

May 26, 2019

Jesus Heals (Literally!)

John 5:1-9

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PODCAST START:

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 co-founders of QueerTheology.com and the hosts for this podcast. I'm Father Shay Kearns

B: And I'm Brian G. Murphy.

Hello, hello, hello, welcome to another episode of the Queer Theology podcast. Today, we are looking at the lectionary reading for Sunday, May 26. We're going to be looking at John 5:1-9. I will read it to you now from the contemporary English Bible.

After this, there was a Jewish festival, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, near the Sheep Gate in the north city wall, is a pool with the Aramaic name Bethsaida. It had five covered porches, and a crowd of people who were sick, blind, lame, and paralyzed sat there. A certain man was there who had been sick for 38 years. When Jesus saw him lying there, knowing that he was already been there a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

The sick man answered him, "Sir, I don't have anyone who can put me in the water when it is stirred up. When I'm trying to get to it, someone else has gotten in ahead of me."

Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." Immediately the man was well, and he picked up his mat and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath.

Okay, Shay, what do we make about this passage?

S: I love this passage. It's so complicated and weird, and kind of ridiculous; and I kind of dig it. There is footnote in this version that we read that says that there is also this addition where people would wait for the water to move and sometimes an angel would come down to the pool and stir up the water, then the first one going into the water, after it would've been stirred up, was cured of any sickness, right. So, this is the context of this passage, this idea that the sick man is waiting at this pool for 38 years to be healed, but like he doesn't have anyone to get him into the water.

And I love this passage because it feels like an indictment on a system that requires people to sit by a pool to be healed and that where if you don't have the help that you need, you're just kind of shit out of luck, right. Which I think feels very similar to the American healthcare system.

B: Yeah, yeah.

S: And feels very similar to people from marginalized communities who traditionally have less access to healthcare resources, who don't have the help that they need, who are in danger, all

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the time, of not being able to access what they need, and who sometimes don't have the community or at least the family community, right, who can carry them into the pool or who can get them to the care that they need. So, I think that, again, when we talk about the gospels, and we talk about the work of Jesus, right, this isn't necessarily just a miracle healing story, this is also a story where Jesus is saying that your physical needs are important. It's not just about... Jesus didn't say to him just pray this prayer and your soul will be saved, and whatever like-

B: And that's all that matters, you should be happy with that. Yeah.

S: Yeah. Jesus said get up, you're going to be healed, you're going to be physically healed. And that healing, then, I'm assuming, restores this man to community, right, because now he can be a part of the community. And then there is also this piece about the fact that Jesus was healing on the Sabbath. And, again, this idea that your physical needs are more important than worship and religious rules, right. That this sense that healing, and that restoration to community, and that physical needs matter; and that they matter to God, and that they matter beyond whatever rules are set up. So, I love this passage even in spite of the kind of weirdness of it and in spite of the complexity of healing narratives, right. They're complicated.

B: There is a lot going on there from disability, and healthcare, and all of that. I really resonate with all of what you say, and I think it's like been eye-opening for me to sort of read Scripture in a new and a critical way, and sort of places this in its actual context. And that's the work that we try and do inside of Reading Queerly, sort of understand the Bible as political, as queer. You can learn more about that at QueerTheology.com/community. We'll also be doing another course about reading the Bible coming up, if you want to get on the waiting list for that, head on over to QueerTheology.com/courses.

So, there is some really cool stuff here. I love this as sort of an indictment of the American healthcare system. And also, right now, one of my best friends is dying from cancer. He is going to die, months, not years even. And, of course, Rachel Held Evans just died. And, sometimes, people get sick and die, and it's not enough to just say get up and walk. And I know so many people were praying that Rachel Held Evans would get well. And I know lots of people tell my friend that they're praying for him or that tell me that they're praying for him, and it's sort of like... He usually just says, "Thank you." And if he is not around, I usually say, "Well, that doesn't help."

There is this sort of also a myth, right, that if you just fight hard enough you can beat cancer. I'm like, "Sometimes, cancer is going to kill you, no matter how hard you fight and no matter how much faith you have." And so, Jesus isn't going to save my friend. And so, that just sucks. It's like shitty. And so, sometimes, it's hard to read passages like this, because I'm here for the political context of it, and also when people try and use passages like this to give me or him sort of a sense of false hope that... Well, you are not his doctors. It's like there is like now, short of a literal miracle, that he is for sure going to die. And so, then I'm like what do you do with passages like this?

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S: I think that's why it's so dangerous to read Scripture as this literal kind of roadmap to faith and spirituality, right. Because, if you do, then you are left with these ideas that if you just pray hard enough, God will cure you. And if you aren't cured, then that you've somehow done something wrong or that your faith wasn't strong enough. Which I think is both not true and also really toxic and terrible theology. If you grew up reading the bible literally, it's really hard to shake that.

And I think it's so, so, so damaging both to the people that are sick and to everyone around them. And so, it's really important that when we read Scripture, we're paying attention to the larger things that are going on, but that we're not reading it as a rule book, or a textbook, or a 100% literal guide to everyone's personal situation, because that is just going to leave you with some really, really dangerous theology.

B: Absolutely.

[outro music plays]

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 cisgendered supporters.

S: 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.

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