
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. Hello hello and welcome back! This week we are taking a look at the lectionary text for Sunday, December 17th. The lectionary text is Isaiah 61:1-4 and 8-11, but we're just going to dial in on 1-4. I'm going to read it to you right now – this is from the Common English Bible.

The Lord God's spirit is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me.

He has sent me
to bring good news to the poor,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim release for captives,
and liberation for prisoners,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor
and a day of vindication for our God,
to comfort all who mourn,

to provide for Zion's mourners,
to give them a crown in place of ashes,
oil of joy in place of mourning,
a mantle of praise in place of discouragement.

They will be called Oaks of Righteousness,
planted by the Lord to glorify himself.

They will rebuild the ancient ruins;
they will restore formerly deserted places;
they will renew ruined cities,
places deserted in generations past. [CEB]

Shay...

FS: Oh!

B: That's Isaiah 61:1-4. What do we do with this passage?

FS: I love this so much.

B: Mhm, me too! [laughs]

FS: I can't even handle it. So, I mean, the first thing that jumps out at me as we read this passage is that, in Luke chapter four, when Jesus starts his public ministry, this is the passage that he reads from the scroll.

B: Yep.

FS: Announces to these assembled congregation, like, "This is who I am and this is what I've come to do." I *love* this, because when we talk about what Jesus meant to do with his ministry, and what it means to be a follower of Jesus – like, he *tells* us, right here. Like, this is it! [laughs]

B: Yeah! [laughs]

FS: God's spirit is upon me; I'm here to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to release the prisoners, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Like, that's it!

B: He gives a bulleted list. [laughs]

FS: Yeah, and all we have to do is follow it! And then, I think the other piece of this that's so beautiful to me is like, if we buy into 'this is what Jesus's mission is,' *and* we want to be a part of that, we are the people who will rebuild the ancient ruins, who will restore the formally deserted places, who will renew ruined cities. That, to me, is such a beautiful vision and mission of what it means to bring about God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. It's not about building giant churches, it's not about getting more people saved, it's not about this kind of hunkered-down, wait until we get to go to heaven and everything's perfect. No!

B: Mhm!

FS: It's about, we bring justice here, we rebuild ancient cities, we restore ruined cities. Get to work! Do good, right here, right now. That's what it means to be a part of the Jesus movement. That's what it's all about. It's not some heart-change that doesn't actually require you to change your life. It's also not some life-change that's about not smoking, drinking, swearing, dancing and having sex. [laughs] It's about, like, actual life change, and investing in the place where you live to renew it, to be a force of good. This, to me, is just so beautiful. I love it so much. I so want us to internalize this meaning of the gospel and Jesus's ministry and work.

B: Yeah! I mean, at Queer Theology, we are almost always saying in response to, "What should I believe?" or "What should I do?" – we do a lot of, well, what do you think? What's your experience been? How do you understand this text? What makes sense in your context? Very rarely do we sort of get a bulleted list of, like, these are the actions that you take. There's a lot of lists of things in the Bible, but Jesus, as you were saying, *starts* his public ministry in Luke with this thesis statement. This passage from Isaiah is Jesus's ministry's thesis statement. And so, this passage becomes one of the really important touchstones for me when I think about what my faith means to me and how I interact with the world, and what I want to be about, and how I make decisions. It all comes back to, does this bring good news to the poor? Am I binding up the brokenhearted? How am I releasing the captives? How does this work to bring about the year of the Lord's favor? How is this comforting? How does this bring joy instead of mourning? In this passage, we see these sweeping things, like good news to the poor and the captives. And so like, economic justice, yes. Prison abolition, yes. Universal healthcare... all those big things that require, yes, rebuilding deserted places and renewing cities – all of that sort of big, sweeping, transformational work of bringing the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. But also, it's so easy for Christians in general, and in particular queer Christians, to get hung up on the little stuff that you were talking about. Like, is it okay to have sex? Is it okay to smoke? Is it okay to drink? Can I hold my girlfriend's hand? Like, x-y-z. I think you can ask those questions of this passage. Does anti-gay theology give a crown in place of ashes? Does it bring joy instead of mourning? Is it comforting? No. [Shay laughs] Is you having sex getting in the way of or helping you bring good news to the poor and brokenhearted, yes or no? This passage gets at the heart of what is important to God and certainly to Jesus's ministry. It makes these decisions about the big things and the little things crystallize. ... crystallize a bit of what it means to be a follower of Christ, and sort of, what are the essentials and what are the things you have to figure out for yourself.

[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.

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