
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 to the podcast! This week we are taking a look at the lectionary for August 13th. We're going to look at 1 Kings 19:9-18. I'm not going to read the whole thing, but I'm going to read 9-14, because that's the piece that we're going to talk about. This is about the Prophet Elijah.

“There Elijah went into a cave and spent the night. The Lord's word came to him and said, ‘Why are you here, Elijah?’

“Elijah replied, ‘I've been very passionate for the Lord God of heavenly forces because the Israelites have abandoned your covenant. They have torn down your altars, and they have murdered your prophets with the sword. I'm the only one left, and now they want to take my life too!’

“The Lord said, ‘Go out and stand at the mountain before the Lord. The Lord is passing by.’ A very strong wind tore through the mountains and broke apart the stones before the Lord. But the Lord wasn't in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake. But the Lord wasn't in the earthquake. After the earthquake, there was a fire. But the Lord wasn't in the fire. After the fire, there was a sound. Thin. Quiet. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his coat. He went out and stood at the cave's entrance. A voice came to him and said, ‘Why are you here, Elijah?’

“He said, ‘I’ve been very passionate for the Lord God of heavenly forces because the Israelites have abandoned your covenant. They have torn down your altars, and they have murdered your prophets with the sword. I’m the only one left, and now they want to take my life too.’”
[CEB]

B: Mm mm mm mm *mm*.

FS: Yeah.

B: This is obviously a classic, iconic passage of Elijah hearing the still small voice, as it is in some translations. This time reading it, I am reminded that not only was the Lord not in the wind, or in the earthquake, or in the fire, but there are these moments when Elijah was looking for God in those moments, and in those things. And I think it can be really tempting, even for progressive Christians in 2017, to be like “Was that a sign from God?” or bargaining with God, “Give me a sign, and I’ll stop being gay.” Give me a sign. You know, I had sex and I got an STI, so that means I should never have sex again because that was God giving me a sign. In this passage, it reminds me to sort of parse out: what things have I been taught by people in my past, what are paranoias, what are superstitions, what are fears – and where is God? And that is hard, tough work. It involves some spiritual practices, maybe prayer, maybe meditation. It involves reading and learning and researching. It involves discernment. It’s a lot easier to say, “Oh, this was a sign. This big event that happened in my life was a sign from God that I should do this or not do that.” It’s a little bit harder but maybe a little bit more faithful to try and listen for God in the quiet. What comes up for you, Shay?

FS: There’s a lot in this passage for me. I love the fact that we have, in the scripture, an example of someone who is a great prophet, considered one of the patriarchs of the faith, who is very, very clearly in this passage going through a depressive episode. Like, a really serious one. Growing up, I was always kind of taught that if you were depressed it was because you weren’t right with God. You were not praying hard enough, your faith wasn’t right, because if it were, you’d be joyful and happy. And I think here we have Elijah, who is the only prophet left, who’s *clearly* right with God, and is depressed. And we don’t see God rebuking him for his depression. Instead, we see God trying to call him out of it and back into remembering why it is that he exists, and what it is that he’s meant to do. And I think that that’s really powerful. And the fact that God takes the time to show up for Elijah, and to be with Elijah in the midst of his depression, and to be

with him in a thin and quiet way... So often people come to us when we're depressed and they're like "You just need to get out more, right? You just need to go for a walk and be in nature and exercise more." It's like... thanks for that. But I can't really get out of bed. So I love that there's this image of thin and quiet. And there's also this repetition which I think is really fascinating. God says to Elijah, "Why are you here?" and Elijah answers, "I've been abandoned," then he has this huge moment of strong wind and earthquakes and fire and this thin quiet, and God asks Elijah again, "Why are you here?" and Elijah says the same damn thing. I think that, too, is an example of, depression is shitty and hard. We can see amazing things and still be in the midst of it. That's okay. And eventually Elijah does get up again and go out and go back to prophesizing, but I think especially those of us who work for justice, and work from places of our own marginalization, that work can be really hard. It can be depressing and demoralizing and painful. And that's okay. It's okay to be upset. It's okay to feel beleaguered, like you're the only one left and now they want to kill you too. Those feelings are natural and normal. You don't have to ignore them or pretend that you're not feeling them out of some sense of Christian joy or peace or whatever other cliché people want to throw at you.

B: You know, when this passage talks about how Elijah wrapped his face in his coat, it reminds me of laying in bed and pulling the pillow over my head. [laughs] And just being like... ughhhh. If you're a pastor, preaching on this perhaps, this is a great moment to sort of remember and recognize the intersections of identity and experience, and that queer people are depressed. And queer people hear God. And queer people are prophets. So, you can find ways to talk about LGBTQ people and issues even in passages that aren't about sex and gender. That's important too.

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B: As you may know, we are in the midst of our first-ever summer fundraising campaign. Shay and I love doing this work, and also it's a little bit expensive and more than a little bit time consuming, and so we would love your help in making this work more sustainable. If you have any pennies or dollars or benjamins to give, we would treasure your support of this work. If you enjoy the podcast this is a really great way to show that support. It's especially great if you're straight and cisgender and appreciate that this work exists, and want to make sure that it reaches the queer folks who need it the most and maybe can't support it. You can go to QueerTheology.com.support. You can give once, or give monthly, and we would just be so, so grateful and humbled to have your support so we can

continue serving you through this podcast and through all of the resources at QueerTheology.com.

[outro music plays]

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, 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