help in making this a work more sustainable. So we're launching our first-ever fundraising drive this summer. If you would like to support us, if you're a fan of this podcast, if our work means something to you – we could really use your help in making Queer Theology a bit more sustainable. So you can head over to QueerTheology.com/support to learn more about that.

[intro music]

B: Welcome to the Queer Theology podcast!

FS: 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. Hello there! Today we're taking a look at the lectionary reading for Sunday, August 6th. We're going to be looking at Genesis 32:22-31. It's the story of Jacob wrestling with God. I think I'll read it out to you, because it's not too long. This is from the Common English Bible.

“Jacob got up during the night, took his two wives, his two women-servants, and his eleven sons and crossed the Jabbok River's shallow water. He took them and everything that belonged to him, and he helped them cross the river. But Jacob stayed apart by himself, and a

man wrestled with him until dawn broke. When the man saw that he couldn't defeat Jacob, he grabbed Jacob's thigh and tore a muscle in Jacob's thigh as he wrestled with him. The man said, 'Let me go because the dawn is breaking.'

"But Jacob said, 'I won't let you go until you bless me.' He said to Jacob, 'What's your name?' and he said, 'Jacob.' Then he said, 'Your name won't be Jacob any longer, but Israel, because you struggled with God and with men and won.'

"Jacob also asked and said, 'Tell me your name.' But he said, 'Why do you ask for my name?' and he blessed Jacob there. Jacob named the place Peniel, 'because I've seen God face-to-face, and my life has been saved.' The sun rose as Jacob passed Peniel, limping because of his thigh."

FS: I love this story so much.

B: Mhm.

FS: You know, this is one of the stories that first jumps out at me, when I was still in my fundamentalist evangelical Christian college, but was starting to see some gaps in my faith for the first time. I was really starting to question if everything that I had been taught was true, and if there was maybe a different way to understand God and scripture. And I remember really clinging to this passage, and this idea of 'wrestling with God', and it being *acceptable* to wrestle with God. The audacity of Jacob to say, "I will not let you go until you bless me" – is something really beautiful. You know, I come from a tradition where we were really taught to be *afraid* of God. Afraid that God was going to strike us down, afraid that God was going to send us to hell, basically afraid of everything. And to be always kind of reverent, and defer to people that were in charge of us, and of course especially God – but it was like this hierarchy, right? God, male pastors, male parents, female parents, right? Always deferring to these people. And the fact that there was this example of someone in scripture of someone who so boldly said, "Not only am I going to ask questions and wrestle, I'm going to demand a blessing." It was just – it was just really mind-blowing for me. And I think this passage has different meaning for me now, but I still always go back to those first stories whenever I read this passage. It's so powerful.

B: Yeah, and I have a similar sort of relationship with this passage. When I was first starting to figure out that I liked guys, that I might be gay or bisexual – like what do I do about that with my Christian faith... this passage, and also 1 Thessalonians 5:21 which is “Test everything, hold fast onto which is good,” they just felt like it was this permission that I found in scripture to really question what I’d been taught, to really wrestle with God, as you were saying to make demands of God. That’s a Biblical thing to do. We see a Biblical witness for questioning and for asking questions and for making demands. And that *doubt* and uncertainty are okay, and that wanting something of God that God has not given you, is okay. You know, much like you, I grew up in a church that had all of the answers, exactly laid out in a certain way, and any sort of questioning or deviating from that was a big no-no. And so it took a lot of time, and it’s still something that I unlearn – the messages that I’ve received about what the Bible says, the messages about who God is. If you’re out there and you’re starting to see your faith in a different way, or you’re wondering if maybe you might be able to see your faith in a different way, or you’re wondering what does your queerness have to say about your faith, which we’ll get into a bit more later – know that that is a very deeply Biblical thing.

FS: Yeah, it’s funny. I’ve been reading *Queer Virtue* by Reverend Liz Edman, and she has this fascinating take on this story that I had never considered before. She talks about how this is the night before Jacob is going to see his brother Esau again, for the first time in years and years and years. Because, you know, Jacob cheated his brother out of inheritance and birthright and then had to flee because his brother rightfully wanted to kill him.

B: [laughs]

FS: And so Jacob is coming back, and he isn’t sure how his brother is going to receive him. Reverend Edman’s point is that this wrestling happens, and Jacob is wounded in the wrestling, and then has to go to face his brother the next day – like, wounded. Not able to rely on strength or military might because he no longer has it – but instead has to rely on the forgiveness of his brother. She talks about what risk there is involved in Jacob’s still going to see his brother, and his longing for home, for family, overwhelming his need for safety. She talks about the risk that often we take as queer people in revealing our true selves to the world. That was just really mind-blowing for me. I had never considered that piece of this passage - I loved it and I was just super thankful for a new way to look at this.

B: [cut into the podcast] A quick interjection: if you're interested in this book, it's called *Queer Virtue*, and we're about getting started in the next few weeks for reading through *Queer Virtue* in our Sanctuary Collective book club. So if you're interested in being a part of that, you can find out more information at QueerTheology.com/sanctuarycollective. Another thing that just quickly jumped out, that isn't central to this passage, but that I was struck by: this passage beginning with the description of Jacob's family, and that including his two wives. And it's just one of many examples in scripture where multiple wives, sometimes concubines, are sort of taken very matter-of-factly. We don't see that being condemned anywhere. And you know, Biblical patriarchs having many wives, or men back in the day having many wives, is very different from modern-day polyamory, right? And just because something is not condemned in the Bible – slavery is often not condemned in the Bible – doesn't mean it's a good thing. But I think it's important just to keep that in mind when you hear Christians say, like, "the Biblical definition of marriage." Well, the Biblical definition of marriage is *many* things, some of which are really beautiful and some of which are not. I see this as a reminder that the Bible is not so clear-cut on what marriage is, and so it's up to us to sort of wrestle with the message of scripture as a whole, and the movement of God and God's people, to sort of figure out: what does a right relationship look for us in our context? [end cut]

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

FS: To dive into more of the action, you can connect with 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