

March 1, 2020

Knowledge Not Shame

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

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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.

FS: Hello, hello, hello. Welcome back to the Queer Theology podcast. This is the podcast for Sunday, March 1st and we are super excited to be back with you again. But before we dive in Brian, I would love to hear what's going on in your world.

B: Oh! It is the "thick of winter" and I don't mean to brag, I know you hate this, but it is so nice here in Los Angeles, but more specifically, I've been reflecting on my own mental health journey. Some of you may recall I get really bad seasonal affective disorder in the winter, or at least I used to in New York City. I've noticed this winter, a few times where I've been what I would describe as depressed, and I'm... Oh, being in warm weather doesn't magically solve my depression, but I can feel like... Oh, this is what used to happen in New York and then this would set me into a spiral that would knock me on my ass for a month, or two. And now, it knocks me on my ass for a day or two. So that has been like nice to know that this thing that I was able to do --- move, which not everyone can do has been helpful for my mental health. Also, a reminder that there's not any one magic solution that - just moving is not going to fix, I'm still prone to depression and I still need to talk about my feelings, and do other types of self-care practices, and I have on my list to try and find a specialist that I can afford with my crappy health insurance. Because I know even though it's better than it was before, I know that it could still be better. It's always a process which sometimes I just wanna have arrived, and be "fixed" and it'll all just be easy, but it's nice to be easier. I'm also looking into a psychiatrist to get back on some medication that I used to be on that I had a store of that I'm now on and so yeah.

The health insurance industry in America is just bananas. I posted about this on our Instagram stories about medication both as a sacrament, and also LGBTQ healthcare as a Christian issue. The world is a mess and I wish healthcare was easier, but I am thankful for the ways in which I've been able to improve over the past year. So that's what I'm doing on these days. What about you?

FS: Yeah, so I have just started assistant directing a musical, of all things here in Minneapolis, which is wild! It's very much not my typical wheel house, I don't really do musicals. But this is a really interesting and fascinating piece about what it means to be trans, what it means to be an Asian-American person, what it means to be finding your identity. So it's a really beautiful piece. I'm excited to be a part of it. It's opening in March here. So it's gonna be fun. It's nice to be in a different role in a theater production. Usually, I'm either a writer or just producing work. So this gets me to be in the mix with the actors a little bit. So it's been a fun adventure so far. I'm glad that I get the opportunity to do that. It's at a theater that I've been working with in Minneapolis as their trans-advisory council liaison. Which is just a fancy word for getting a

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bunch of trans people together to help them think through the ways that they are welcoming trans artists and trans patrons into their space? And really taking a look at, what is your paperwork look like? What is your building look like? Are you actually extending the welcome that you say you are extending? Which feels very much like the work we do at Queer Theology at churches, right? Saying where are your bathrooms? Are they accessible to trans people? And do you ever have trans people speak at your church? And if so, when? Do you only bring them out on Trans Day of Remembrance? Right? All of those different things. It's been fun to do that in a different context. In a context that I also love: I love the church, I love the theater, and I want both of those communities to be better about actually living out what they say they feel about trans folks.

B: Before we dive in, just a friendly reminder that this podcast is brought to you by our supporters over on Patreon which are now just over 140. So thank you to everyone over there.

FS: Our patrons not only help to keep this show on the air but also support all of the many, many free resources we create over at QueerTheology.com. Stuff like: articles, videos, PDF guides, and all sorts of things that we keep rolling out more of. So thank you to all of our Patreon supporters.

B: This week, we want to give a shout out to Jessica Luna. Jessica, thank you so so much for your support. Every single dollar counts and it means the world to have you part of this little family with us.

FS: If you enjoy this show and want to support it, you can that for as little as \$2 per month at patreon.com/queertheology. You can learn more about why we need your support and check out all of the perks, at patreon.com/queertheology.

B: Okay, let's get on to the show!

FS: So this week we've got a listener question, oh it's a good one, so here we go.

What kind of historical context would be required to truly appreciate what the writers of the Bible were trying to communicate?

And this question comes from Jesse.

