
PODCAST START:

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. Hello there! Today we're taking a look at the lectionary text for Sunday, August 27th. We're going to be looking at Exodus 1:8 – 2:10. It's rather long, so we will put the whole passage in the show notes, which you can find at QueerTheology.com/188. This is the story of the birth of Moses. You might remember Joseph and his amazing technicolor dream coat – he got all cozy with Pharaoh and then there was a new king in power who did not know him and was not so keen on all the Israelites. And so, these two women, midwives, send the baby down the river and save Moses's life. You can get the full details at QueerTheology.com/188. Pause it and join us in just a second.

[not read aloud]

“Now a new king came to power in Egypt who didn't know Joseph. He said to his people, ‘The Israelite people are now larger in number and stronger than we are. Come on, let's be smart and deal with them. Otherwise, they will only grow in number. And if war breaks out, they will join our enemies, fight against us, and then escape from the land.’ As a result, the Egyptians put foremen of forced work gangs over the Israelites to harass them with hard work. They had to build storage cities named Pithom and Rameses for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they grew and spread, so much so that the Egyptians started to look at the Israelites with disgust and dread. So the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites. They made their lives miserable with hard labor, making mortar and bricks, doing field work, and by forcing them to do all kinds of other cruel work.

“The king of Egypt spoke to two Hebrew midwives named Shiphrah and Puah: ‘When you are helping the Hebrew women give birth and you see the baby being

born, if it's a boy, kill him. But if it's a girl, you can let her live.' Now the two midwives respected God so they didn't obey the Egyptian king's order. Instead, they let the baby boys live.

"So the king of Egypt called the two midwives and said to them, 'Why are you doing this? Why are you letting the baby boys live?'

"The two midwives said to Pharaoh, 'Because Hebrew women aren't like Egyptian women. They're much stronger and give birth before any midwives can get to them.' So God treated the midwives well, and the people kept on multiplying and became very strong. And because the midwives respected God, God gave them households of their own.

"Then Pharaoh gave an order to all his people: 'Throw every baby boy born to the Hebrews into the Nile River, but you can let all the girls live.'

"Now a man from Levi's household married a Levite woman. The woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She saw that the baby was healthy and beautiful, so she hid him for three months. When she couldn't hide him any longer, she took a reed basket and sealed it up with black tar. She put the child in the basket and set the basket among the reeds at the riverbank. The baby's older sister stood watch nearby to see what would happen to him.

"Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe in the river, while her women servants walked along beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds, and she sent one of her servants to bring it to her. When she opened it, she saw the child. The boy was crying, and she felt sorry for him. She said, 'This must be one of the Hebrews' children.'

"Then the baby's sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Would you like me to go and find one of the Hebrew

women to nurse the child for you?’

“Pharaoh’s daughter agreed, ‘Yes, do that.’ So the girl went and called the child’s mother. Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, ‘Take this child and nurse it for me, and I’ll pay you for your work.’ So the woman took the child and nursed it. After the child had grown up, she brought him back to Pharaoh’s daughter, who adopted him as her son. She named him Moses, ‘because,’ she said, ‘I pulled him out of the water.’”

[CEB]

Okay Shay. What does this bring up for you? How do we queer this ancient text?

FS: I love this passage. I think one of the things that we do when we’re queering text is you have to look for places where marginalized people are named. Here we have, in this passage, in verse 15, “The king of Egypt spoke to two Hebrew midwives named Shiphrah and Puah.” You don’t often see women who are named in the Bible. When you do, pay attention to them, because it usually means that they’re going to do something really badass. In this passage in particular, we have these two midwives whose work is to help women have their children, and they were given the job of killing all of the baby boys. We have these two women who are kind of smartasses who then go to the king. Pharaoh is like, “Why are you letting these boys live?” And the midwives are like, “We just – we don’t really know! The Hebrew women are just so much stronger than the Egyptian women; they’re giving birth before we can even get to them!” Because the pharaoh has such a negative view of the Hebrew people and fears their strength, he just takes that as face value and is like, “Oh. Okay, I guess that’s right.”

B: And I think that’s a way in which compliments can actually be rooted in racism. We see that in the modern day – black men being strong and powerful and having big dicks – that’s all sort of rooted in racist stereotypes.

FS: Yeah, absolutely. I think that this is a passage of marginalized people who are using humor and trickster-ness and covert whatever to save people’s lives. I think that’s something that queer people have learned how to do, right? We’ve learned how to use humor to survive. We’ve learned how to be the sassy best friend or the flamboyant queen, not only to claim our identities but also to survive in a world that is hostile to us. I think that that’s something that is both really

beautiful and is a testament to our strength and to the strength of our people and our community.

B: Yeah. There's something about this interaction with Shiphrah and Puah where it could almost be a campy comedy. "We don't know!" I can see that playing out. You know, later on in this passage, in chapter 2, it's sort of the story of the birth of Moses. I think this is another area where we see God in the margins. Moses shouldn't have been born; the king at the time wanted all the babies to be killed – which if you're paying attention sounds not unlike the story of Jesus. There's some parallels there. We see this consistent theme in the Hebrew and then the Christian scriptures, that God is working in the margins. It's not a matter of like, how did the Israelites convince Pharaoh to become open and affirming? How did they transform Egypt? It's like, no, God is doing something in the midst of the Hebrew people. That's where God is. That's where redemption is. If you're a person with a marginalized identity, if you're a queer person, a trans person, a woman, a person of color, someone with HIV, you don't have to ask for acceptance from your oppressors. God isn't with them. God is already amongst you. That's something we see throughout the Bible. I want you to remember that, and to own that and to claim that.

FS: And it's not just that God is working in the margins – it's that salvation then comes from the margins to all of the people. God is working in the margins *and* bringing salvation from that place, which is fantastic. And what we find later in this passage is it's not that the Pharaoh has a change of heart, and out of the goodness of his heart let's the people go; it's that the people became such a pain in his ass that he was like, "Please, get out of here with my blessing!" Like, "You are destroying my life."

B: They caused a holy ruckus.

FS: A holy ruckus! Maybe we just need to make more evangelicals think that we're a pain in their ass that they release us and free us.

B: Yeah, it reminds me of – Bayard Rustin said, "we need in every community a group of angelic troublemakers." We were just talking about this a couple of weeks ago in the podcast, I can't remember exactly when. About like – it's [okay to offend your oppressors sometimes](#). God is working in the margins. Salvation comes from the margins. Queer people are where it's at. If you are interested in this sort of work of queering the Bible, we have this whole course inside of [Sanctuary Collective](#) called [Reading Queerly](#) dedicated to that. It's six units, and within those six units there's over twenty lessons – there's videos, there's

worksheets, there's written lessons, there's a few homework assignments. But we won't grade you on them, don't worry. [laughs] And we look not just at quote-unquote LGBT stuff, but we look at women, and empire, and we can see how queering the Bible is more than just finding quote-unquote gay themes in scripture. It's really sort of applying a queer lens to the whole of scripture and queering all of it. If that's something that gets you jazzed up, you can find more information about that at QueerTheology.com and of course if you have any questions about that you can shoot us an email at connect@queertheology.com or tweet at us. Any which way you would like to find us, we would love to talk to you more about reading queerly and Sanctuary Collective.

[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, 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