
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.

FS: Hello, hello! Welcome back to the Queer Theology podcast. We are excited to be back with you today. We've got a really special podcast coming up today, so we're stoked about that. But first, Brian, what's been going on in your world and life?

B: I just went to Disneyland. My good friend, whom we dated for many years and now we're just friends - whatever just friends is. He is a Disney nerd and we have annual passes to Disneyland because it's only \$20 a month that you go once. So there's a new Star Wars ride that just opened, so me, and Matt, and our friend Molly all went down to Anaheim. We got up at the crack of dawn because the way that they do it is that you have to be in the park at the time that it officially opens, at 8:00 AM. Then everyone frantically goes on the app on their phone to try and get a boarding group, and then that's the digital queue for the ride. So I woke up at 5:00 AM and Matt picked me up at 6:00 AM and we drove to Anaheim and we got in the park with 10 minutes to spare. And then it's just how fast is your cellphone and how fast are your fingers. So we got on the ride, we didn't end up getting on until 4:00 PM, we just did all the stuff in the park and we went to the new cantina there. I got this drink that had this foam that made my mouth numb, which was wild. Then the ride was the most amazing ride I've ever been in my entire life. I won't give any spoilers because it's just incredible. It was so cool! Then we went immediately home and I fell asleep. What about you Shay?

FS: Yeah, I feel like in Minnesota, the winter --- it's hibernation mode and so I'm taking a lot of time to read books and write some things and relax. I've been reading this memoir about Sister Rosetta Tharpe who is this phenomenal and pretty unknown - she was a gospel singer. Started out as a gospel singer from the Pentecostal tradition, but did some cross-over work with blues. She played the electric guitar, she's really phenomenal, and really was a groundbreaker. Some people call her the founder of rock 'n roll. She was doing it before anyone else. It turns out that she had relationships with both men and women throughout her life. It's been really fascinating to learn more about her, learn more about this unknown person who should be really well known. Who is just a phenomenal musician. There's a great video on YouTube of her playing on a train platform, playing her electric guitar and singing with a group choir backing her. From the early '60s, late '50s that's just wild!

B: That's bonkers!

FS: Go check out. I think it's the song, Up Above My Head. She's just phenomenal, so I've been enjoying that and looking forward to reading some more books and chilling. Oh and I just joined the YMCA, so I'm super excited to start going and swimming. 'Coz I got to do some

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swimming while I was out in LA with Brian and I just loved it. So I was like, "Oh! I'm gonna do this. I think this will be good self-care in Minnesota in winter, to get in a pool and swim."

B: So today we have a special guest on our podcast, Sarah who was a member of Sanctuary Collective and first came into our orbit through Christianity and Polyamory course last year. Not dissimilar from the Faithful Sexuality course that we're getting ready to do now, but also not quite the same but lots of overlaps. So we have an interview with her coming up, but before we dive in just a reminder that this podcast is brought to you by over 125 supporters on Patreon.

FS: If you enjoy this show and want to support it, you can do that for as little as \$2/month at patreon.com/queertheology. Learn more about why we need your support and check out the perks at patreon.com/queertheology. Okay, on to the show!

B: Hey there, Sarah thank you so much for joining us today!

Sarah: No problem! I'm happy to be here.

B: So can you just tell us a little bit about your faith journey in, and not your whole life story, but what brought you to this point where you are today?

S: Sure, so I grew up in a relatively conservative Southern church in the Disciples of Christ umbrella in West Virginia. I was never really satisfied with the conservative theology of it was taught to me. It was a lot of just: this is what the Bible says, so this is what we believe; questions are okay as long as they're the right kind of questions. So then when I went to college, I still was in West Virginia I moved from South to North, and I started taking religious studies courses because it allowed me to ask questions I'd never been allowed to ask before. That just bloomed into this love of literary, criticism of the Bible, as well as questioning my faith and how those two can tie together instead of push against each other. So then when I got out of college and out of my post-graduate work, I did a religious internship in Ohio, moved to Ohio, and then I was looking to do church work. I was interested in going to seminary, which I just started. In my looking for resources for a class that I was doing on sex, and gender, and the Bible. I stumbled upon Queer Theology, the website, and it was just right before the class was gearing up. So I just happened to hit it at the perfect moment, I think.

B: How awesome!

S: Yeah.

B: I can relate to lots of parts of that story, so can you share a little bit about how your faith, and your sexuality, and your sex life where interacting or not interacting?

S: I realized that I was not straight when I went away to college and found out that... I had friends. I was describing my relationship with other women from high school to college friends. They were like, "Sarah, that's really gay." I was, "No, no, no. We were just really good friends."

