

September 15, 2019

Being Found

Luke 15:1-10

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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.

B: Hello, hello, hello! Today is Sunday, September 15th 2019, we're going to be taking a look at Luke 15:1-10. I'll read it to you now and it's also available through the show notes of this episode at queertheology.com/294 if you want to read along there.

All the tax collectors and sinners were gathering around Jesus to listen to him. The Pharisees and legal experts were grumbling, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose someone among you had one hundred sheep and lost one of them. Wouldn't he leave the other ninety-nine in the pasture and search for the lost one until he finds it? And when he finds it, he is thrilled and places it on his shoulders. When he arrives home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Celebrate with me because I've found my lost sheep.' In the same way, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who changes both heart and life than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need to change their hearts and lives.

"Or what woman, if she owns ten silver coins and loses one of them, won't light a lamp and sweep the house, searching her home carefully until she finds it? When she finds it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Celebrate with me because I've found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, joy breaks out in the presence of God's angels over one sinner who changes both heart and life."

Shay, what do we do with this?

FS: I am so intrigued to read this passage again. You know, this is one that was read all the time when I was growing up in my church. I feel like I have heard sermons on this passage for years and years and years and years. I mean you know, they often centered on converting people...

B: Yuuuppp!

FS: ...and there's this need to evangelize, and witness, and share our faith. Just a lot about that. I'm actually preaching on this passage this Sunday and have been thinking a lot about what's a new take on it, is there a new take on it, and what do I wanna say. You know, I'm part of a Lutheran church, an older congregation --- probably in a lot of ways shrinking congregation. I think that many mainline churches that are shrinking, there's a lot of anxiety about: how do we

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get more people to come to our church, how do we grow our numbers. It's this sense of we just have to fill the congregation, right? I'm struck by both these stories that Jesus tells. The message isn't: "Be really great and get a lot of people to come into your congregation." It's like, "There are lost people out there, go and find them, and be where they are." So I'm struck by that kind of turn around especially for the kind of liberal mainline church who are not comfortable with ideas like witnessing and converting people. What does it look like to then live in a world in such a way that you're going out after people who are lost. And I don't think of lost in a sense of like non-Christians. I think of lost in a sense of people who are experiencing despair, or who are searching for meaning and don't know how to find it, or who are trapped in their lives and feeling depressed about that. What is it that we have to offer that could be helpful for them. It's about going and being with people in those spaces and not necessarily like bringing them in into our congregation. And I think that that has to be the conversation. These ideas can't be transactional anymore. They can't be: "I'm going to be nice to you, so you join my church and save it from dying." It's gonna have to be: "What does it mean to live out in our faith in new ways when so many people don't wanna come to church on Sunday morning?" That's not exactly a queer take, but that's something that I'm really thinking about for my own context for this Sunday.

What about you?

B: Yeah, I also heard of this passage a lot growing up. Sometimes it was, they would tell us that we are supposed to be excited about when we converted people or like if we're good Christians our whole lives and some terrible person became a Christian at the end of their life, they still could go to heaven and God will almost be happy. It sounds like a good thing, but also, there's a twinge with this like, I don't know, weird jealousy or something. I was super, super involved in young life growing up and they have these summer camps for a week at a time. We're like bringing out high school kids from all around the country and the target audience is people who are not evangelical Christians, to try and convert them. And literally, at the end of the week, they have people who have decided to "give their life over to Jesus", like stand up and everyone claps and they play music and it's like a literal celebration. The waters that we swim in are tainted by conservative, fundamentalist, and evangelical Christianity. So it's really tempting to feel like that's the real version of Christianity and our understanding of it is somehow like an adaptation. I wanna push back on that like that evangelical Christianity as we know today is relatively modern invention like within the past 100-200 years, right? I remember a few years ago, one of my boy friends from college have been not out for a long time. We were in our late 20s and he came out. I remember saying, "Oh! The angels are celebrating in heaven today! So and so, came out."

I do see this parallel between coming out or embracing your LGBTQ identity, and being found. Before we come out, we're like literally separated from the queer community. We are literally separated. From any of us for are in anti-LGBT versions of Christianity. We're like separated from a faith that is giving us life, so we're like in this place of metaphoric darkness. We need a woman to come bring her lamp out to come find the coin that's missing right? It's dark, and scary, and depressing, and there's all sorts of research that shows that not being accepted and affirmed in your queer identity has negative mental, physical, and health repercussions. And so, we've got this good news of the gospel of the queer Jesus Christ. So I thought that: A. To you

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point earlier, it's a good thing to share it. And not to share it in a, say this prayer with and you become a Christian, and then it stops there. But like, we have light, we have healing, we have community. If you're alone or hurting or in despair, as you were saying, or have needs to be meeting, as you as well say elsewhere. This is a place that we should come together and celebrate this beloved community. That's my, I guess slightly more queer take on this passage. I also find some real insight into coming back to these passages, and realizing like oh no, the Bible is alive, all of it, from Genesis to Revelation for LGBTQ people and there is a good word in there for us too.

[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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