
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're taking a look at the lectionary text for October 7th, which is also my birthday! We are going to look at Genesis 2:18-24. I'm going to go ahead and read it – this is from the Common English Bible.

Then the Lord God said, "It's not good that the human is alone. I will make him a helper that is perfect for him."
So the Lord God formed from the fertile land all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky and brought them to the human to see what he would name them. The human gave each living being its name. The human named all the livestock, all the birds in the sky, and all the wild animals. But a helper perfect for him was nowhere to be found.

So the Lord God put the human into a deep and heavy sleep, and took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh over it. With the rib taken from the human, the Lord God fashioned a woman and brought her to the human being. The human said,

"This one finally is bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh. She will be called a woman because from a man she was taken."

This is the reason that a man leaves his father and mother and embraces his wife, and they become one flesh. [CEB]

B: [crosstalk] I have—

FS: —there is—

B: Go ahead.

FS: There is a *lot* in this text.

B: [laughs] Yes.

FS: And I know you that have some feelings about it. [laughs]

B: I have some good feelings and some bad feelings. I just have a lot. So, we've talked about this passage at least once before on the podcast. I will put a link to that in the description below, in the shownotes. And also, I made a video about for our YouTube channel – I'll link or embed that as well.

So, today, what comes up for me is – and I think I have shared this story before – I like this idea of 'it's not good for the human to be alone.' When we look at the creation story, or any stories in the Bible, really, it's often helpful to think, who is this by and who is this for and what are they trying to teach us? And in the creation stories, you know, I see that the big questions being asked and answered are who are we, what is our place in this world, why are we these social, relational creatures, and how did things get to be the way they are? This story is very much looking at the way things are, and then looking back, and sort of creating myth and story and meaning to sort of explain the world that the authors of this story saw, right? I think that 'it's not good that the human is alone' is such a universal human experience. I'm an introvert, and even I, if I am alone for too long, I start to go a little stir-crazy.

I also think one of the things that sticks out for me is that Adam's choice is so central. God brings, you know, a hippopotamus and an elephant and a raccoon and an ostrich and a lizard. And each time, Adam is like, oh no, that's not the one for me. God trusts Adam, or in this translation, the human – trusts the human to know what is right for him, and to know who is right for him, and who he's compatible with. Here, when he sort of looks upon the woman who was created, he says 'this is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh.' This is the one who is *perfect* for him. And that's something that queer people can experience also. I remember the first time that I dated a guy. It finally clicked. This story finally clicked, because never before had I looked upon someone and been like, "Oh, *you!*" I get you, you get me, we fit.

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And so, I think that, in this sort of story, these are the first two humans so obviously they have to be a pairing that can procreate to make the rest of humanity. Right – it has to be a person with a womb and another person with sperm. And just because this one couple in this one story is a man and a woman, doesn't mean that that's, like, the only way that you can couple. That just sort of fits into this particular story. I think that queer people can see ourselves in this story regardless of whether or not these characters are queer – and I think can find queerness elsewhere in scripture. I know some folks point to this and say, well, it's a man and a woman here and so it must be a man and a woman everywhere, and that's just not the case.

I also think that it's important to note, nowhere in here does it talk about marriage, right? Nowhere does it talk about monogamy in here, nowhere does it say that you can only be one flesh with one other person. Nowhere in here does it say that if you have sex with someone that you leave a little bit of yourself behind, or your tape gets less sticky, or your rose petal gets dirty, or whatever sort of metaphors you may have heard in purity culture. [laughs] Anyone who has had multiple relations, either sequentially or simultaneously, can know that you can look at someone and feel really deeply for someone, and really connect with someone, be really entwined with someone. Love is abundant, and a parent can love multiple children – literally have multiple people from their literal flesh. So I think, metaphorically as well, you can feel this way, have this experience.

That sort of teases that we're having a webinar all about Christianity and polyamory coming up, on Sunday, October 14th. You can learn all about that at QueerTheology.com/polyamory and sign up. But Shay, what here comes up for you?

FS: All of the things that you said. And this idea, right, that we have this mythological narrative that now has become twisted into this blueprint of 'how it happened' that I think is really damaging. It's not what the text is about and it's not what the text says. I think that this text in particular sets up this idea too, that this ultimate, straight, heterosexual coupling of one man and one woman that become one flesh, and everything is perfect forever and ever and ever – has been the cause of so much heartbreak within the Christian tradition, and within couples. It's hard sometimes to read this text and find the beauty in it, so I love what you've done to kind of queer this text and talk about Adam's choice in the matter, or the human's choice, and talk about that this doesn't have to be the be-all end-all of what relationships look like.

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But the other thing that really jumps out to me in this text is this idea of naming, and how important it is that each of the animals have a name, and this idea of humanity being given the power of naming. In some ways, this naming becomes co-creation with God, right? The creatures aren't fully there until they've been given a name. And this power that humanity has been given to kind of co-create the reality and the world that we're living in! I think that that idea of naming continues to hold resonance for the queer community, particularly, I think, for the trans community. We are people who often name ourselves. And by naming ourselves, we give ourselves a new creation, and a new sense of creation. I think that's really powerful and beautiful.

And also this idea of the power of being able to speak a new reality into existence, both God speaking the world into existence and now the human naming all of the animals and by that, bringing new things into existence. We also have the power to continue to speak a new world and a new reality – to speak justice into existence. And by speaking it and by naming things, we have the power to do something about them. That's really beautiful, and it's not about relationships, right?

B: Yeah!

FS: In a sense, it's about our relationship to creation and ecology and the world, and also to one another. So I think that there's so much resonance in this passage, about a *lot* of different things.

B: Yeah, words matter. We talked about that in a recent podcast as well. And I also want to point out, too, that you and I are both men. This passage, [speaks out of side of mouth] like much of the Bible, centers the experience of the man here. It's perhaps a bit easier for us to access this and feel good and inspired by it. If you're a queer woman who only is interested in other queer women, men might not be a part of your relationships or much of your life at all. I also just sort of want to name that – just because I find some goodness in here doesn't mean that it's going to resonate the same with everyone, or doesn't mean that this passage isn't also problematic. That the woman is named in relationship to the man is, I think, problematic, and again sort of a sign of the times. And that doesn't mean that it was good then, or that we should excuse it, but sort of recognize that that's how a lot of folks were thinking back then. Not everyone, obviously. So we can, I think, critique it at the same time that we find inspiration in it. And if you don't find inspiration in it [laughs] that's okay too.

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FS: Just a reminder about that we've got that webinar on polyamory coming up on the 14th. You can go to QueerTheology.com/polyamory to find out more information about that and to sign up. We really hope you'll join us. It's going to be a fascinating conversation, and hopefully really enlightening and educational as well.

[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

Referenced links:

June 15, 2014 episode: <https://www.queertheology.com/genesis-1-2-creation-adam-eve/>

June 11, 2017 episode: <https://www.queertheology.com/lgbtq-gods-image-genesis/>

Queer Theology YouTube video: https://youtu.be/8pSo_FWQQOE

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