
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 30th. We're going to look at Mark 9:38-50. This is from the Common English Bible and I'm going to go ahead and read it for us.

John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone throwing demons out in your name, and we tried to stop him because he wasn't following us."

Jesus replied, "Don't stop him. No one who does powerful acts in my name can quickly turn around and curse me. Whoever isn't against us is for us. I assure you that whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will certainly be rewarded.

"As for whoever causes these little ones who believe in me to trip and fall into sin, it would be better for them to have a huge stone hung around their necks and to be thrown into the lake. If your hand causes you to fall into sin, chop it off. It's better for you to enter into life crippled than to go away with two hands into the fire of hell, which can't be put out. If your foot causes you to fall into sin, chop it off. It's better for you to enter life lame than to be thrown into hell with two feet. If your eye causes you to fall into sin, tear it out. It's better for you to enter God's kingdom with one eye than to be thrown into hell with two.

That's a place where worms don't die and the fire never goes out. Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again? Maintain salt among yourselves and keep peace with each other." [CEB]

B: *Ooh*. There's a lot in here.

FS: [laughing] There *is* a lot in here.

B: In the Common English Bible, which we're reading from, the section header is 'recognize your allies'. When we were looking through the text, that sort of caught my eye. And I want to talk about allies and allyship in just a second.

But the other thing that stands out for me in this passage is, you know, the section on, "if your hand causes you to fall into sin, chop it off." Chop off your eye, tear it out, all that. Growing up, I remember hearing this in sort of a [laughs] 'if you masturbate with your hand, cut off your hand.' I mean obviously, not literally cut off your hand. Folks who sometimes say that they take the Bible literally, in moments like this, take it pretty metaphorically. [laughs]

I think that understanding what sin is is so important. Over time, sin has become understood, in some circles, as very personal, and disconnected from anyone else in the world around us. But we see throughout scripture, when God or the prophets or Jesus talk about sin, it's most often in connection to other people. Is it getting in the way of loving God, loving neighbor, doing justice, walking humbly? I think about this when it comes to recognizing my own privileges – the ways in which I benefit from white supremacy, the ways in which I benefit from patriarchy... Sometimes, working to undo those systems, and to recognize my own complicity in that, is painful. It feels sometimes like chopping off a part of me. This thing that I grew up being told was just natural and normal and the way things are – I really have to excise white supremacy and sexism and transphobia from my being. It's not easy and it's not just going to happen. I'm going to have to do it and work at it. But in the long run, both for myself and for the world around me, recognizing that in me which causes me to sin, and working to remove that, is going to be beneficial.

What comes up for you, Shay?

FS: That same kind of thing struck me too, about how often this passage is preached – especially in the context that I grew up in, in the evangelical church –

as individualized sin. And it's usually sexual sin. [laughs] It's never anything else. It's always like, lust, or sexy times, or whatever. And I'm thinking too about the passage from a couple Sundays ago, where Mark talks about taking up your cross and following Jesus, and how often *that* passage is also preached in this individualized context. It's all about suffering for Jesus and taking whatever burdens are placed on you as a personal thing. But actually, in the context of the time, choosing the way of the cross meant participating in insurrection and fighting back against the oppression of the empire, right? Doing that work is risky, and it could end up with you being crucified.

I think about this passage in that context, too. It's talking about entering into God's kingdom in some way – limping or maimed or whatever – because of the work that you've done to fight against oppression, and to fight against being a part of systemic injustice. I think that these two passages really intersect nicely, and they challenge how often we've, especially in the United States, been trained to read the Bible as a 'me and Jesus' kind of love letter. Or, if I follow all of these rules as an individual, then I get into heaven when I die. And really, these passages are about, like – no, this is about how to create God's kingdom here and now. It's about how to create a world where people are cared for and where justice is done. Sometimes the work to create that world costs you something, especially if you're from a privileged class. That challenge to reorient how we read scripture, to be reading it from a communal lens, to be reading it from a lens of systems and oppression and poverty and justice instead of from a lens of 'me and Jesus', I think, is really important. So that comes up for me in the midst of this.

I also think, too, it's been fascinating to see so many people be like, you shouldn't read politics into the Bible. And I'm like... have – have you read the Bible? [Brian laughs] You can't not. So really what you're saying is you shouldn't read liberal politics into the Bible [Brian laughs] because those make you uncomfortable. Because I don't think that you can read scripture and not do politics, right? [laughs] The whole thing is political. It's written in a political context and it's meant to be read in that way. So that also comes up [laughs] for me in the midst of this.

B: Now before we jump off this call, you were talking about how the framing in beginning of this sort of raised your alert in terms of this exchange between John and Jesus. John says, "We saw someone throwing out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he wasn't following us." And Jesus says, "Don't stop him." What was going on for you there?

FS: Yeah, I mean, when you said this, the subtitle of this thing is recognize your allies, right? So much of the work that you and I do, particularly around allies, is like, an ally doesn't get to say 'this is how I want to do the work, whether it's helpful for you or not.' So I was reading that and was like, oh, no, that actually makes me super uncomfortable. I don't want an ally to be like, well, I'm *for* you, so I get to do this work however I want. Because I don't think that that's actually helpful and I don't think that that's the way to work in solidarity with people.

And you brought up this really great point, of, this isn't like cis straight folks and LGBT folks. These are people who are both part of the same community. These are all Jews, all Jewish folks, who were living in an oppressive system and living under the occupation of Rome. That changes the conversation.

B: Yeah, it made me think of exactly what you said, that they're not, like, the Roman allies. [laughs] Even I think that notion would be sort of silly, right? [laughs] To Jesus. Like, what do you mean, Roman allies? The folks here were living under Rome, were subversively healing under Rome. They might have had slightly different tactics or be affiliated with different teachers, but we see, in our own histories, that happening. There are different LGBT groups sort of working at the same issue from different directions. When we talk about the black civil rights movement, you had Martin Luther King, Jr., you had Jon Lewis, you had Malcolm X – who were all oppressed under the dominant system, and were coming at it from different ways. This isn't saying, like, oh well! The white moderate – you just have to put up with that person! I think that context is so important, and it's a reminder that context matters when you read the Bible. And in particular, recognizing the context that Jesus and Jesus's followers were living in and operating from, and that of who they're talking to or who they're talking about, is so important.

[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