

Queerology: A Podcast on Belief and Being

Episode 39 – Rev. Emmy R. Kegler

Transcript

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Hey friends, this is Matthias Roberts, and you're listening to Queerology, a podcast on belief and being. This is episode 39.

Emmy: Is there actually a truth that's transformative in this text for the life that we live now? Is there a truth that sets us free from the burdens? Is there a truth that's liberative for those who are oppressed? Is there a truth that breaks the privileged out of the oppression of their privilege and puts them alongside the oppressed for healing and reconciliation? The answer's always been yes. The answer has always been yes.

Matthias: Emmy R. Kegler is the pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in northeast Minneapolis and she's founder and edit of Queer Grace, an encyclopedia of online resources around LGBTQ life and faith. She has her masters in divinity from Luther Seminary in St. Paul and is an ordained pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. She was raised in the Episcopalian church and then has spent time in evangelical circles, non-denominational traditions, before finding her home in the LCA.

She pastors a small servant-hearted community in northeast Minneapolis focused on feeding the hungry and community outreach, and is also the co-leader of the Queer Grace community, which is a small group of LGBTQ Christians in the Twin Cities who meet for worship, bible study, and fellowship. Emmy talks about that a little bit more at the end of the episode, so if you're in the Twin Cities area and looking for a faith home or community to just kind of explore things, be sure to check that out.

She lives in St. Paul, enjoys biking, board games, and babysitting her fiancé's dogs. I've known Emmy for a couple years, and when I first decided to start this podcast, Emmy was one of the first people on my list of, "This is who I want on the podcast." I am so excited to have her on the podcast this week. We're talking about scripture and the complicated relationship that goes with being queer and holding to a text that for so many of us has been used to hurt and harm us in many different ways. This may be one of my favorite conversations that I've had thus far for the podcast. Maybe instead of me saying more about it, let's just go ahead and dive in. Emmy, hi, welcome.

Emmy: Hi. How's it going?

Matthias: Good. How are you doing?

Emmy: I'm doing great. It's been a great day so far.

Matthias: Good. I'm glad to hear that. I'm so excited to have you here. Thank you for joining.

Emmy: I'm really so honored to be asked. You've had such an incredible slate of folks from the very beginning, and it's just really an honor to join that group, so thank you.

Matthias: Oh, thank you. To start, the question that I ask everyone, how do you identify, and then how would you say that your faith has helped form that identity?

Emmy: Sure. I primarily identify as queer, or as a queer woman. That has changed significantly from when I first came out. I first realized I was gay at 14 and started coming out I would say officially at 16. One of the things that really changed that for me is when I was identifying as gay, a lot of the questions that I was dealing with and negotiating were around sexuality very much as a core sort of identity, and what does that mean for me as a member of the church and how do I deal with these scriptures, the passages that we often talk about. That was very much what my identity and my spirituality was confined to was answering these questions that were very specifically about what was the gender of the person I was going to end up with going to be.

As I've gotten older, as I've pursued my call into ministry, it's become more important for me to identify as queer. That's because my identity and the difference that I live in because I am a woman, an assigned female at birth, attracted to women, all women, cis and trans, and what that has meant for me is more than just my sexuality and more than just the gender of the person that I'm with. It does actually affect a lot more about the ways that I see the world, the way that I move through the world, and the way that I relate to scripture, and not just those six or seven verses that are often used against LGBT people.

It's become very important for me to identify as queer and to understand that my sexuality actually has a bigger impact than just on my sexuality, and also that it brings me into unity with others. One of the things, I know that queer is a difficult term, and you have this conversation I know often, but some people really find it offensive, problematic, because it's been used as a slur, and then in the younger generations primarily within the LGBT community, people are finding it more useful as an umbrella term.

Finding my primary identity in that reminds me that I am also connected to people who are queer like me, but who are not queer like me, in the sense that they are bisexual or pansexual, that they are a trans or non-binary or agender, that they are asexual or aromantic. All of us fall into that queer heading, and when I'm more primarily identifying with that, I remember that my struggle, which primarily ended when we achieved

marriage equality in the United States, my legal struggles at least, aren't over because I am part of a larger community.

Matthias: It sounds like queer as a term not only connects you more fully into your body, your experience, it moves you beyond just sex, but it also connects you to a larger community and a larger way of being in the world that goes much further than just yourself.

