
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.

FS: This week we are taking a look at the lectionary texts for September 17th. We're going to look at Exodus 14:19-31. It's a little bit long, but it's the story of Moses and the Israelites escaping from Egypt and crossing the Red Sea. Just a reminder, this month we're focusing on the theme of back to the basics. We're talking about, you know, what are the basics of our Christian faith? What are the basics of what it means to be a queer Christian? This passage seemed like something that fits in with that, and we want to dive into it.

[not read aloud]

“God’s messenger, who had been in front of Israel’s camp, moved and went behind them. The column of cloud moved from the front and took its place behind them. It stood between Egypt’s camp and Israel’s camp. The cloud remained there, and when darkness fell it lit up the night. They didn’t come near each other all night.

“Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord pushed the sea back by a strong east wind all night, turning the sea into dry land. The waters were split into two. The Israelites walked into the sea on dry ground. The waters formed a wall for them on their right hand and on their left. The Egyptians chased them and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh’s horses, chariots, and cavalry. As morning approached, the Lord looked down on the Egyptian camp from the column of lightning and cloud and threw the Egyptian camp into a panic. The Lord jammed their chariot wheels so that they wouldn’t turn easily. The Egyptians said, ‘Let’s get away from the Israelites, because the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt!’

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the water comes back and covers the Egyptians, their chariots, and their cavalry.’ So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. At daybreak, the sea returned to its normal depth. The Egyptians were driving toward it, and the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the cavalry, Pharaoh’s entire army that had followed them into the sea. Not one of them remained. The Israelites, however, walked on dry ground through the sea. The waters formed a wall for them on their right hand and on their left.

“The Lord rescued Israel from the Egyptians that day. Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the amazing power of the Lord against the Egyptians. The people were in awe of the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.”
[CEB]

So, Brian, what comes up for you as you read this passage?

B: Oh man. This could not be a more perfect passage to be one of the first ones that we look at in our back to basics series. [laughs] Because the story of Exodus was really – I think of me, figuring out that I liked guys, and that being the first crack in my religious worldview – the story of Exodus is when the whole glass just came shattering down around me. I was in college and I was taking this religion class and my professor, who was a Jewish rabbi, was talking about the exodus and scripture and truth. He said, very matter-of-factly, something to the effect of, “Well, you know, the exodus didn’t actually happen.” And I just, like, lost my mind. [laughs] That so didn’t jive with the way that I had been taught to understand the Bible. I think I even remember raising my hand and being like, “Wait, excuse me, what do you mean the exodus didn’t happen?” And he was like, “Well, there’s not really any archeological record that that happened, there’s not any historical record anywhere else that that happened, like if there were all these Hebrew slaves who left and were in the wilderness for forty years – someone would make mention of that at some point and we would find remnants of that civilization, but it just didn’t happen.” [laughs] I didn’t know what to do with this. One of the things that we want to talk about this month with back to the basics is, sort of looking at the assumptions that we’ve made about quote-

unquote what the Bible says, or what it means to be a Christian or a person of faith, and getting back to the basics of – where does that come from? Is that helpful? Is that useful? Is that even faithful? How might a queer lens or a queer approach to faith and to scripture be even more faithful to doing that? You know, we've been talking in Sanctuary Collective recently (our online community) a lot about Genesis, and specifically what is scripture and what is scripture's place. If this conversation sort of gets you jazzed up and you want to dive more in, we would love to have you in Sanctuary Collective and talk more about that with you. You can join at QueerTheology.com/sanctuarycollective. So Shay, if this didn't actually, literally, historically happen, what might this story be trying to tell us about history or about God or about all of the above? What do we do with this then?

FS: Yeah, I think it's really important to realize that 'didn't literally, historically happen' doesn't mean 'not true; has no meaning.' I think often when we talk about – the response from, especially from folks who grew up in a tradition where the Bible was considered the literal inspired word of God, when folks who read the Bible more metaphorically or in any kind of different way, the kind of knee-jerk response is, "Are you saying that the Bible isn't true? Then what is our faith based off of?" And I think that, no, we're not saying that the Bible isn't true. We're saying that the Bible isn't historical fact, which is a really different conversation, right?

B: Right. Yeah, and the Bible doesn't even make itself out to *be* a history book.

FS: Right, exactly. Exactly. And so I think what we're seeing, especially in these Hebrew scripture stories, is that this is an oppressed and small and minority group of people who are trying to make sense of their relationship with each other, with the world, and with this God that they serve and follow. And so they have these stories that are about who they are as people and where they come from and what God means to them, and I think that, in this story, we see – and throughout the entire Exodus, we see the story of a God who is really passionate about God's people, and wants what's best for them, and wants their liberation and freedom. Wants them to be a free people and to not be under slavery. Wants them to have a promised land of their own that they can call home. I think that that's really beautiful, and that tells us something about the heart of God for God's people, and something about the heart of God for liberation and for freedom. That, to me, is way more life-giving and powerful and enriching than arguments about whether or not this actually happened, like rather than a conversation about the weather. "Maybe this wasn't actually a sea, maybe it was

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The Exodus didn't happen. The Exodus is true.

Exodus 14:19-31

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a swamp, and it was fine..." You know, all of those things. None of those things get me jazzed up.

B: Yeah, maybe there was a hurricane – yeah.

FS: But like, talking about freedom and liberation and the end of slavery, like – man, that's stuff that I can get excited about.

B: Yeah, and that that is so important to God that God will move oceans to see God's people free. You were talking about being life-giving. This is not just an ancient story in a history book, but it's something that any oppressed or marginalized person can relate to. Whether you're a woman or a person of color or an immigrant or a queer person, a person living with HIV – even in the year of our Lord 2017, can relate to being oppressed and needing freedom and that God desires that for us. This, I think, in Exodus, is a story of God's people and the long time sort of wrestling with their place in the world, and their relationship to God. It's a story that continues today, that we continue in our own ways to wrestle with and to find and make meaning. The story of God continues today and we're a part of the Exodus story just as much.

FS: Yes. I love all of that! And if you are also excited by that and want to dive deeper into it and want to talk more about it, like I said we would love to have you over in Sanctuary Collective. You can sign up for that over at QueerTheology.com/sanctuarycollective. And also be on the lookout for the rest of the resources that we've got coming out this month around this theme of getting back to basics.

[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

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