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## 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 hello! Today we are looking at the lectionary reading for Sunday, March 18<sup>th</sup>. We're going to look at John 12:20-33. I'm going to read it to you now from the Common English Bible.

Some Greeks were among those who had come up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and made a request: "Sir, we want to see Jesus." Philip told Andrew, and Andrew and Philip told Jesus.

Jesus replied, "The time has come for the Human One to be glorified. I assure you that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it can only be a single seed. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their lives will lose them, and those who hate their lives in this world will keep them forever. Whoever serves me must follow me. Wherever I am, there my servant will also be. My Father will honor whoever serves me.

"Now I am deeply troubled. What should I say? 'Father, save me from this time'? No, for this is the reason I have come to this time. Father, glorify your name!"

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

The crowd standing there heard and said, "It's thunder." Others said, "An angel spoke to him."

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“They tried to bury us...”

John 12:20-33

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Jesus replied, “This voice wasn’t for my benefit but for yours. Now is the time for judgment of this world. Now this world’s ruler will be thrown out. When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me.” (He said this to show how he was going to die.) [CEB]

Okay, Shay. How do we queer this? And since we’re looking at the politics of Jesus, what does this have to say about the political implications of Jesus’s life and ministry?

FS: So let me start by saying that I do not like the Gospel of John. [both laugh] I just don’t. I feel like all of the other gospels are really rooted in the context of Jesus’s day, and then we get John, which is the latest gospel, trying to theologize all of Jesus’s life and ministry, and really separate it out from being anchored in community and in real life. I have some beef with whoever wrote John. But, I will say, at the same time, that even John can’t completely depoliticize Jesus’s message. I think it’s telling that most conservative evangelicals hold up John as the best gospel, and as their favorite gospel, and as the gospel that they hand out to people that they’re trying to convert. And also, the politics seeps through even in this text that has, like, voices from heaven and Jesus knowing the future and all of this stuff.

So the first thing that kind of jumps out at me is this verse 24 and following, when he talks about being a grain of wheat and falling to the earth and dying. I think of that beautiful quote – ‘they tried to bury us; they didn’t know we were seeds.’ I think that when we talk about political movements, especially movements that are by and for oppressed and marginalized people, there *is* this sense of going up against overwhelmingly powerful forces. And feeling like we’re too small to make a difference, or that the structures are stacked against us, which they are. But I think about this verse, about when you do what you know is right, when you fight, it has repercussions and the ripple effect is so much bigger than even you might be able to see, or that you might even live to see. And yet, you do it anyway, even not knowing what will come of it. That’s really beautiful and hopeful to me. Especially as someone who – I think a lot about legacy and what I’m leaving behind, and this gives me courage and pushes me to do the right thing even when I’m feeling like the right thing is hard, or when I’m feeling really small in the midst of it.

B: At my conservative church growing up, the emphasis for Christianity in general in passages like this was very much on those supernatural occurrences. The

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emphasis in this would be all about the voice from heaven, sort of proving that Jesus was God because God was talking from the heavens.

And, you know, what I really appreciated about the past few weeks as we dig into the politics of Jesus in Sanctuary Collective – which you can join at [QueerTheology.com/community](http://QueerTheology.com/community) – we’ve been reading *The Last Week*. That sort of explores the last week of Jesus’s ministry. That book really does a great job of situating Jesus’s life, ministry, death, in the context of what was actually happening. One of the things that they talk about is that hearing voices from heaven isn’t necessarily unique to Christianity. Not only is it something that you see in the Jewish Bible, but also in Egyptian writings and in Roman writings. Just because the Bible says it happened here, doesn’t mean that either it didn’t happen anywhere else or that this is somehow fundamentally different than what we see in other religious political texts. Now when I approach a passage like this – before where I think all my focus would have been on the supernatural elements of the voice from heaven, and losing your life and keeping it forever being really about keeping your life in heaven – if you love this life you’re going to die and you’re going to go to hell, but if you don’t, if you follow Jesus, you’ll get to live forever in heaven – and now, now I can look at the same passage with this new set of queer theology lenses, and see what perhaps was there all along. Not that it’s the only right way to approach this text, but I think it was always there. What you were saying about legacy – we’re going to die. I’m going to die, you’re going to die, everyone’s going to die. And so, what sort of legacy do you leave behind you? What seeds are you planting and what seeds is your life planting, and what fruit will that bear in this life and in the generations that come after you?

And I think also that it’s not – it doesn’t need to be this supernatural premonition that Jesus had, that he was going to die. To know that he was going to die. There’s that Martin Luther King Jr., the last speech that he gave before he was assassinated – he talked about going to the top of the mountain, and he’d see the Promised Land, and he might not get there with you but he knows it’s right over there, he can see it – and then he was assassinated. So it’s not irrational to think that perhaps Jesus sort of knew what he was getting himself into. There doesn’t have to be – this story is just as equally powerful as a political message about the here and now as it is about a spiritual message about eternity. Holding those two in tension together helps you unlock something deep and powerful.

FS: If you’re interested in diving in more and talking more about what the politics of Jesus mean, or what they could mean, we’re hosting a live webinar on Sunday, March 18<sup>th</sup>. If you want to get in on that, you can sign up at [QueerTheology.com/politicwebinar](http://QueerTheology.com/politicwebinar). It’s totally free. You can submit your

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questions beforehand and on the podcast. It’s going to be a really great conversation, so we hope you’ll join us for that.

[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