Emmy: Very much so, yes. Very much so. Claiming that term has been a way of reminding myself to be more expansive in my understandings, to not be narrow-minded and focused on only the issues that affect me, and to remember not only are there issues within the queer community that don't affect me, but that I am called to participate in, but also that that takes me into other communities as well and really does challenge me into understanding the intersections of oppression and privilege.

Matthias: You're a pastor.

Emmy: I am.

Matthias: Yes. You mentioned scripture. You mentioned the ways that you've moved through scripture and those clobber passages that I think we're all oh so familiar with, but also relating with scripture more fully, more as a whole. I'd love if you could maybe talk about your relationship with scripture, especially as a queer woman who's a pastor.

Emmy: Yes. I've had a call to ministry that I've been aware of since about age 14, which is a really fun thing to be both quietly becoming aware of your non-heteronormative sexuality and your call to ministry at the same time. It really amps up that sense of teenage isolation where I'm different from everyone, no one's going to understand me, and I was like, "No, really, no one is going to understand me and I'm going to be alone for the rest of my life."

I came of age during the period of culture, "I kiss dating goodbye," movement, and that sense of, "I'm going to be chaste until marriage. I'm going to be celibate until marriage. I'm going to be celibate until God leads me to the person that I'm meant to be with," was this really deep challenge for me in the sense of I don't know if I'll ever find somebody else who shares my faith.

When I was primarily identifying as gay, when I was younger, a teenager and early 20s, I was really concerned with how to defend myself against the bible. I think that's an almost necessary process for everyone, especially people who don't grow up in affirming families. I was fortunate enough that I did grow up in affirming family and an affirming church, which is miraculous, really, and I am so deeply grateful.

Even so, I was not sheltered from the conversations that were happening both at higher denominational levels, just things that were going out in the news, things that I was encountering online as we were getting AOL in the house and I was dialing into chat rooms. I was learning that there were other Christians for whom the scriptures that I

was being taught in confirmation were not applicable were, and they used them quite mightily against me, and when I came out, I actually lost friends at school because they said that God says it's not okay. I'm looking at them going, "What? No. I was specifically taught that that part doesn't apply. That part's the same as the not eating pork part. I don't understand where you're getting this."

I went through this process of really developing all of these different, theologians call them hermeneutics, and that's a fancy way of saying lenses, for reading the bible, what are the different ways that we come to scripture and understand it and read it. I still felt very captivated by the church and by the Jesus story, despite my really tenuous relationship with scripture, and so I pursued my call to ministry.

In my 20s, I was at some lecture that Nadia Bolz Weber out in Denver was giving. She was here in the cities for something. She talked about how her understanding of her job as a pastor was that she was supposed to be in love with scripture in public. I remember just thinking, "Well, shit. That is not something that I think I can do. I don't think I can be in love with scripture in public. How can I be in love with this text that has been used to abuse me and to abuse my queer family? I don't know how to reconcile myself with this story."

The further that I pursued my call to ministry, especially because I was pursuing it within a Lutheran church, which has a deep and long history of intentional engagement with scripture and taking scripture very seriously, I had to come to terms with how I was going to love scripture. It's not an appropriate metaphor to use because I'm not from a culture that uses arranged marriages, but this is what I imagine arranged marriage is like, is that I really wanted to pursue my call to ministry and I ended up stuck with a bible and having to deal with it and just go, "What am I going to do with you? I have to live with you for the rest of my life." Not just in a, "Well, I want to be part of a church community, so I have to do it on a Sunday morning." I want this to be my life.

What I ended up doing, I was actually in seminary or finished seminary at the time when some friends out in Madison, Wisconsin were doing this through the bible in 90 days, you read like 16 chapters a day. It's really only a project that pastors or seminarians can have the time to take on, and they were going to be doing it with some college kids who were off school for the summer.

That's what I did is I churned through 16 to 20 chapters in a day and just really forced myself to say, "If my whole life is going to be a testimony to the fact that there's some sort of truth, some sort of reality in this scripture, despite the fact that I don't believe it's literal word for word King James perfection, what does that mean for me?"

What I found was the more I took seriously my call to ministry, my call to serving as a pastor, the more I deliberately engaged with the bible and tried to find ways to put my walls down around it, and I was doing this within a community that was very supportive, so that was a huge blessing, that was what changed me was that direct and constant engagement for 90 days and just saying, "I'm going to sit with this text until something good comes out of it."

