
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, hello! Today we're taking a look at one of the lectionary texts for Sunday, October 1st. We're going to be looking at Matthew 21:23-27. It's pretty short, so I'm going to read it out for you. This is from the Common English Bible.

“When Jesus entered the temple, the chief priests and elders of the people came to him as he was teaching. They asked, ‘What kind of authority do you have for doing these things? Who gave you this authority?’

“Jesus replied, ‘I have a question for you. If you tell me the answer, I’ll tell you what kind of authority I have to do these things. Where did John get his authority to baptize? Did he get it from heaven or from humans?’

“They argued among themselves, ‘If we say “from heaven,” he’ll say to us, “Then why didn’t you believe him?” But we can’t say “from humans” because we’re afraid of the crowd, since everyone thinks John was a prophet.’ Then they replied, ‘We don’t know.’

“Jesus also said to them, ‘Neither will I tell you what kind of authority I have to do these things.’” [CEB]

Okay, Shay. What is your queer take on this passage?

FS: Ooh, I love this one.

B: Me too.

FS: I love it because Jesus takes no shit! It's really fantastic to see. To me, this really reminds me of so many conversations I've had, particularly with straight and cisgender Christians, that basically boil down to some kind of arguing of

semantics or asking me to defend my right to exist as a trans person, or my right to transition, or any of those things. And then there's this assumption, right, when these straight and cisgender Christians confront me, that I will enter into conversation with them. Not even dialogue, really, because it's never a dialogue.

B: Right. [laughs]

FS: And that I will answer all of the questions that they ask of me in a way that can satisfy whatever point that they're trying to make to themselves. And it's like, if I don't answer the question exactly how they want me to, then they disregard – not only my life, but my faith too. And I think what's so beautiful about this passage is that here we see the Pharisees trying to do the exact same thing to Jesus. They're trying to get him into a semantic argument. Instead of engaging him in that, Jesus kind of tricks them, in a way, and asks them a question back, that they can't really answer because they know that no matter which way they answer it, they're going to piss someone off. And so instead Jesus just gets to be like, "Well, you didn't answer my question, so I'm going to walk away." [laughs] I think that's such a brilliant rhetorical response, but it also points to the fact that so many of these conversations are not in good faith. Part of what it means, as queer folks, to guard our own selves and our own hearts, and to have healthy boundaries, means being able to recognize when a question is not being asked in good faith. And being willing to say, "I'm not going to engage in that conversation because I don't believe that you're entering into it in good faith." And that doesn't mean that we never have these conversations, but it means that we don't have them with people who aren't entering into them with an actual sense of openness and a willingness to be changed. It's not even just a willingness to dialogue – someone has to enter into the conversation being willing to be changed by it. And if they're not entering into the conversation, I think that we have every right to walk away.

B: Yeah, I mean, I think you've absolutely nailed it, every which way. When Jesus is asked this question, he sees quite clearly that they're not asking because they're *curious* about where his authority comes from. They're setting him up, and he turns that on its head and back on them. They're asking him sort of an unanswerable question, that no matter what he says, it's going to be the wrong answer for them. It reminds me of – this one time I was doing this cross-country LGBT activism, and I had a conversation for three hours with a seminary student at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary about Leviticus. [laughs] And that conversation – I was like, not ever again. Not ever again will I allow three hours of my life to be wasted by some like, straight white dude who's just like, jerking my chain around. And who doesn't actually want to learn about me or

understand me, but is just trying to debate semantics and nuance and the Greek and all this like, really academic stuff. It's like, no. You're not asking so we can understand each other and understand God better. You're asking these questions to trick us. The goalposts are constantly being moved – you answer one question and then there's another question, and then there's a follow-up question, and there's a third question. You can just talk and talk and talk and answer and answer and answer questions. You know, I just love that Jesus says, "I'm not playing this game. I'm not doing it." And that's very much the approach we take at Queer Theology. 'It's okay to be LGBTQ' is the starting point, not the finish line. And we're just not having these conversations that are designed to go in circles, or designed to be used as weapons against us, to catch us, to trap us. We're not playing those games.

[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