
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: Hello, hello, everyone! This is the Queer Theology podcast for December 10th. It is the second week of Advent, and we're going to take a look at Mark 1:1-8. I'm going to go ahead and read it for us. This is from the Common English Bible.

The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, God's Son, happened just as it was written about in the prophecy of Isaiah: "Look, I am sending my messenger before you. He will prepare your way, a voice shouting in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight.'"

John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins. Everyone in Judea and all the people of Jerusalem went out to the Jordan River and were being baptized by John as they confessed their sins. John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. He announced, "One stronger than I am is coming after me. I'm not even worthy to bend over and loosen the strap of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." [CEB]

B: Mm. This is pretty juicy. There's a few things that stick out to me. The first thing that really jumped out to me is just in this first sentence – "The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, God's Son, happened just as it was written about in the prophecy of Isaiah." In this text, Mark is connecting Jesus and

Jesus's ministry, and the ensuing movement, back to the Hebrew Bible and the Hebrew prophets. He's doing that because Jesus and many of his earliest followers were Jewish – that was their context. As they were embarking on this revolutionary social movement, they referred back to the sacred text of their context while also making something new. When we as queer Christians, as we are sort of building our movement, to understand and live into God and the divine as we understand it, and then we look back at and reference our sacred texts (both the Christian scriptures and the Hebrew ones), we're – this is not something new, having a movement of trying to wrestle with the divine and embody the divine in this world. And sort of referencing the spirituality of our upbringing – that's not something new or radical [laughs] we're doing with queer theology. What Mark was doing here in his gospel – it's just sort of cool that two millennia later, we're still part of this tradition of experiencing the divine and making sense of the divine and locating ourselves in this ancient movement of God's people. So that's one of the things that sticks out for me right away. What about you, Shay?

FS: I love texts like this, and I love how different all of the gospels are and how different they start out, because I think it tells us something really important about what each of the different writers was trying to say. I think it's really important to notice that this is the beginning of Mark's gospel, and we don't have – this is not about Jesus being born as a baby, of Mary, in a manger.

B: Right, yeah. [laughs]

FS: Mark jumps out the gate with the beginning of Jesus's ministry. Mark is the earliest of the gospels that were written, and so it's really interesting to note that this is how Mark decides to start. He clearly doesn't think that Jesus's birth narrative is all that important, or he doesn't have it. I mean, that's also a possibility. Instead, he just jumps right into Jesus's ministry, and starts off with a really bold claim: "In the beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, God's son." It's really important to know the political context that this was written in. Mark is saying here, "this is the gospel." That's the word that he's using, which is also what Caesar – Caesar would have been presenting his gospel all over the empire that he was trying to crush and make larger. Caesar was also known as God's son. So when Mark starts his story with, "This is the gospel about Jesus, God's son," he's very specifically saying, "And by the way, Caesar, the guy who's in charge, is not bringing good news, and is not God's son."

B: Mm. Mhm!

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FS: Mark is putting Jesus up as a competitor to Caesar. That sets the tone and the context of the entire gospel, and I love that. That was *never* taught to me growing up in church. So like, if you're hearing me talk right now and you're like, "Whaaat is happening..." I highly recommend you check out the book *The First Christmas* by John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg. It's super important and it's really readable and it talks all about this political context. But for me, to think about Advent and to think about Christmas, it's a political thing. It's not just this cutesy, we pull out our Lego advent calendars and count down to a baby being born. Like, this is the waiting for the in-breaking of God into humanity and into the world to say, "The way that things are going aren't the way that they should be going. Here's good news. Here's a better way. Be a part of it." That, to me, is really exciting.

B: Yeah, I mean – you know me – I also get jazzed about sort of the politics inherent to the gospel. I also, in this passage here, see that this is not just this cutesy, sort of feel-good story. And it's not just accepting Jesus into your heart. John was out in the wilderness, baptizing people, physically coming together in the river. And this description that we see of John – wore clothes made of camel hair, leather belt around his waist, he ate locusts and wild honey – and this sort of idea of the one who is proclaiming Jesus... sounds like he looks a lot more like the folks you might have seen at Occupy Wall Street than Pat Robertson or Joel Osteen. This idea of what a Christian looks like or what being a good Christian looks like, having to dress up the right way, carry yourself the right way – John was a little bit of a wild thing. That also in today's context, is a powerful political statement. And, this idea that Mark opens with this text about Jesus, but then jumps to John, who's preparing the way. And that it isn't just Jesus who did it on his own – that John came before him, and the early church came after him. There's this building upon movement after movement, always standing on the shoulders of those who came before us. I think as queer people who are oftentimes either separated from our families or don't have an amazing relationship with our families, we can soak in to knowing that queer people, for generations and generations and generations before us, have come before and have done the work of calling out into the wilderness to prepare this moment for us to live into. That's a beautiful, powerful thing.

[outro music]

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.

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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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