Phyllis Tribble talked about, in about I think 2013, 2014, she gave an interview and she talked about understanding the bible as the stranger who wrestles with Israel, Jacob. He's Jacob when the stranger comes to him and wrestles with him until daybreak, and Jacob gets the upper hand and pins this messenger, who was either a messenger of God or is literally God, and says, "I will not let you go until you bless me." The messenger strikes him on the hip and makes him lame, changes the way he walks for the rest of his life, but also gives him a new name and says, "You will no longer be Jacob, heel grabber, supplanter, one who steals from others, one who takes what is not his. You will be Israel, for you have striven with God and with humanity."

Phyllis Tribble talked about that as a metaphor for understanding scripture. I will sit on top of you like a big brother with his little sibling until you give me a blessing. I will not let you go, and sometimes that means we are wrestling all night, and yet that metaphor has remained very true for me since then. I call it the hermeneutic of the hip. It's an understanding that you might walk away, and in fact, often when we engage with scripture, we do walk away wounded because of the way others have used it against us, and yet we also walk away blessed. That blessing passes on not just to us but to our family, whether that's family of origin or family of choice, into a faith community that's around us.

Matthias: That's so interesting that you bring up the story of Jacob and wrestling with this stranger and that, "I will not let you go until you bless me," because as you've been talking, that was immediately what popped into my mind was those exact words, "I will not let you go until you bless me." I'm wondering, then, as you have intentionally engaged with scripture, as you have been seeped into his world now for a while, what has that wrestling produced? What has been the blessing?

Emmy: One of the greatest gifts of the congregation that I serve and the people that are being drawn into it is that we're creating intentional space for the LGBTQ community, both within our "normal" worship, but then also having specific events set aside for queer and trans Christians to participate in and to really make that space where we can wrestle with our own religious trauma or spiritual struggles that are unique to us.

One of the great things is that that brings a lot of agnostics and atheists out of the woodwork in the neighborhood, and they just start showing up and going like, "Okay, I think this is potentially ridiculous, but you're doing it in a way that I'm interested in." I say, "Great, we have a chair for you." One of them looked at me and just said, "I just don't get it. I don't get why you think this is true." I finally just looked at them and I said, "I don't know. I'm not really sure that Harry Potter isn't true."

Matthias: Yes.

Emmy: They looked at me, "You've lost your mind," and I was like, I mean in the sense that quotes from Harry Potter are transformative in people's lives. The setup of Harry Potter, we're seeing right now with the teenagers out of Parkland who are doing all of this activist work. We've been feeding them this content of Harry Potter and Divergent and Hunger Games of teenagers who can rise up against an oppressive authority and it's not "real" in that apparently Hogwarts doesn't actually exist and that's why I've never

gotten my letter, and it's not real in that sense, but it's true in the sense that it tells us the truth about our lives, about who we are, and who we have the potential to be.

That's one of the things I keep trying to mine in scripture, knowing that people are showing up on Sundays and during the week who are like, "I don't think I believe in God or in Jesus. I don't really understand what you're getting out of this," and yet they keep showing up, and I'm like, "Okay, how do I find a truth in this, how do I communicate the truth in this, that is about more than just, as Reverend Broderick Greer says, eternal fire salvation? How do I talk about something that's more true than just, 'God came down and died for our sins so we could live forever with him in heaven'? Is there actually truth that's transformative in this text for the life that we live now? Is there truth that sets us free from the burdens? Is there a truth that's liberative for those who are oppressed? Is there truth that breaks the privileged out of the oppression of their privilege and puts them alongside the oppressed for healing and reconciliation?" The answer's always been yes. The answer has always been yes with scripture is that I keep coming back to it and sitting on it and saying, "I will not get up until you bless me," and there's a blessing in it.

For example, there's a passage in Matthew, I think it's Matthew 25, that we just finished reading in the liturgical calendar, the lectionary cycle, which finished right before Christmastime. It's the story of the 10 bridesmaids, the five foolish and the five wise, or that's how we translate it. Don't let me get into the Greek, because I will never stop. It's this story where these 10 bridesmaids are waiting for the bridegroom and five of them have extra oil and five of them don't, and those who don't have enough oil say to the ones who do, "Give us some of your oil or we'll run out," and the wise ones say, "No, go to the market and buy your own. We don't have enough to share."

The five foolish unprepared women go to the market to buy their extra oil, and that's when the bridegroom comes, and so the five wise, selfish, horrific, terrible bridesmaids get to go in with the bridegroom and he shuts the door. The five foolish ones come too late and he says, "Depart from me. I never knew ye." I think there's weeping and gnashing of teeth at the end of it. There might be eternal fire.

