

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 and welcome back! We are back from summer vacation! Today we are looking at the lectionary reading for Sunday, September 9th. We're going to be looking at Mark 7:24-37. I will read it to you now from the Common English Bible.

Jesus left that place and went into the region of Tyre. He didn't want anyone to know that he had entered a house, but he couldn't hide. In fact, a woman whose young daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit heard about him right away. She came and fell at his feet. The woman was Greek, Syrophoenician by birth. She begged Jesus to throw the demon out of her daughter. He responded, "The children have to be fed first. It isn't right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

But she answered, "Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

"Good answer!" he said. "Go on home. The demon has already left your daughter." When she returned to her house, she found the child lying on the bed and the demon gone.

After leaving the region of Tyre, Jesus went through Sidon toward the Galilee Sea through the region of the Ten Cities. Some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly speak, and they begged him to place his hand on the man for healing. Jesus took him away from the crowd by himself and put his fingers in

the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. Looking into heaven, Jesus sighed deeply and said, "Ephphatha," which means, "Open up." At once, his ears opened, his twisted tongue was released, and he began to speak clearly.

Jesus gave the people strict orders not to tell anyone. But the more he tried to silence them, the more eagerly they shared the news. People were overcome with wonder, saying, "He does everything well! He even makes the deaf to hear and gives speech to those who can't speak." [CEB]

Okay, Shay. What do we do with these passages here?

FS: I'm really struck by the fact that, in the Common English Bible – you know how they have chapter headings that kind of tell what the story is? In the Common English Bible, the heading is, 'An immigrant's daughter is delivered.'

B: *Yeah!*

FS: That really struck me and jumped out at me, at this time in our country when immigration is such a topic of debate. I think often, and especially in my evangelical upbringing, this passage with the Syrophoenician woman would have been interpreted as, you know, Jesus testing her. Or, you know, trying to find out if her faith was real. And I think the actual answer is, no, actually, Jesus is being a racist dick in this passage, and the woman rightly calls him out on it. And he realizes that he was wrong and changes his ways. I think – this passage is so instructive to me.

You and I have seen, on Twitter and Facebook and the messages that we get at Queer Theology, so many folks who tell us, "You can't make the Bible say something it doesn't say! You can't say that queerness is okay just because you want it to be okay." And these folks who are so convinced that nothing will ever change their minds. They take that on as a badge of honor, that it's somehow unfaithful to change your opinion, it's unfaithful to change your theology, it's unfaithful to learn and grow. [laughs] I just think that this passage is so much about – if even Jesus can have, like, a racist interaction with someone and can change how he does things, then like, who are we to say that we have everything figured out and never need to change anything?

So this is both a passage that I feel speaks to people who are homophobic and transphobic, but it's also a reminder to myself, of like, what are the things that I hold on to, really tightly, that maybe I should be examining and letting go of? Where are the areas in my life where I'm holding racist beliefs, where I'm still internalizing homophobia and transphobia, and acting that out in oppressive ways to the people around me? I need to be examining all of those things and figuring out where I need to change my ways.

B: Ooh! Amen. For LGBT people, once we come to understand ourselves as oppressed or marginalized people and not just as sick and sinful people, it becomes really easy to sort of see ourselves in scripture and find support and [the idea] that God is on the side of the oppressed and the marginalized. So like, yes, *and*, to your point, it's also important for us to not let the ways in which we're marginalized blind us to the ways in which we're privileged and powerful. Always remembering to look at each story from both sides of the coin, if you will, to see how those play out in our lives, is super important.

You know, I love that section about Jesus changing his mind, and that to change your mind on something, even on theology, is Biblical. It's like it's baked into the Bible. But this time around, this second section struck me. I think what struck me is just how different the context that we live in today is from the context in which this was written, and how we understand deafness and not being able to speak. In other parts of scripture, blindness, disease... you know, in some ways, it's very similar. There's a lot of stigma and shame that goes along with it, then and now. There's still sometimes this sense of, "What did you do?" And even if we don't say that directly to someone who has a disability, when we say things like 'good karma' or 'God blessed me with this,' the sort of alternative is that people who aren't cured of cancer or who've lost limbs must not have done something – must not have God's favor.

So in some ways, that stigma and shame and sort of divine grace or punishment is similar. But just how people understand disease and ability and disability or different abilities. You know, I have friends who are deaf and very much insistent that deafness is not something that needs curing. I would be interested to hear how deaf Christians make sense of these passages. And that's homework for me, sort of speaking to that point earlier in this podcast, is to sort of notice my blind spots. That's not something that I know about. You know, I've talked in the past about healing passages, about the shame, the stigma that goes along with that. And so maybe it's changing the culture. But I sort of wanted to own my own limitation and own the limitation of scripture. It perhaps says things in a way that doesn't resonate with people who are living with those conditions in a modern

context. In the same way that we see, just in the passage before, Jesus changing his understanding, sometimes scripture says messed up things, or has a wonky context, or is coming from a position that we might disagree with. And that's okay! Part of what it means to be a person of faith, and part of what it means to be a person of faith who believes in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, is to sort of constantly be wrestling with God, wrestling with the text. It's so easy to want to have comforting, pat, simple, black-and-white answers to questions, but as Christians, our faith is embodied and alive and living and present. That means wrestling with the messy realities of life and faith sometimes.

[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