

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 — t

B: And I'm Brian G. Murphy. Hello there! This month at Queer Theology is all about transgender issues. We think that it's really important to make space in the conversation around what it means to be an LGBTQ Christian to specifically focus and give attention to the T in that acronym. Too often, trans issues and trans people get overlooked or brushed aside, and so we really want to focus on that this month. And not only that – we think it's important because trans folks bring something unique and beautiful and sacred and important to the conversation about faith. So, we're going to be doing that all month long. Today, we're kicking off that month of trans issues, and so, Shay, what do you have to add to that? Why is it important that we talk about transgender issues here at Queer Theology?

FS: Yeah, I think it's super important. I know, for me, when I was coming out especially, there were so many conversations about homosexuality in the Bible, right? Or like, what it means to be gay, or how you could be a faithful gay Christian. There was really no space at all for people to talk about gender and to talk about being trans and what it means to be a trans Christian. I think folks are kind of sort of starting to catch up to that conversation, but we're still multiple years behind everyone else. [laughs] I think what we're seeing at QueerTheology.com, too, is that people are desperately searching for information and for resources, and they're really struggling to find them. There are hardly any books out, and our resources that we've produced on trans issues are some of the most requested and most viewed on our site, so clearly this is a topic that matters to people. Obviously, it matters to me personally, as a trans person and a trans priest and someone whose experience of transitioning has actually really been helpful to my faith and has taught me a lot about my faith. So I'm excited that we're spending the month talking about this topic.

B: Me too. You know, at Queer Theology we often say that it's not always about asking for queer people to be 'let in' to straight churches – it's not like, please affirm me because I need your affirmation! – but it's also like, we have something important to tell you. That is true, too, when it comes to transgender issues as a cis, queer person. It's not just that trans issues should be important to me because they're important to trans people – which like, [laughs] that is true, they

should be important to me because they're important to trans people. That in and of itself should be enough. And also... the perspective and experience that trans people bring to the conversation of faith is important to me because it has something to teach me about myself and about my faith. Sometimes that's about gender-related stuff – so often, discrimination and oppression of cis queer folks happens sort of around gender nonconformity, like I'm transgressing the idea of what it means to be a man by sleeping with another man, by being effeminate, whatever. But also, sometimes the experience and perspective that trans folks have to bear is not about gender necessarily. Trans folks are brilliant on other issues as well, and I know Shay, you wrote this amazing book called *Walking Toward Resurrection* for Sanctuary Collective, and that weaves in your experience and perspective as a trans person but is not just about gender and not just about being trans. It teaches me something about Jesus and about resurrection and about faith and about Christianity, and so, as a cis person, my faith is enriched when trans voices are present in the conversation. So, I'm just like, super excited to do more of that this month.

FS: Yeah, I think it's going to be a really awesome month. You and I each are going to have a couple new articles coming out, we're going to do another webinar all about trans issues – we're just really excited to share all of this with you, and would love to take your questions, too. So if you've got questions about trans folks and trans folks in the church, you can send those to connect@queertheology.com. We will either answer those in a webinar or on a podcast or possibly in an article too.

B: Yeah, I will put a link in the show notes to some of the articles that we've already got out, and resources we've already got out about trans stuff. And save the date – our webinar is Tuesday, November 14th at 9 pm eastern. I'll put a link to that in the show notes as well. And so, before we close out, Shay, I'm going to put you in the hot seat for a second. Is there one thing for our podcast listeners who maybe haven't read any of our articles on the website that you can say about how being trans has enriched your faith, or how your faith has helped your trans experience? Where has been some of that synergy for you?

FS: I think the biggest thing for me has been – you know, I'm kind of a bookish, nerdy guy who spends a lot of time in my head. I think, growing up, that my faith was really intellectual. Especially as I was coming out and kind of grappling with whether or not it was okay to be gay and how to deconstruct the faith of my childhood and to reconstruct a faith that was life-giving, all of that was really kind of heady intellectual stuff. And it wasn't until I started my medical transition and is what I would say 'came home to my body' for the first time, that I was able to really integrate the intellectual of my faith to the emotional and embodied and

bodied-ness of faith as well. That was a real gift for me. It helped me to look at scripture with new eyes, particularly stories *about* bodies. I grew up in a tradition that taught me bodies were bad, or at least, like, an inconvenience. So, to be able to see, actually there's a lot of really beautiful messages about bodies in scripture. That, you know, when God came to earth, came as a bodied person. That bodies matter and they mean something. That's been a real gift to my faith, and that's something I'm not sure I would have gotten to had I not been trans and transitioned.

B: Yes. Speaking of bodies, we have a whole issue of Spit & Spirit dedicated to the themes of sex and bodies, actually. [laughs] That sort of bridges the gap between last month and this month. I'll put a link to that in the show notes. I know that, for me, when I first moved to New York, one of my friends from the Equality Ride was living with me. Over the course of the three months that he was living with me before he found his own place, he came out as trans, and by virtue of that, my social network grew to include more and more trans folks as my friends. One of the things that I noticed was, I think that the LGBTQ community in general does a really amazing job of taking care of each other and creating chosen family, and I see that even more acutely amongst trans folks. I know, so often trans folks need to medically transition in a way that is not covered by insurance, and the way that, even though they shouldn't have to do this – it should just be a human right that you can access medically necessary care – but I've seen trans folks come together, friends and family come together through GoFundMe and YouCaring campaigns to fund surgery. One of my good friends was mugged and we sort of came together to replace all of his belongings. It was around that time that I discovered this passage in Acts about the early church, sort of sharing everything they had and there being no needy amongst them. That really, for the first time, made this connection of like – oh wait, this thing that the early church in Acts did has some relevance today! My trans people in my life show me that that is something a, that is possible, that we can take care of each other, and b, that needs to happen on an even wider level. It shouldn't just be trans people who are all struggling to support themselves and figure out how to make their surgeries work, having to GoFundMe each other, but as a society we should all take care of each other. I think definitely, the trans Christians in my life sort of radicalized me around health care and helped me to see the throughline of healing in Jesus's ministry. So I am forever grateful for that influence on my life.

FS: So we're really excited to have you join us on this conversation for this month. Again, you can send any questions that you have to connect@queertheology.com, and stay tuned on the website for articles and sign up for the webinar! It's going to be really great.

[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