B: That is a great question, Jesse and I think it's so important that you're asking it. So many people gloss right over context, or if they're asking about context: think that that means a few sentences before and a few sentences after whatever verse you're looking at. I think that the answer is: all of the contexts, and would also that there's one amount of context that will give you all of the answers that you have to arrive to. It's not black or white, on or off. It's like, the more that you know, the deeper you can understand it, and the more nuance you can bring to the text. It's like peeling back an onion: there's layers, and layers, and layers. And also, just at a top-level context about the way that the Bible is written that oftentimes scripture is intended to mean multiple different things to the same person, or different things to different audiences, or different things to different times and places. Even if you know all of the possible historical context and all of the exact translations --- it happened 2000 to 5000 to 10000 years ago it's not

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possible to know all of it. But even if it were possible, it's not like you would arrive at the one definitive meaning of the text. The multiplicity of meanings is often baked into the text. Also, historical context is an important key component to it. There's also literary context and religious context as well, all factor into understanding the Bible. I studied Religion in undergrad and I'm still, 15 years later, learning more. Shay, what would you add to this, Mr. Seminarian graduate and ordained priest?

FS: Yeah. All of what you said Brian is absolutely true. For me, I think it sometimes can be helpful to figure out what section of the Bible are you most jazzed about diving into? Because I think, like you said Brian, this idea of historical context right? Even just the events of the Bible spanned like years, and years, and years, and years. So like we're talking about a lot of different historical contexts. So there's a part of me that's, okay let's just narrow it down. Which section do you want to look at? I have found that one of the things that were super helpful for me in starting with historical context is really just starting with Rome. Rome and the Gospels, and figuring out how to place the Gospels in a Roman context. That wet my whistle for the whole thing and got me really jazzed about it. So then it inspired me to keep on doing that study. So that's always a great place to start and feels like a helpful place to start. I also think that overarching in all of Scripture, there's two really main pieces: that's exile and empire. If you can start to dive in about what Scripture text were written in the midst of exile and what might that mean. And which text were written in the midst of empire and what might that mean. That's also a great place to start.

We have an entire course on this that we did last fall. It was called How to Read the Bible and basically looked at all of the different kinds of context. And we are gonna do that course again, so if you are interested in finding out when we're gonna do that course again, and getting on the waitlist. You can go to QueerTheology.com/courses and find out more about that. I would suggest checking out --- a great place to start is one of the books by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, they have a book on The First Christmas, The Last Week --- so that's like The Passion, and also The First Paul. Those are really great accessible books for folks who wanna know a little bit more about where to start reading context.

B: And we will put the exact names, and titles, and spellings, and links to where you can find them to the show notes of this episode which you can find at QueerTheology.com/318.

FS: Throughout the week we're diving deeper into questions like these and more, everything from coming out, families, dating, reading the Bible, creativity, all sorts of this stuff inside of Sanctuary Collective. We would love to have you be a part of an international community of LGBTQ Christians and straight, cisgender supporters. You can find out more about that community and join at QueerTheology.com/community.

B: Ok, let's open up our Bibles and queer this text!

FS: This week we are taking a look at Genesis 2:15-17 and 3:1-7, it's one of those wonky split passages again. I'm gonna go ahead and read it for us as we get started. This is from the Common English Bible.

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The Lord God took the human and settled him in the garden of Eden to farm it and to take care of it. The Lord God commanded the human, "Eat your fill from all of the garden's trees; but don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because on the day you eat from it, you will die!"

The snake was the most intelligent of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say that you shouldn't eat from any tree in the garden?"

The woman said to the snake, "We may eat the fruit of the garden's trees but not the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden. God said, 'Don't eat from it, and don't touch it, or you will die.'"

The snake said to the woman, "You won't die! God knows that on the day you eat from it, you will see clearly and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." The woman saw that the tree was beautiful with delicious food and that the tree would provide wisdom, so she took some of its fruit and ate it, and also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then they both saw clearly and knew that they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together and made garments for themselves.

B: I am so excited. We just talked about this text! It's been a minute. So this text is a foundational text of the Hebrew Bible, the Christian Bible, of religious studies. Everyone --- if you studied religion in any sort of way: casually, at church, in seminary, for a degree. You're gonna talk about this. So there's a few things going on here and this pairs so well with the question we got this week about context. There are just so many different contexts that you can look at this from to illuminate new meaning. That just feels especially important because the creation story in Christianity we call this part of it "The Fall" is so well known that people have ideas about this story that are based on what they've been told about this story, and not necessarily what's actually in the story itself. And so I think going back to it and reading it with fresh eyes is super important. And super illuminating.

A few things that pop out to me is that nowhere in the text does it actually say that the snake is the devil, it just calls it the snake. The snake was not wrong. God was not necessarily right in this text: God said, "Don't eat from it or don't touch it or you will die." And they ate, and they did not in fact die. People said that well, they died later. Also, like nowhere in the text does it say that before they ate they were immortal. And that because of this they were gonna die a whole lifetime later, right? There's just not actually present. So I think if you didn't have all of this baggage or preconceived notion about what this text says before you approached it, I think I will read this and be like: "Oh well, they didn't die. And in fact, they learned something about themselves that they didn't know before: that they were naked." And so the snake was not necessarily wrong. And that is a progression in the Hebrew Bible. That the way that humans understood God shifted overtime.

