
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: This week, we are taking a look at the lectionary text for September 16th, and we're going to look at James 3:1-12. I'm going to go ahead and read it for us. This is from the Common English Bible.

My brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers, because we know that we teachers will be judged more strictly. We all make mistakes often, but those who don't make mistakes with their words have reached full maturity. Like a bridled horse, they can control themselves entirely. When we bridle horses and put bits in their mouths to lead them wherever we want, we can control their whole bodies.

Consider ships: They are so large that strong winds are needed to drive them. But pilots direct their ships wherever they want with a little rudder. In the same way, even though the tongue is a small part of the body, it boasts wildly.

Think about this: A small flame can set a whole forest on fire. The tongue is a small flame of fire, a world of evil at work in us. It contaminates our entire lives. Because of it, the circle of life is set on fire. The tongue itself is set on fire by the flames of hell.

People can tame and already have tamed every kind of animal, bird, reptile, and fish. No one can tame the tongue, though. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

With it we both bless the Lord and Father and curse human beings made in God's likeness. Blessing and cursing come from the same mouth. My brothers and sisters, it just shouldn't be this way!

Both fresh water and salt water don't come from the same spring, do they? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree produce olives? Can a grapevine produce figs? Of course not, and fresh water doesn't flow from a saltwater spring either. [CEB]

B: Yes, yes, yes. Amen. There's so much that I love about this. It's just so beautiful and poetic and just, like, the imagery is amazing. And in particular, this one line just really captivated me: 'a small flame can set a whole forest on fire.' When we were first looking through the texts for this week, my mind when we were reading this – I just sort of rolled my eyes. I saw 'Taming the Tongue' as the heading in the Common English Bible, and I just sort of rolled my eyes. I was like, oh, this is going to be a respectability politics passage about how you should not say bad things and be nice. And then I read it, and I was like, oh no, that's not actually what this passage is about. 'A small flame can set a whole forest on fire.' The message of this passage isn't, don't say shit, right? Don't say fuck. The message of this passage is, if you preach homophobia and transphobia from the pulpit, people die. It will contaminate your lives. It matters.

This other part in here is, 'With it [the tongue] we both bless the Lord and Father and curse human beings made in God's likeness.' I just think about how often Christianity is used to curse human beings made in God's likeness. What a distortion of scripture that is! This passage right here is the conviction against all sorts of –isms that get their seed, get the embers of that fire, with words. Words matter. It's not just sticks and stones can break my bones but words may never hurt me. Words matter and words have an effect on people's lives. Words translate into action and action is what translates into effects and results. We really need to be guarding our hearts and guarding our tongues.

What about you, Shay? What does this passage bring up for you?

FS: I grew up with a very similar interpretation of this passage. Watch how you speak, make sure that you don't swear, make sure that you don't complain... [laughs] I felt a little weird even reading it again, because of so much of that "your tongue is full of evil!" It takes me back to all of those days where it was like, oh, I'm a terrible human being for even existing. And I think that the pieces that

jumped out at you are also the pieces that jumped out at me, particularly that, 'With it we both bless the Lord and Father and curse human beings.' I think that this idea of religious leaders, and Christian leaders in particular, who talk such a big game about how good of Christians they are, and how much they love the Lord, and how they're doing their best to follow God – and then turn around and say such horrific things about queer and trans folks. They say not just that it's sin, but that we are ultimately depraved and vile human beings.

B: Mhm. That we're dangerous.

FS: Yeah! And the harshness of that language is so – it's so hurtful and it's so insidious. And I think that, you know, one of the things that we talk about a lot at Queer Theology is that reading the Bible from a queer and trans perspective isn't just a gift for queer and trans folks. It's also a gift for straight and cis folks. I think about verse 6 – this idea that what we say contaminates our entire lives. When I think about these preachers and these Christian leaders and Christian not-leaders who say these vile things, I think about the fact that that homophobic and transphobic belief contaminates their entire lives, whether or not they're queer or trans themselves. Whether or not they even know that they know a queer or trans person. That hatred that is within them is doing them a disservice and is ruining their lives.

And so when we talk about getting free from toxic theology and getting free from harmful beliefs, we're not just talking about how it's important for queer and trans folks to get free. We're talking about how it's important for *everyone* to get free, because that shit is insidious and it will kill you. And you, in turn, are also killing other people when you preach it. So cut it out.

B: If you want more resources on how to sort of get free from that, over at QueerTheology.com/resources, we have a bunch of different resources on a bunch of different topics. In particular, things like recovering from fundamentalism and how to read the Bible queerly. If you grew up – or maybe even recently heard those interpretations that we were talking about in the beginning, and you want to unlearn and relearn ways of thinking about God and scripture, we've got some resources for you over there.

And if this podcast is meaningful to you, we're really glad to be back from our summer vacation, and we would love your support so that we can keep on doing this and doing more of it. There's two main ways that you can be a part of this movement. One is to join Sanctuary Collective – it's our online community. We've got a dedicated app in Slack so that you can connect with people from all around

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James 3:1-12

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the world whenever you want. It's sort of in your pocket, on the go, or at your computer. You can learn more about that at QueerTheology.com/community. And if you don't want to sort of be part of the community, if you don't want the resources, but you just want to support the work that we're doing already, we would love your support over at Patreon. You can become a supporter and get perks like stickers and handwritten cards, be able to pick the podcast verse episodes – all that and more over at Patreon.com/queertheology – we just updated it with some goal levels.

To keep doing this work and expand the work that we're doing, we could really use your help. So either QueerTheology.com/community to join Sanctuary Collective, or Patreon.com/queertheology to become a monthly supporter. Thanks so much and we'll talk to you soon!

[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