They were like, "Okay! I'm gonna trust your experience, but just know that a lot of that sounds really gay."

Then I was like, "Oh wait. Maybe I am a queer woman." Then I explored that in college and because I had such a strong Christian faith, I was, "Well, if I'm queer and I'm a good Christian. And this is what I believe about the Bible. There's no reason that those can't exist at the same time." Then as I started to research, I realized there was a huge debate going on about sexuality and religion that I just completely glossed over because until you are exposed to a new aspect of identity sometimes it's really easy to do that. Especially if the culture you grew up in isn't talking about these issues.

So then I definitely was, "Okay, my view of the Bible has always been based on this idea that the ultimate challenge is loving everyone regardless of what they do in their spare time." So yes I'm a queer woman, but I'm also a Christian. I'm gonna love myself and other queer people the same way because everyone has human value and deserves love. So to me it wasn't necessarily reconciling those two ideas, that was just very inherent to me. It was more: how do I find the language in the Bible to support my idea? And how do I interpret scripture to get that?

FS: I love what you said about your realization that if you were queer and a good Christian then those two things must be okay. Because I think so many of us have this opposite: we take in everyone else's ideas first instead of starting with ourselves and saying, "I believe these two things." I love the fact that you have the confidence in yourself to just be, "Yeah. This is who I am and so these things can't be opposed." That's really beautiful.

S: Aw! Thank you!

B: You mentioned wanting to find ways that you're like queerness and sexuality could complement your Christian faith. But what was the challenges of having not yet found that? Or sort of the impetuous for wanting to go deeper beyond just it's okay.

S: As far as who I am as a person, I am a seminarian right now, but my primary career is actually teaching high school Science. So I'm a scientist first, teacher second, and seminarian third. I had already done a lot of work to try and reconcile the ideas that science and religion could co-exist peacefully, but I knew that a lot of times the argument against science was that there was so much in the Bible that didn't line up with it. So when I started to do my work on my sexuality and presenting it from a Biblical standpoint, I knew that I was going to have to find ways that the passages in the Bible and my sexuality intersected in order to prove that point to people. Just because I already had to do that with being a woman, and a scientist, and also religious. So I think that that's kind of --- I had laid the groundwork doing other, not proving work but just validation work in the past to build on there.

Then it's just grown because, and you guys know this, but as you get older and as you started to dive into these issues you discover more about yourself. And I realized that not only was I a pansexual woman, but I was also polyamorous. How does that interact with church life? I've also realized that I'm demi-romantic and how do I find a healthy, faithful basis for that kind of relationship with the world and the Bible. Yeah!

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B: You then got connected with us and we first met you through the Christianity and Polyamory course which is not the same thing as this Faithful Sexuality course that's coming up, but I think there will be a lot of similar themes like working through negative cultural messages and really just messages and finding ourselves in Scripture. So can you share a bit about what the process of going through that was, and what that unlocked for you?

S: Yeah. So I signed up for that class 'coz I was very, very new to the idea of Christian Polyamory. I'm in my third polyamorous relationship as we stand, and when I started that course, I was just out of the very first one that I had ever been in. And so I was just seeking knowledge and community that would tie to Christian Polyamory. Like I said, I just happened upon the class and I'm so glad I did just because the community that I found that there have been people that had done it before, people that were trying for the first time, people that had really succeeded and struggled with it, all of those perspectives were just phenomenal. But then there was the extra course work. I'm excited about this new course on the sexuality portion just because we talk about sexual ethics in the Polyamory course and that just blew me away. I'd never had to layout in words what my sexual ethic was, and that helped me realize that the relationship that I had been in had not been the healthiest polyamorous relationship, but it taught me so much about what I wanted going forward. And taught me how to communicate boundaries. Now as a pastor, in the between, between that class and now, I've come out to my church as both pansexual, polyamorous. It's given me the language to help me put up boundaries between what questions they can ask, and what they can't, and what I'm comfortable with. I don't know. Just having the resources and language provided as well as that community that I can turn to if I needed to resource mind was just a phenomenal thing.

FS: That's awesome! I would love to hear if you don't mind sharing how it's been coming out to your church? How's the reaction been?

S: Well, okay I did mention that I'm in Ohio which is not necessarily the most socially-accepting state... [laughter]

B: It's not San Francisco.

S: So I think that more than anything, people just were overwhelmed by curiosity and they forget that there are questions that you wouldn't ask your pastor. I had someone ask me the other day if I had sex of all of my partners at once? I had to have a genuine conversation with them about would you ask a straight, male co-pastor this? Or would that be a question you would not ask? That was a realization for them.