I have all these colleagues who are like, "How do I preach this story?" This story is literally, "You should be selfish just in case Jesus comes back." I was like, "Yes, okay, I see that, but my hermeneutic says that I have to sit on this text until it has a blessing for me."

The blessing that I've found is that it started to sound a lot like my years in al anon. I grew up in an alcoholic family and I have been in relationships with alcoholics, recovering alcoholics usually. One of the core principles of al anon is that you can't set yourself on fire to keep somebody else warm. I started seeing that in those five "wise" bridesmaids who are saying, "You can't have my oil," and started seeing women in those bridesmaids saying that to men, who are like, "Explain to me exactly what male privilege is," and women are going, "No, I'm not going to give you my oil, my time, my energy, my money to explain something to you that you can easily Google."

I started seeing black and other communities of color in the wise bridesmaids looking at the white people and going like, "No, I'm not going to keep explaining this to you over and over. If you honestly can't perceive the fact that racism is dominant in American society and still controls the lives of those who are in any way distinguished as non-white, I don't have enough oil to keep giving you. The light is going to go out."

That's both liberating and challenging, in the sense that it's liberating for me when I need to be the person who says, "Look, I cannot give you more of my oil. You have to do your own work," and it's also more of a challenge to me in saying you can't expect everyone else to make up for your shortfalls. Sometimes you have to hike your butt down to the market and do your own work.

Matthias: Wow. I'm sitting here just in awe a little bit of yes, the blessing in that, and your preaching, and the deep goodness that is in even those passages that we look at and are like, "What the hell?"

Emmy: Yes, yes.

Matthias: I think about a professor that I had who he wrote a book called Reading the Bible with the Damned, and his work around the Old Testament in the prison system, and working with inmates and reading scripture and working to pull out the deep blessings that are present even in those texts. We read that book alongside Phyllis Tickle's book on feminist hermeneutics on the Old Testament.

Emmy: Yes, yes, yes, Texts of Terror?

Matthias: Texts of Terror, yes, that one, and the fact that I think in the tradition that I grew up in, that kind of wrestling was never really allowed, that kind of sitting and working with the texts in ways of, "There is blessing in here somewhere. We just have to find it." It's such a challenge.

Emmy: Yes. I think there's that presumption in some Christian communities of, "If you don't see the blessing right away, there's something wrong with you," which is so anti-biblical. I mean that in the literal sense of if you look at stories of scripture, there are plenty of people who don't see the blessing right away. Abraham, who seriously messes up, gets this huge blessing and promise from God, and then takes it into his own hands. He believes, "Oh, God is going to give me a child and a future. Well, God hasn't done it yet, so clearly God meant for me to sleep with my slave girl and have Ishmael that way." If we anthropomorphize God, I have to imagine her putting the divine hands over her face and just going, "That's not what I meant. That's not what I meant. I have to go back down there and explain."

That desire to, "I have to understand right away. I have to have the promise fulfilled right away. I have to find the blessing right away. If I live in a period of doubt or questioning or if a text comes through to me as painful rather than a blessing, there's something wrong with me," and that is just so anti-biblical, so anti what the bible stories actually say about the movement of the spirit.

Matthias: I'm curious about this concept of blessing, because that's something that I've been personally working on in my own life I think for the last year, year and a half, but even in the last few weeks, it's something that has popped back up for me of the practice of blessing, but especially speaking blessing and speaking blessing over our own lives and our hurt parts and the hard parts. I'm really curious around, this question isn't fully formed, but what are your thoughts about blessing in general, the power of blessing?

Emmy: Oh, that's such a great question. Let me sit with it for just a second.

Matthias: Yes.

Emmy: Okay. One of the fascinating things is the way the word blessing, and I actually haven't done a deep word study on this Hebrew-wise, so someone wiser than me may be able to correct me, but it functions in so many different ways. The psalms especially will talk about, "I will bless the Lord." The proverbs talk about blessing the Lord, and that means usually giving praise or giving acknowledgement to God's work, so what has God done in the past, how do we bless God for what God has done in the history of our lives. Then, there's the idea of receiving a blessing, which is a gift, usually divine. One of the things that happens is that sometimes those blessings are very specific, and sometimes they are not.

