

PODCAST START:

Brian: Hey there! The Queer Theology podcast is on summer vacation for the first time ever. But fear not, there is an episode of the podcast coming your way in just a minute. We have given a queer take on over two hundred Bible passages. There's a good chance you haven't heard every single one of those, which is why every week for the summer we're publishing a throwback episode of the podcast. We'll be back with new episodes in September, and until then, you can stay connected with us on social media, inside of Sanctuary Collective (which you can learn more about at QueerTheology.com/community), and of course, with throwback episodes of this podcast. So without further ado, here's today's episode, and we'll see you in September!

[intro music]

Fr. Shay: Welcome to the Reading Queerly queer theology podcast, where each week, your hosts Brian Murphy and Shay Kearns will offer a reflection on the week's lectionary readings. This week we're looking at the lectionary texts for October 13th, 2013. We're going to take a look at 2 Kings 5:1-15.

[not read aloud]

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. And the king of Aram said, "Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel."

He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his

leprosy.” When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, “Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me.”

But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, “Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel.” So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha’s house. Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, “Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean.” But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, “I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?” He turned and went away in a rage. But his servants approached and said to him, “Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, ‘Wash, and be clean’?” So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, “Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel; please accept a present from your servant.”
[NRSV]

Brian, what comes up for you as you read this text?

B: When I read this, I immediately saw a parallel to the experience of being gay, coming out as gay. The funny part is, before I came out and as I was struggling to accept myself, I saw my gayness as something that God could *cure*, right? I

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saw myself as the leper, and thought that, if I prayed hard enough or had enough faith or was patient, or if it was God's will, God might cure me of my homosexuality. And after coming out, I came to realize that no, my *gayness* isn't the leprosy that needs to be cured, homophobia and transphobia is the leprosy that needs to be cured. God can and God will cure people of their homophobia and transphobia, both in straight and cisgender people and also I think as queer people we suffer from our own internalized homophobia, transphobia, gender weirdness.

As I was trying to figure out what it meant to be a gay person, to have these attractions, I spent a lot of time reading and listening to sermons and thinking about it and journaling. I was in this 'I gotta figure this out someday' state for years and years and years. I don't know what I was looking for, but I was always in this process. I was on a journey and I was constantly in a process where I wasn't quite sure. And it turns out it was simpler than that. I didn't need this complicated process. All I had to do was go wash my hands in the water, right? Find a new church to go to that was affirming of LGBT people. Go on a few dates with guys. Make friends with other queer people. Watch *Queer as Folk*. That's what resonates with me. I see my own journey as someone trying to cure myself depicted in this 2 Kings passage.

FS: That resonates a lot with me from my own experience of coming out, both times. [Brian laughs] The kind of mental agony that I put myself through, and the ways that – I know, for instance, when I was thinking about coming out to my mom as trans, I figured that she really wasn't going to understand and wasn't going to be supportive. I was trying to figure out, how am I going to have this conversation with her? There was a piece of me that thought, you know, I should go to her and we should sit down and we should talk about it face to face, even though what I really wanted to do was to just simply write a letter – and quite frankly writing a letter was hard enough. But there was this piece of me that was like, trying to make it difficult for myself. Or felt that, because I was doing this air-quote 'terrible thing' to my mother by coming out as trans, it should be difficult for me to have that conversation with her. And it was a really freeing moment when it was like, okay, this a) is not something I'm doing to my mother. This is just who I am. And b) I can just write her a letter, and that's okay. I don't have to punish myself by making this harder than it should be.

I think often, because other people might have pain because of our identity, we feel that we owe them something, even though that is making things more difficult for us. This passage is really comforting in that line that the servant says to Naaman, "If he'd told you to do something hard, you would have done it. So

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why are you freaking out when he's just telling you something simple?" So what are the ways that we can let ourselves off the hook?

B: It's funny that you talk about your coming out experience, because I similarly thought I was supposed to come out one way, and that wasn't the way that was working for me. I had always sort of thought about [??] because that's what I'd heard other people had done, or I saw it in movies, like, you sit down and you tell your parents and you tell your friends. And my coming out process was not like that. I sort of knew that I was gay and had come to terms to that, and I was planning on coming out in the traditional way at the end of the summer. In the beginning of the summer, I met this guy – we had mutual friends in common. He was openly gay and so [laughs] he must have known I was gay. We had a connection. And at some point he just had a party and we like, held hands. We had our first kiss. And I told two or three friends, sort of officially, but then everyone else just sort of found out because I would show up to a party and be like, oh, here's my boyfriend Ben. Or they would walk into my friend's parent's house and we would all be hanging out, and I'd be like, you know, having my head on his shoulder. It was so much easier, right? I didn't have to post a status update. I didn't have to write a letter. When you're a kid, friends and parents are sort of separate. I was dreading this moment of telling my parents, how that would go down, and it ended up, it spilled out in the midst of a heated discussion if you will.

But I think also, there's some element of being gracious to yourself when you have to do things your way, or differently. Not everyone is the same way. Everyone processes these things differently. Coming out or learning to love yourself might mean going to a gay bar for one person and it might mean going to an affirming church for another person. Recognizing what works for you and taking those simple steps to find reconciliation.

FS: You and I were talking about this before, but part of this process, I think, is also realizing that so many of us are willing to do really, really difficult things to reconcile our sexuality and our spirituality, often. And sometimes, we don't need to do those really difficult things. You and I were both joking about how we've read a ton of books about the clobber passages. Really what we maybe could have done was left the church that wasn't affirming us and gone to one that was. [laughs] I think that that's an important message that I would want to tell people. Do the easy thing, because that might be all you need.

B: Yeah. And it might *feel* more difficult or unimaginable, but often, it is just that simple. Go to the church across the street.

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FS: [laughs] Right, right. So, as we close, I just want to share this poem by Mary Oliver. It's one that's popular, but I think it's also really beautiful. We'll close with this. This is a poem called 'Wild Geese.'

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

[outro music]

B: If you're jiving on this queer spirituality talk and want it in a different format, we just announced yesterday that we are relaunching *Spit & Spirit*, which is a digital magazine wrestling with the reality of faith. If you go to spitandspirit.com you can jump on the mailing list. We'll send you a free copy of the first issue and you'll be able to get the details, learn more and be one of the first to order. We're going to do a special pre-sale just to those mailing list subscribers. So if you want to check out the first issue for free and learn more about the magazine, go to spitandspirit.com to check that out. I'm Brian—

FS: And I'm Shay. And you can find out more at QueerTheology.com.

B: If you'd like to connect with us, send us an email to connect@queertheology.com.

FS: Thanks for listening.

PODCAST END

Transcript by Taylor Walker