

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: Welcome to the podcast! We are really excited to take a break from the lectionary this week and talk about our theme for this month and a little bit into April. We are talking about the politics of Jesus and of Easter. It's going to be a really juicy conversation. We're excited to dive in. And it seemed like it was a good time to do this, because a lot of folks in the Christian world are observing Lent right now, and we're preparing for Easter, and so we thought we would take this time to really figure out some of the political meanings and overtones of Jesus's life and ministry, and especially his death and resurrection. We've got all sorts of stuff coming up. I'd love to start, Brian, by just asking you – when you think about politics and religion, what comes to mind for you?

B: Ooh. Yeah. There's two things that come to mind, and they are sort of contradictory but often, I think, go together. One is, I think about the saying that, you know, 'keep your politics and your religion separate.' And that comes from both secular or liberal folks who want to see a separation of church and state, and it also comes from conservative churches or conservative Christians, who say, like, "Jesus is about what's going on in your heart, and politics is of the world, and they're kind of separate. It's not the government's job to take care of the poor or the sick or the needy; that's people of faith's job." There's this idea that politics and religion should be separate. But I also, at the same time, see [laughs] again, usually with conservative religious folks – in the US that's Christianity – this sort of merging of politics and religion. I think that conservative Christians would say they want America to be a Christian nation, but it sometimes seems what's actually happening is that Christianity is becoming an American religion. It feels like, from my perspective, that there's sort of this unholy alliance between American nationalism and white evangelical Christianity that's distorting both the common good of society and the message of Jesus. That's what first comes to mind when I think about politics and religion, and then

of course, we'll dive into what Christianity and Jesus might have to say about politics and religion. [laughs] What about you, Shay? What comes up for you?

FS: Yeah, I think a lot of the same things that you just mentioned have come up for me too. I think, too, of how conflated religion has been becoming with politics in the United States in particular. And this idea that it's possible and maybe also a good thing to try to legislate morality. We saw that around gay marriage, in particular. We see that around abortion. We're starting to see that even more explicitly around transgender folks. There's this sense that it's the duty of politicians to somehow create laws that enforce Christian morality. I think, like you said, there's this conflation of 'this is a Christian nation, and so therefore our laws need to reflect that' – which I think is really troublesome. But then, on the flip side of that, I think a lot about the fact that I don't think it's possible to separate out our religion and our faith. For me, if I really believe something, it influences everything that I do, whether that's decisions that I make politically, whether that's decisions that I make financially, whether that's decisions that I make about my day to day life – for me, everything is political, just like I feel like everything is religious. I don't feel like you can separate out these two things.

B: Yeah, I totally hear you on that. The personal is political. We make moral judgements all the time, you know? Gun legislation, or the lack thereof, is sort of a moral judgement. The national budget is a moral judgement. I think it's important to own that and say, like, what are our individual moral judgements, and what do we think are our communal ones? When you live in a diverse country or community, you have to figure out what parts of your religious, faithful, spiritual, moral judgements belong inside of yourself, and are things that you make personally, but that other folks might disagree on, and that's okay also for them – and what things need to be the ground rules that we all agree upon? I think teasing that out is important, and sort of what we're called to do. And I think as Christians, people who follow Jesus, we claim that we follow a particular person's vision for what life on earth looks like, or could look like. I said one person's vision, but also as interpreted and understood by, you know, hundreds of thousands of millions of people throughout the ages. And sort of wrestling with, what does the call of Jesus ask of us in our personal lives, as citizens of a country and of the world? When you look at the life and ministry, death, resurrection, 'the call' of Jesus, what sort of political ramifications do you see there, Shay?

FS: Man, we are going to need more than one podcast for this. [laughs] Because they're huge, right? When Jesus starts his ministry in Luke 4 by saying, "The reason that I've come is to proclaim liberation for the oppressed, the freedom of prisoners and the year of God's favor," those are all political statements. And

they're pretty radical ones. I see all of Jesus's life and ministry as kind of filtered through what he was trying to do politically. It was about a spiritual conversion, but it was about a spiritual conversion that manifested politically. God's kingdom is here, and what God's kingdom looks like is a kingdom where people have enough, where no one is in need, where the community takes care of one another, where people aren't being oppressed, where violence doesn't exist. That's both a theological vision and it's a political vision. That's really beautiful and inspiring, and it's also a call to be like, oh, if we believe this thing, then it's our job to work to bring that about. That means that we need to be active, and actively working in these really political areas, to make that kind of community exist.

B: Absolutely. [laughs] As you said, there's a lot more to this topic than we can fit into one podcast. That's why, in a week or two, on Sunday, March 18th at 2 pm eastern, we're going to be hosting a live, interactive, online workshop-webinar all about the politics of Jesus to dive even more deeply into this. You can register at QueerTheology.com/politicwebinar. But there's something else that comes up for me when I think about Jesus and Easter and the politics of Easter, and what it all means. That, for me, is this sort of – two things. What is going on there with Jesus and divinity, and what happened on the cross? Why was Jesus crucified, and what does that mean? As someone who is [laughs] pretty open about my doubts about the supernatural, sort of the concerns that I have, what Queer Theology has done for me is unlock this whole new world and depth of my understanding of my Christian faith. It now feels even more alive and vibrant, and honestly faithful to what I see in the Bible, to not be so worried about the supernatural elements [laughs] of what I see in the Bible. Because I see in the life and ministry of Jesus a real concern for the here and now. That's also true in the Hebrew prophets, and in much of the Hebrew Bible as well. Coming out later this month, I'll be writing sort of a 'skeptic's guide' to the life and ministry of Jesus. We're going to be talking a little bit about the atonement in another webinar, but before I talk about those details, about how to register – Shay, do you have anything else to say about Easter that's coming up, about how this all sort of fits together?

FS: I think we're going to be exploring that in articles and podcasts all throughout this month. For me, it's about figuring out how we can really live into the life and message of Jesus, here and now – figure out what happened back then, how that speaks to and informs what we do today. I'm really excited to be diving into all of this.

B: On April 10th, at 9 pm eastern – that's a Tuesday – we're hosting another online workshop-webinar all about the atonement. Sort of the crucifixion,

resurrection, what happened, what that means, what that meant then, what that means for us today. You can register for that at QueerTheology.com/atonementwebinar, and of course, if you have any questions that you would like us to cover on these topics, in either of those webinars, or on the podcast, or in articles, or on social media throughout the month and next month... always email us at connect@queertheology.com, or tweet at us, or DM us on Facebook. Our inbox is always open to you. [laughs] We're really excited to wrestle with the politics of Jesus and the meaning of Easter this Lenten season with you.

[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