In the story of Abraham, for example, that God says, "I will bless you with children. I will bless you with generations more numerous than the stars," that's very vague. Technically, Abraham didn't live long enough to see that many children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren. That blessing did not come true for him in his lifetime, and I think the difference in time and understanding blessing as a long-term promise is something we miss often. I think in our western and individualized minds, we think if it doesn't happen in our lifetime, then it's never going to happen. That would've been different for those reading the Hebrew scriptures and telling the stories in the original context, where your ancestors are with you in a more immediate way and you carry on that lineage.

I think what I'm trying to get at is this idea that blessings are messy and often indistinct, and they often completely ruin our lives, very much like be careful what you wish for, the truth will set you free, but first it will destroy you, in whatever way that may take shape in someone's life. I think blessings, gifts from God that are unmerited, which is essentially what we understand gifts from God to be, they're given by grace, they very rarely line up pleasantly with what we'd like to do for our lives. I think when we're asking for a blessing, the two dangers we can fall into is either being too specific and therefore God's going to go, "I can't work with this," or being too vague and God going, "Oh, you really want to be that open? You just want to ask for a blessing? Well, okay."

Be prepared to have your life turned upside down, and the stereotype for that is always the sort of like, "Well, don't tell God you'll go anywhere to serve the mission because then God will send you to Africa," or some other terrible foreign country, which is the fear that my fiancé actually grew up with. She used to worry that that was what was going to happen was God was going to send her to Africa to preach the gospel.

What has ended up being her mission and her work is that she's this incredible person. She's such a dear partner to me, and I'm incredibly, incredibly lucky. She is my biggest support, my biggest cheerleader. I would not be where I am in multiple ways without her, but also the testimony that's lived out in her life in being this person who has deeply thought about the Catholic virtues she was raised with, deeply investigated many different aspects of science because she's a veterinary doctor, and also aspects of faith, because she's deeply studious and intelligent, and she has crafted this beautiful integrated faith which has served as a bridge point for so many. I think that is a blessing. That's a gift from God, and yet it's not anything she ever would've even known she wanted to ask for.

Matthias: Yes. That's so interesting, because I think sometimes when we talk about, "Be careful what you ask for, be careful what you wish for," I think our minds so often go towards that "worst case scenario." I remember pleading with God when I was 13, like, "I'll be a missionary in Africa if you make me not gay." The problem with all of that aside of Africa being that place, that idea of God's blessing won't actually feel like blessing, and I wrestle with theology because I also deeply believe that God is fully for us and that God says he will give us the desires of our hearts, and yet the threat that I think we're often told about of God's blessing as if it's something that will not be the desires of our hearts, I don't know where I'm going with that.

I often wonder, when we think about desire and we think about blessing, I think God gives us our desires and every single one of our desires are a reflection of who God is no matter what. I guess what I'm trying to say is I don't necessarily believe that there's such thing as perverted desire. I do and I don't. That's a whole conversation.

Emmy: No, that is the struggle of like, how do we distinguish between the image of God that's placed on our hearts and how we're seeking to fulfill that in the world, versus, I don't talk about being delivered into the power of original sin or the power of the devil. There was a Calvin and Hobbes cartoon that I saw in college that basically just formed all of my devil theology, which is Hobbes asks Calvin, "Don't you believe in the devil?" Calvin says, "I think man is perfectly capable of screwing up on his own." I was like, "Yes, I do believe that." I'm probably going to get angry emails because I said that. I'm trying to remember if it was in my ordination vows that I believed in the devil. I think it was. Hope my bishop's not listening to this conversation.

I talk a lot about being carbon-bound creatures, being creatures that are conscious of the fact that we will die and what that does to us. I don't think we need original sin and a serpent and a devil to scare us into terrible behavior. I don't think we are selfish or greedy or power hungry or murderous or self-hating simply because the devil's got a hold on us. I think it has to do with the fact that we know we're going to die and we're terrified of it.

That I think can, I don't like the word pervert, I'm with you on that, but that I think can really turn us away from the image of God that is marked in us in our creation into power hunger, greediness, fear, anything that we do to try to bolster who we are as we are, and to take care of ourselves and to be self-sufficient rather than recognizing that we are part of a community.

Matthias: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yes. Go ahead.

Emmy: I was just going to say, it wraps us back around to where I started talking about, I've been thinking a lot recently about the kids in Parkland, Florida who are the ones who are finally able to actually stand up as a coalition and take significant action against the NRA that we're seeing right now and against the massive amount of assault weapons and semi-assault weapons that we have in American society and what that means for us.

