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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.

FS: Welcome back! This week we are taking a look at the lectionary text for April 22<sup>nd</sup>. We're going to look at 1 John 3:16-24, and it's pretty short, and it's awesome, so I'm going to read it for you. This is from the Common English Bible.

This is how we know love: Jesus laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. But if a person has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need and that person doesn't care—how can the love of God remain in him?

Little children, let's not love with words or speech but with action and truth. This is how we will know that we belong to the truth and reassure our hearts in God's presence. Even if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows all things. Dear friends, if our hearts don't condemn us, we have confidence in relationship to God. We receive whatever we ask from him because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. This is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love each other as he commanded us. The person who keeps his commandments remains in God and God remains in him; and this is how we know that he remains in us, because of the Spirit that he has given to us. [CEB]

B: *Oh my goodness!* I'm just – doing some holy hands over here.

FS: Excellent.

B: Yeah, I'm just *feelin'* this. Let me first start and say, when we were reading this before recording to sort of figure out which passage we were going to talk about, I was like, I'm pretty sure that this passage was one of my sixth grade Sunday school memory verses. And it, like, for sure was – well, not the whole thing, but this 'little children, let us not love with words or speech but with action and truth.' And I am reading this now in this whole context, and just utterly flabbergasted that my evangelical Christian church read that verse and translated that into, like, the action [laughs] is talking to people, and telling them that they're going to hell, that they don't believe in the right words. [Shay laughs] And so... I just like, don't know where the signals got crossed, and how one week we could be learning this verse and the next week we could be like, "Oh, well it's all about saying this prayer and turning your life over to God." And you know what, there was this bit about 'you can't just let Jesus ride shotgun; you have to let Jesus take the wheel.' But like – [both laugh] what we see in so many churches about what living a righteous life looks like is often some form of, going to church regularly, displaying Christian crosses, commandments publically around your neck, drinking in moderation, not smoking cigarettes, at least saying that you're not going to have sex before marriage, voting against the rights of LGBT people, right – but this passage sort of lays out what those actions look like. That we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. And this isn't a metaphoric lay down our lives – it says 'Jesus laid down his life for us.' Jesus literally died. And so [laughs] we ought to also literally die on behalf of other people. And if a person has material possessions and that person doesn't care, how can the love of God remain in him?

And so I just think that – I think you can be a good person, right, and not be willing to die for other people. You can be a good person and want to live a comfortable life. But to be particularly a Christian person, comes with a specific set of – mm, not requirements [laughs] but certainly principles and guideposts and markers. Putting ourselves in the path of violence on behalf of the people around us, and taking care of each other, I just think is so central to the message of Christ. This is not just a theological, heady, academic faith, but it's an activist faith. Jesus was an activist and a social organizer.

I'm going to say one more thing and then be done! The end of this passage ties up, 'this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ, and love each other as he commanded us.' And that there *is* a spiritual and a heart component to this as well – that we *believe* in something outside of ourselves and bigger than ourselves, and that transforms our heart and our

souls. And in response to that, we love each other. And by expressing that love through action, we take action and change other lives and change the world. It's a heart change and it's a change in action as well.

Okay. What about you, Shay?

FS: Man. I am just – ooh, there's just so much here. [both laugh]

B: So much.

FS: I'm struggling to formulate my thoughts. Because I think that, what's so fascinating, right, is when we talk about what it means to be a follower of Jesus, and when we talk about what it means to be quote-unquote saved, or Christian, there's often this idea that we *believe* the *right* things, and that those right things put us in the saved, Christian camp. That *belief* means that we go to heaven when we die, right? That's been the thing, that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, we believe that, so therefore we get saved from hell to go to heaven. And like, that's just not what I see in scripture. [laughs] And it's not what I see in this passage either. It's not like, 'Jesus laid down his life for us so that we could pray a prayer and go to heaven.'

B: Right! Yes.

FS: It's, Jesus laid down his life for us, so we ought also to lay down our lives for other people. Jesus is this example of what it means to be at one with God. Our job then is to follow that example, and to be in that too. I'm just – I'm also really struck by this passage in conversation with Acts 4:5-12, which is one of the other lectionary texts for the week. It's this famous passage, right, which is, "This is Jesus, the stone you builders rejected. He is become the cornerstone. Salvation can be found in no one else. Throughout the whole world, no other name has been given among humans through which we must be saved." Often that Acts passage is kind of pulled out as a way of saying, see, look, Christianity is the only way to heaven, and you have to believe in Jesus, and that's how you get saved.

But like – Peter is saying this thing in the midst of the Roman Empire, where it was told that the Caesar was going to bring salvation, and that Caesar was going to save the whole world, and that Caesar was the only one that you could be saved through. [laughs] So for Peter to stand up and say, actually, Jesus is Lord and Jesus is going to bring about salvation, and not Caesar – that's a really political statement. And I think to put that in conversation with this 1 John passage, where the author of 1 John is saying, "Let's be a part of this Jesus

movement,” and it’s about action and truth and doing this work and following Jesus even in the midst of death – these are political statements that require actual action and not just the affirmation of a certain set of beliefs that not only get us into heaven and get us out of hell, but kind of don’t require anything of us here, right?.

B: *Mhm.*

FS: Like, not really, in that kind of configuration. And so I’m just, I’m really fascinated by all of this. And I also love this passage about, ‘when we love in action and in truth, this is how we will know that we belong to the truth, and reassure our hearts in God’s presence.’ And *even if* our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows all things. And I think – this is kind of a tangent, but I know that we get lots of emails from folks who are like, you know, I *think* that it’s okay to be gay or trans, but I’m worried that I’m just fooling myself. And I think that this passage is so beautiful because it’s saying that we can have confidence in our relationships with God, and even if we feel that twinge of old beliefs come up, God is greater than that. And we still can have confidence that, even if we feel that our hearts are condemning us, God is greater than our hearts. We can have confidence in our relationship with God and in the love of God and the love that God has for us, because we’re living in this action and truth. We’re following in the way of Jesus in a way that’s beautiful and that’s caring for one another. And I think that that’s really powerful.

B: Yeah. We wrote an article at some point in the past few months about whether Jesus is all about getting into heaven, and we did a podcast about that Acts 4 passage, so I will put links to both of those in the shownotes to this episode.

[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**

April 22, 2018  
**This is his commandment...**  
**1 John 3:16-24**

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Transcript by Taylor Walker

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