

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 and welcome back to another episode! This week we're taking another break from the lectionary because Easter just happened, Good Friday just happened, Holy Week is behind us, and every year, around this time of year, Shay and I talk a little bit about what we understand to have happened on Good Friday and on Easter Sunday and what the crucifixion and the resurrection means – and [laughing] that can bring up feelings for folks. So we wanted to sort of dive into those feelings a little bit, not just what happened – we'll be talking about the Atonement in a webinar coming up in just a week from today, if you're listening to this on the day that it comes out, on Tuesday April 10th at 9 pm EST, which is Wednesday 1 am GMT. We'll be talking all about the Atonement, why the crucifixion happened, what that meant then and what it means now. You can register for that at QueerTheology.com/atonementwebinar.

And when talking about these theological things and what they mean, sometimes those are very different from what we heard growing up or what we've believed for a long time. It can feel shaky or uncertain or scary. And so we want to take a moment to acknowledge those feelings and talk about some ways that we might productively deal with feelings of fear and anxiety and maybe guilt or shame that come up when exploring our theology. So, Shay, [laughs] you've got some first-hand experience with this. Can you tell me why you think this is important?

FS: Yeah, I'm mean, if you are like me, and you grew up pretty much hearing that there was one way to interpret scripture, that the Bible was the literal, inspired word of God, that everything was true, that nothing in the Bible contradicted itself, and that it could pretty much be our guidebook for life, and we could read it and understand it – and really, like, read it right out of the box and understand it. Right? Like, we didn't have to know anything else about the context or the history or anything. If there was ever a question, we could go to our pastor and our pastor would tell us what to believe. And I think that, along with believing that there was only one way to believe scripture, as theology was taught, we were

also taught that there was only one way to understand different things like what Jesus's death on the cross meant.

And I know, for me, I have really had to do a lot of work to kind of unpack the things that I've been taught. And one of the things that happened in that unpacking is that I realized that there are actually a lot of different ways to read scripture. There are a lot of different ways to understand different theological tenets, like the Atonement. And like Brian said, we're going to talk all about the different ways to understand the Atonement next week, so we're not really going to dive into that. But what I've found is that often when I tweet or facebook or blog about something that provides one of those alternative ways to view scripture, sometimes people get a little upset about that. And often their first response is to lash out and to say, "Well, I've never heard that before, so it can't possibly be true." Or, "What about..." and then they'll list off a whole bunch of verses. I've been really struck every time by the kind of immediate emotional and almost angry response that I get when I put something out there that's maybe different.

And I remember that response from myself, too, right? When I was unpacking all of the theology that I grew up with, I was really angry a lot of the time. What I had to come to understand for myself is that I wasn't actually angry at the person who was telling me new information, or even the new information that I was getting. I was angry that it had been kept from me for a lot of years. So one of the first things I would encourage folks to do, who are feeling their emotions pinged, is to really sit with where that anger is coming from. Are you actually angry at the new information that's being introduced, or are you angry that it had been kept from you? Because I think that anger can be a totally appropriate emotion, but it needs to be directed towards what you're actually angry about. What about you, Brian? What are some other ways that you've handled dealing with tough emotions around theology?

B: Yeah, I think that what comes up for me is that the beliefs and the values that I grew up with and that I've held for a long time feel very familiar and comfortable and sometimes even comforting. Thinking about faith and scripture and God differently can feel really scary, and so I don't want to let go all of the way of those things because they served me in some way at some point. You know, I think about how, [laughing] every now and then, I just can't help myself, and I listen to contemporary Christian praise and worship music. And I intellectually know like, this theology is terrible, but like, it reminds me of my childhood – also it's a major chord progression and it just sounds moving [laughs]. It's not the Holy Spirit moving, it's just a good chord. But I feel it and I remember it and it feels good! And so it's hard for me to wrap my around this thing that felt really

comforting and comfortable to me, but also taught me really bad things about myself and taught me bad things about the way the world is about the nature of God. And that, by continuing to hold onto these beliefs, or by sharing them, I'm perpetuating that injustice or violence in the world. And so, holding in tension, like, I have lots of really good memories associated with this type of theology or this type of understanding of God, with, that way of understanding God is not helpful anymore. It doesn't serve me and it doesn't serve others, and in fact it can be really harmful. And that is really scary.

And for me, for awhile, I had to take some time away from church, because it was just so overwhelming trying to sort out my sexuality, trying to sort out my theology, trying to make sense of justice and injustice in the world. I found that a lot of conservative theology taught me that my mind was bad, that my body was bad, that I couldn't be trusted. And so I took some time away from church, away from God, to find me. And I think that is a really noble and spiritual pursuit. That can be a faithful thing to do, to sort of put pause on Christianity [laughs] for awhile, if it hasn't been serving you. I've also found that reading, learning, finding good books about theology, about liberation – reading about things outside of my own spiritual tradition, whether that's Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism – just to sort of see the world through a bunch of different perspectives – reading about science, learning more about the way things are and the way people are encountering the divine. I think that, you know, there's something really unique about Christianity and about Islam – I don't want to say that about Hinduism, I don't want to sort of collapse them all and say it's all the same... [beat] and also what *is* in common is that we're all wrestling to make sense of who we are and our place in the world and sort of what the divine is. I think, not being afraid of exploring other ways of understanding has been really helpful for me.

And then just sort of trusting the process, that I'm not going to have it all figured out today or tomorrow or maybe even next week, but trusting that there's something divine about questioning, about doubts, about learning and letting go of my own ego-need to be right, and being open to the movement of the spirit as both a [laughing] psychological therapeutic process and also as a spiritual practice.

FS: I think, along with that, the one thing, maybe the best thing that I could say to folks, is to be really curious. Ask a lot of questions, and kind of lean into the curiosity and the unknown. You may get to the end of it and feel that you want to hold onto that theological tenet, but it doesn't actually hurt you to read what other people have had to say about it, to grapple with it and to really wrestle with it. I think what happens when you are willing to lean into that curiosity and really do the wrestling and the work is that, on the other end of it, whatever you end up

believing will be hard-won. It will be more true and more honest because you've actually done the work and you've learned what other people believe and you've learned other ways to believe and see. That's actually really beautiful, and it makes your faith more real, it makes it more authentic, it makes it more true. So, again, just lean into that curiosity. Notice your emotions as they come up, but also notice that it's okay to be curious, it's okay to ask more questions, it's okay to even argue with things that you've been taught your whole life. That's okay, and God can handle that.

B: Yeah, I think that that curiosity is so important. There's something divine there. For those of us who come from more evangelical or fundamentalist backgrounds, conservative backgrounds, it can be tempting to see this path, this quest, as like, "I have to figure out the right answer of how the universe is," – but God is in the questions, and God is in the curiosity, and God is in the process just as much as in finding the quote-unquote 'right answer' for what you're quote-unquote 'supposed to believe.'

FS: If you want to join us for that Atonement webinar, again, it's QueerTheology.com/atonementwebinar. It's going to be Tuesday, April 10th, and it's going to be a lot of fun. We've got a special guest for that night. You can add questions when you register beforehand, and we'll get to those on the webinar. It's totally free, so please 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