It was scary at first, the first time I mentioned it was in a bulletin insert. Just about my history, what was bringing me to ministry at this church, and then it's just been a bunch of small followup conversations from that. People are ready for it. Our church, in particular, is going through what the disciples call an open and affirming process. Which is basically just this affirmation that LGBTQ folks are not only welcomed in the church but would be included and offered leadership positions. Anyway, so me coming out as a pastor was both just because I want to be comfortable where I'm being a pastor, but also as a way --- not to test the waters necessarily,

but get the church ready to be, "Ah, yes. These people exist and they're here already." It's been fun and just kind of keeps me on my toes. I haven't had any horribly negative reactions yet which has been a blessing.

FS: Cool! Thanks for sharing that.

S: Yeah, thank you.

B: Before you signed up for the course, were you nervous about anything in terms of participating in it? If so, what was that?

S: I had a lot of nerves regarding talking to other people about Christian polyamory. Every Christian space I've ever been in has been relatively lukewarm to people that are queer in general. And I wasn't worried about that at the website called Queer Theology [cross talk]

B: For sure!

S: But even when you start to get towards what a lot of people would consider the fringes, polyamory is what I think on the fringe as far as queer group goes. A lot of people are still judgmental about it, and you have a lot of internalized judgment when it comes to it. I've encountered that a lot in other Christian spaces. So I was nervous about entering this community and perhaps having to defend myself or my experience. In that space, I was still in that, "What if I'm not actually polyamorous since my first relationship failed?" And I think that a lot of people probably come to that space from that perspective of: "What if I'm not XYZ enough to be a part of your group?"

That was just the very opposite of what I experienced. The first week I was so nervous, but by week four I was so sad that it was almost over. There would be group calls again later, but that it wouldn't just be this weekly thing in my life. I think the nerves will resolve themselves, but most nervous going through is acceptance in a space, especially Christian spaces are hard for LGBTQ people.

B: Yeah, it's been a beautiful community. We've got folks that are polyamorous like you and I, monogamous, celibate, vanilla, a-sexual, demi-sexual, binary, trans, non-binary, the whole... it's a beautiful tossed salad of identities. I think what's beautiful is being able to share the ways in which I've found God through my experience with these identities, but also being able to then encounter the divine in other people whose identities and experiences are different than mine. I don't have to judge them because someone is demi-sexual, or someone is a-sexual, or someone is celibate, and I'm slutting polyamorous. There's stuff to celebrate in all of our identities and it's not about prescribing one way that you have to be queer and Christian, asexual and Christian, but it celebrates the diversity of ways to be faithfully sexual.

FS: I think so often in Christian communities, there's this idea that there's one way to be faithful and Christian. What I love about being in community at Queer Theology is the way that we're creating space for people to figure out what it means for them to be faithful. That that can look really different from person to person. I think it's a beautiful way to say like our spirituality

can, and should, and does inform our sexuality and also that that doesn't have to look just one way.

B: Yeah. And that might change over time.

FS: Absolutely!

B: So what would you say was the highlight for you from your time in the course or one of your most memorable things that we did, or that you learned?

S: I don't know. There was so many gems from that course that I took away, at the same time, I was also planning that sex and gender in the Bible. Life-study is what we call them. They're basically just applied Bible studies. I just remember when we were talking at my church about, if communities, the ones that you were describing could exist and be like, "Yes! They do and I'm not going to oust this whole people, but I'm a part of one of those communities where there is this open exception and there's this fluidity to it, that's not stifling your theological growth, but bolstering it in a way that's going to be healthy that you don't see often in church communities. I wasn't really struggling. I know a lot of people struggle with, I mentioned this before, but this idea that you can't be Christian and poly. That was another one of those. Well, I'm poly and I'm a Christian so that's gotta be wrong.

B: Dumb and done.

S: Yeah. But it was just really validating to hear the breath of experienced people had. So people that have been practicing polyamory for their whole lives up to this point versus people that were already married and exploring polyamory for the first time together. Just hearing my struggles echoed in other people and their solutions to it, helped me be more confident in both my theological background and in my own sexuality. So I really think that in classes like this, you learn skills to do that introspective work that will help you in your day to day life. As well as just the community aspect of it too.

B: Cool! Well, thank you for chatting with us a little bit about Christianity, polyamory, and sexuality. You're gonna stick around for the second half of this podcast and we're gonna queer the Bible together.

S: Excellent! I'm so excited!

B: Okay, let's open up our Bibles and queer this text.

Today we are going to take a look at 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. This is a passage that Sarah picked. Sarah, in one quick sentence, can you tell us why you chose this passage?

