
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 and welcome back! Today, we are looking at the lectionary reading for Sunday, June 16th. We are going to be looking at Romans 5:1-5, I will read it to you now.

By faith we have been made acceptable to God. And now, because of our Lord Jesus Christ, we live at peace with God. Christ has also introduced us to God's undeserved kindness on which we take our stand. So we are happy, as we look forward to sharing in the glory of God. But that's not all! We gladly suffer, because we know that suffering helps us to endure. And endurance builds character, which gives us a hope that will never disappoint us. All of this happens because God has given us the Holy Spirit, who fills our hearts with his love.

Okay, Shay. There is some stuff in here! I know that we've heard a lot about suffering and endurance, and just the past few days we've been talking about How to Read the Bible course that we've been putting together. And you were talking about the importance of understanding the Christian scriptures in their context. So, how might that context eliminate this passage?

FS: First of all, me growing up --- literal and infallible read of the Bible, that was how we were taught. We would read a passage like this and the extrapolation would be: that we should be happy when bad things happen to us, right? So, our kid gets cancer, well we should somehow be happy about that because it's gonna build character in us and give us hope. Or you think that you were born gay, and maybe God is just asking you to suffer and fight against that because that's going to make you a better Christian, and you'll learn a lot by being celibate for life. Right?

B: Yeah!

FS: I think we've all heard these takes on the passage, and if you read it at face value that does seem to be what it's saying: that we will gladly suffer because we know that suffering helps us to endure.

But I think it's really important to remember that Paul, or whoever the author of Romans is, is writing in the context of the Roman empire, as someone who is being persecuted for their faith. And as someone who, because of their faith, is standing up to empire and really confronting it and saying: You are all saying that God is here, but actually, God is over here with the marginalized and the oppressed. The empire of God, the kingdom of God is better and more

just than the empire that you are pushing. And when you say that to empire, the odds are that you are going to suffer. And it's in that context, that this author is saying: we will gladly suffer because we know that God is going to help us endure and because we have this hope that we are in this fight for something better.

I think that totally flips this passage on its head, right? Because it's not about suffering for suffering's sake. It's not about a vindictive God who does shit to you, that you have to be happy about because God is also using that shit to teach you a lesson. God isn't a big meanie in this passage. It's about when you confront empire, bad things will probably happen to you. And God will help you and be with you in the midst of that because God is always on the side of the oppressed.

B: Yeah, I think that distinction is so important. Recently, I mentioned that one of my friends is very sick. Someone close to me, who is not close to him, said to me: "This is just one of those times that I'm like mad at God plans. I don't understand it." I said, No! God's plan is not for us to suffer, but God is with us in the midst of that suffering. I think that it relates to LGBTQ Christians so much. Like you were saying, it's not like God wants us to suffer. If we find ourselves closeted and queer at a church that doesn't accept us. God is there with us to help us get through this and to survive and to thrive. It's not that God wants me to take on the suffering, I don't have to. It's how we respond in the midst of suffering that is happening around us.

FS: Yeah, absolutely. I think this is one of those reasons that we spend so much time talking about the context of scripture, right? Why we spend so much time doing courses around it and writing articles around it. Because it's so easy if you grew up fundamentalist or even evangelical, it's so easy to miss all of this. Also, I think sometimes you feel like --- well if I didn't go to seminary how can I possibly read the Bible? I don't think you have to go to seminary to read the Bible. But I do think you have to know some of the contexts and that's really important to know this context in order to read the scripture well and to not have it continue to perpetuate these harmful ideas.

B: Yeah, absolutely!

Quick announcement before we go. The podcast is moving to Sundays from now on. So, in the past it's a few days before the Sunday we are talking about which we know can be a bit confusing for folks. So we are going to move it to the Sunday that the passage is about. So it's almost like you get a little church sermon in your podcast app. So this coming Tuesday, there won't be an episode because that episode will be coming out on the following Sunday. Then it will be every week, every Sunday on wherever our podcasts are found. So we will see you then!

[outro music plays]

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, Tumblr, Twitter, and Instagram.

B: We'll see you next week.

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