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And also, that because of literary criticism which we mentioned earlier. Different communities were writing about God in different ways. Like Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 were actually most certainly, different sources that were combined. Over the course of history, God goes from this anthropomorphized type person who says things that are not always don't immediately happen that sometimes at one point doesn't know where someone is, walks around to eventually becoming this sort of more out there, in the sky type person. More of a spirit. We began to use different languages and different metaphors for how we understand God and how we relate to God. So that's just something to note and to pull at that and say, well what is this version of God have to teach us? What did that God mean to this community? What might we learn from that text? How do we, when we pair this story with other stories of God, that are also in the Bible? What is that evolving or multi-faceted view of God has to teach us? I think that's my initial thought. What about you Shay?

FS: Yeah. I think that this passage is so intriguing. Because it feels almost impossible to read it without the baggage. I think that's one of the things I struggle even now. I was reading this and I'm remembering right being taught that Adam and Eve, which they're not even named in this passage either, so we're making the assumption that that's who we're talking about. That one of the things that came along with their nakedness was them being ashamed. But I'm reading this again and it doesn't say that. It just says that they knew that they were naked and so they then made garments for themselves. We can maybe extrapolate that it was because of that noticing that they felt uncomfortable or shame or whatever that's why they wanted clothing. But again, we're kinda bringing that to the text and I think that all of the angst around human bodies and human sexuality that the evangelical church, in particular, has placed upon scripture is like part of what I'm reading into this text because of my own history and baggage.

I think that you're take on it of like they learned something new about themselves actually feels much more healthy and holistic of like, this isn't necessarily a moment of shame or "sin". But it is a message and a moment of self-agency, where the humans are making decisions for themselves, and they're noticing new things about themselves, and they're taking care of themselves in a different way. We can think of maybe the shift of babies who will run around naked at any given moment, to being able to take care of themselves, and dress themselves, right?

So could this be instead of a text about the fall of humanity, instead be a text about humanity coming into its own? Like learning more about what it means to be human and how they're gonna interact with the diety that has placed them in this space.

B: Yeah, and one of the things that we talked about when I was studying this text in school was looking at it from --- we looked at this story of Adam and Eve, and the garden creation from the Hebrew Bible, from the Christian Bible perspective, and the Quran's perspective. To see what are the similarities and how are they different. In the Christian scriptures, they also talk about this story and the Christian scriptures talk about this same story in a different way than the Hebrew Bible talks about it. I think that noticing that is important and it doesn't necessarily mean that the Christian version is the right way and that they're correcting the Hebrew Bible. It also doesn't mean that because the Christian Bible is different than this one, that the Hebrew

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Bible is the right one. It's just like these are how different communities, at different times were making sense of this story.

To your point of how you were shifting the way you think about this in the Christian scripture, it's definitely framed as a fall. But what we talked about in school is that this is --- in the Hebrew scripture it's a lateral move. They move out, sideways from the garden, not down. That's a value-neutral journey that they're taking out. They certainly do leave the garden and can't re-enter the garden as a result of this action, but that's not necessarily, here at least, a bad thing. It is perhaps, like you were saying, a place for growth, and transformation, and a new way of relating to ourselves and to God. It's telling the story of what's happening.

FS: We dive into text like this a lot at QueerTheology.com and we're about to get ready to launch a course on Queering a Bible. This text in particular or the text from Genesis are often wielded against queer and trans folks. The whole one-man-one-woman, Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve, all of those things. So we think it can be helpful to continue to dive deep into these texts. We are diving into more work around queering the Bible all the time over at QueerTheology.com. And we've got lots of new articles that are gonna be coming out soon. So if you're not on our mailing list, make sure you go over to QueerTheology.com and jump on the mailing list so that you can get all of those resources as they come out. We think it's really important to continue to do this work, especially when texts like this one or the ones from early in Genesis are so often used against queer folks. You know, all of those Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve, one-man-one-woman text. So diving into that and doing that work of what does it mean to queer scripture, I think is really important, and life-giving, and healthy for queer and trans-Christians to do. So again, go over to QueerTheology.com, jump on our mailing list, I will be sending out some new resources soon and we would love to have you get those.

[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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