S: There's just so much love and equality in it, that I love it.

FS: Awesome! So I'm gonna go ahead and read it for us. This is from the Common English Bible. Again this is 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.

Love is patient, love is kind, it isn't jealous, it doesn't brag, it isn't arrogant, it isn't rude, it doesn't seek its own advantage, it isn't irritable, it doesn't keep a record of complaints, it isn't happy with injustice, but it is happy with the truth. Love puts up with all things, trusts in all things, hopes for all things, endures all things.

Love never fails. As for prophecies, they will be brought to an end. As for tongues, they will stop. As for knowledge, it will be brought to an end.

So Sarah, reading this, what comes up for you as we read this and what is this passage inspire in you?

S: I have always loved this passage because at least if you're taking the text literally if you are just reading it off the page it never specifies what type of love that it's talking about. So it applies to any type of love in your life. So when I think about it, even if I'm not in a romantic relationship this love is going to apply with how I interact with my best friends, when I interact with my church family, when I interact with even my students to some extent. It's just this idea that whether you're prophesying if you're trying to predict the future, that is not always going to be solid ground. Knowledge won't always serve you, but you're always gonna have this idea that love will carry on and that's what you're going to be remembered for. It's kind of like a legacy. So this not only builds how you should interact with the entire world regardless of this hierarchy of love that we've established. But it also just talks about how that's the most important thing.

B: I think because this passage is often used in wedding ceremonies, I can't help but think of it in that context. So it's almost... it's sometimes used as a formula for love between two people who like each other, and love each other, and how you should express that love. But what's coming up for me today is perhaps because this is the Queer Theology podcast and we're queering theology, but I'm thinking about the ways in which sometimes people try to use love against queer people, against us to say "I love you and that's why I'm kicking you out of the house." or "I love you and that's why you have to go to conversion therapy." or "I love you and that's why I won't come to your wedding."

More specifically, my partner's family and I had a strained relationship, and they've said a number of times, "But we love you, we love you, we love you." I'm always like, "Okay, well like is it, are you patient and kind? Are you not jealous, and are you not arrogant, and are you not rude?" You keep saying love, but it doesn't feel like love to me. I don't see that love and so I'm into this idea that these are all the things that love is not. Sometimes saying what love isn't is just as important as defining what love is.

FS: Something that jumped out to me in this passage is, like you Brian I've often heard this at weddings and it's usually to me, feels kind of this sense of well, just love people and everything's gonna be okay. It becomes this glossy thing, but the verse that jumped out to me is that "...it isn't happy with injustice, but it is happy with the truth." That's not a love that glosses over oppression, it's not a love that says we'll just all hold hands and everything's gonna be fine, let's not talk about this hard things, it just that love is in the midst of revealing truth and that

might not be happy. That might be really uncomfortable and painful, but that's the point. And so that jumped out at me, this is a passage with more teeth than I think we often give it credit for.

B: Yeah, for sure. To bring back to this Faithful Sexuality course that we're in the midst of registration for, that it's not about anything goes. Well, if you're sex-positive or if you're a queer Christian or if you're a progressive Christian. There is no God and anything goes. No! We have ethics, and morals, and divine centering. It's maybe not the oppressive brand of Christianity that we've been told that it's supposed to be. Anything else coming up for you Sarah?

S: I also love the "Love does not delight in injustice but rejoices with the truth." because I've always told people --- I've had a lot of friends that have had to use, I don't want to use "tough love" because that's used against a lot of people, it's a form of abuse or whatever. So that's not the words I want to use, but friends that have had to be like "Sarah. Let's talk about boundaries. Let's talk about ways that we can love each other in a way that is sustainable for both of us." And I think that those are honestly more important of a conversation. A lot of times than this fluffy idea of, "Oh! I love everybody and I just want everybody to get along." 'Coz a lot of time, love is the work that you put in to keep it going. You know? You can love someone that you meet. You should still show that love to people, but a lot of the work of long-term friendships, long-term relationships, long-term connections is the work that you put in to keep it going. And a lot of times, that's just sitting down and being, "I'm hurting and perhaps this is what's causing it, but like we need to address it." Then if you get into systemic issues, like Shay was saying, I think that's beautiful, too. This idea that love is action. Love isn't silence. Love is action. And moving in a direction towards justice.

FS: Yeah, so just a quick reminder that our Faithful Sexuality course, the registration is open for that. It's gonna be closing in a week or so, so make sure that you jump on that if you are interested.

B: [Queertheology.com/faithfulsexuality](https://queertheology.com/faithfulsexuality) is where you can learn more and sign up!

[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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