

February 25, 2018

What will you give in exchange for your life?

Mark 8:31-38

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PODCAST START:

[intro music]

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 cofounders of QueerTheology.com and the hosts for this podcast. I'm Father Shay Kearns —

B: And I'm Brian G. Murphy.

FS: Welcome to the podcast for February 28th! [sic] It is the second Sunday of Lent. This week, we're going to take a look at Mark 8:31-38. I'm going to go ahead and read it for us. This is from the Common English Bible.

Then Jesus began to teach his disciples: "The Human One must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and the legal experts, and be killed, and then, after three days, rise from the dead." He said this plainly. But Peter took hold of Jesus and, scolding him, began to correct him. Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, then sternly corrected Peter: "Get behind me, Satan. You are not thinking God's thoughts but human thoughts."

After calling the crowd together with his disciples, Jesus said to them, "All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me and because of the good news will save them. Why would people gain the whole world but lose their lives? What will people give in exchange for their lives? Whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this unfaithful and sinful generation, the Human One will be ashamed of that person when he comes in the Father's glory with the holy angels."
[CEB]

B: Ooh, buddy.

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FS: Yeah.

B: There's a lot here. A few things jump out at me, but I'll just start with one. Right off the bat, I just really relate to Peter in this passage, as someone who is really concerned with the here and now, and also *pretty* skeptical of supernatural things of all sorts. [laughs] To hear this person that I've been following around, dedicating my life to, thinking is fighting the good fight, say, "What's going to happen is I'm going to be rejected, and then killed, and then I'm going to rise from the dead." I think that that would strike me as, no, man, you're not going to be rejected. What I want from this movement is to transform the whole world. You're gonna win. I can see myself being like, no, don't get down on yourself, I don't want you to be killed. I think there's a way we can come out on top still. And so this passage is a little challenging for me because I get what Peter was thinking. It's sometimes hard for me to not look at the life and ministry of Jesus and say like, did it work? [laughs] Here we are 2000 years later. Did it work? [laughing] Obviously I still feel very passionately about still following the call of Christ, but sometimes I think to myself, like, ah, I don't know about this. Are you really doing it, Jesus? That's sort of my first thought. What do you have to say, Shay?

FS: I'm really intrigued by this particular translation of this passage. In verses 34 and following, this was quoted a ton in my church growing up, but it was always, "Why would people gain the whole world but lose their soul?" I think that that translation allows us to kind of distance ourselves from the revolutionary nature of this passage, because what is a soul really? We kinda know, but we kinda don't, and like [laughs] it doesn't really make sense all that much. But when you talk about, "Why would people gain the whole world but lose their lives?" We know what our lives are, and we know what that means. I think that this passage, too, about what will people *give* in exchange—

B: Yes! I was just about to say that! [laughs]

FS: I think a lot about respectability politics in both the queer movement in general and the trans movement, and even more particularly, in the queer and trans Christian movement. This idea that we play it safe and we are kind to the people who are oppressing us and we don't rock the boat too much and we get ourselves into monogamous gay marriages. We have kids and we move to the suburbs and we are the good gays, and that's what we're doing and that's what it means to be a follower of Jesus. I feel like this whole passage is saying, don't you get it? That's not how any of this works. Jesus was rejected by all of the

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people who came before him. He was part of this movement, like we talked about last week. He was baptized into this movement, and yet all of these people are like, “Um, actually, you’re a little radical for us. We don’t really want to be a part of that.” He’s calling us to be a part of his movement, which is to say, stop playing these respectability games, and figure out what it means to be a part of God’s kingdom. And I don’t think that this is saying, like, the self-denial of my childhood church, where it was like, be miserable for Jesus! [laughs] That’s not what this is about. But I think this *is* saying that safety is not all it’s cracked up to be. When you choose to be safe, in the contemporary, American, upper middle class white way, you are giving something up in exchange for that. It’s going to cost you in ways that are so much more detrimental than being a part of God’s kingdom, and whatever safety that might cost you.

B: I also hear ‘take up your cross’ a lot, and used in really terrible ways, to say, oh, you know, being gay is just your cross to bear. You’re just going to have to be celibate and deal with it. Or, you’re in an abusive relationship, but his temper is just your cross to bear. That’s not what this passage is saying, first of all. Jesus is very much clear, like if you want to come after me, you choose to take up this cross – but also, the cross means something particular. It doesn’t mean staying in an abusive relationship. It doesn’t mean being miserable. It doesn’t mean denying yourself. It means death. The cross means death at the hands of the state for political and religious insurrection. This translation really drives that point home. It says, what will people give in exchange for their lives? To follow the way of Jesus often puts you in direct conflict with the way things are. That might cost you something up to and including your life. I think what I take away from the gospel message of Jesus is that the kingdom of God is worth that risk. That proclaiming release of the prisoners and sharing what we have and seeking justice, living into that new world, being co-creators in the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven – living that sort of life is worth the risk of the cross that comes with it.

FS: Yeah, and if you want to explore more about these thoughts, we are tackling the politics of Jesus throughout this whole Lent and Easter season over at the website, so make sure you check that out – QueerTheology.com. We’ve got articles and we’ll keep talking about it on the podcast. We’ll have a couple webinars, so stay tuned for that. If you’re not on our email list, just head on over to the website and get yourself on that list. You can get the articles sent to you as soon as they come out.

B: And, one more thing. This Lenten season, we’re reading *The Last Week* [by Marcus Borg], a book about the meaning and political implications of Jesus’s life

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in general, and his crucifixion and resurrection in particular, inside Sanctuary Collective. If you want to dive even deeper into what all of this means, read a book, be in discussion with other people around the world – you can read more at QueerTheology.com/community.

[outro music]

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, Twitter, Tumblr and Instagram.

B: We'll see you next week.

PODCAST END

Transcript by Taylor Walker