I remember after Pulse happened a year and a half ago that there was this wondering if the LGBT community or the gay community, this was going to be our new thing. We've been pushing so hard for marriage equality and this was going to be our new thing. We were going to be the ones who would take down gun violence in America. There have been really great efforts for that, but on the whole, we didn't. On the whole, these 17-year-olds are significantly giving us a run for our money, which is great. Go children, go.

It's interesting that we had this coalition where people who wouldn't necessarily be benefited by marriage equality, trans people who are still excluded because their gender markers aren't correctly identified, people who are asexual or who are polygamous or polyamorous and don't seek the blessings of a two person marriage system, still came together to work against anti-marriage equality, things on the state and the federal level, and then eventually work for marriage equality at the federal level.

Once we won that, we all just went home as if our trans family hasn't been fighting this fight alongside us, hasn't been leading the fight since pre-Stonewall, and I see that brokenness that we talk about when we talk about sin in that. We're like, "Okay, we got what we needed. We're going home," instead of, "Okay, we've gotten what we needed. Now we need to be a people for others in our community."

I think that is to some degree an indictment against the particularly lesbian and gay leaders of the LGBT community where we just said, "Well, okay, we got marriage equality." We keep fighting about the adoption stuff state to state, and that's our big thing, and we haven't really stayed together as a group. When I think about pursuing our wants versus desires or pursuing what we think is going to feed us rather than what will actually feed us, that's what I think about is just, "Okay, I got what I needed. I'm out of the fight."

Matthias: Yes. It makes me think of, I don't know if it's Sarah Coakley, but I think it's Sarah Coakley or Kathryn Tanner, talking about sin as turning inwards and that arc of turning inwards upon ourselves.

Emmy: You're shaming me because I just read both of them and I can't remember which one it is.

Matthias: I think it was one of those two.

Emmy: Yes, I think you're right.

Matthias: I doubt that that thought's original to them, because I feel like it pops up everywhere, but I know it's one of them who established that, fleshed that all out. I think as we talk about this idea of the devil, and it's well within Christian orthodoxy not to believe that the devil's an embodied being, and that's not outside the realms of Christianity at all, but that whole idea of turning inward, focusing on ourselves, desire, and that wrestling back and forth with what opens us up, what turns us in, and how do we live out blessing in the world. I feel like that's kind of what we're talking about.

Emmy: One of the critiques of *incurvatus in se*, *incurvatus in se* is the Latin phraseology for the turning inward, so it goes back to at least medieval theology, and one of the feminist theology critiques of *incurvatus in se*, and this shows up a lot also in womanist/mujerista theologies, is that it disregards the way that women, and especially women of color, are forced to turn away from themselves by society. You're supposed to give up of yourself for your family, for your children, for whatever.

Then, that gets adapted into church language, like you're supposed to be humble, that acronym that gets handed around sometimes, "If you want true joy, Jesus first, others second, and yourself last," JOY, and the critique of feminist theologies, that's not it, either. That's not a way of flourishing, either. I think we flourish when we flourish. It does not say Jesus came to give us a small life or to break us down into tiny pieces so that we would serve others, but rather the proclamation of the gospel of John is, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

Matthias: Yes, yes. I know this is Kathryn Tanner. She talks about the filling up. We have to fill ourselves up in order to be able to then overflow. That work of God happens in the overflowing, as opposed to the emptying of ourselves, and it's a different kind of emptying than I think what Christ talks about. It's an overflowing of God's goodness and abundance from our own lives that comes from us being full and fulfilled, instead of that continual giving up of our very beings. It's such a different picture than that, "Jesus first, others next, yourself last," or whatever that was.

Emmy: Yes.

Matthias: Yes, that's not what we're called to.

Emmy: One of the things that's so interesting for me as I'm doing work with specifically LGBTQ people who are pursuing and integrated to Christian faith is the diversity of need, that there are people for whom the proclamation of turning away from *incurvatus in se*, of letting go of the self as the core thing, that's important. In fact, that was central in the western colonialist individualized faith of like, "Let go of turning in towards yourself. Christ has come to free you from the sin of turning into yourself to make you turn out towards others." That has been an incredibly powerful message, but for so many in the queer Christian community, that's not our "original sin".

I think what's going to come for us as far as a reformation within the queer and Christian communities is distinguishing what our spiritual needs are once we get through the threshold of finding a welcoming and affirming community, whether that's a worshipping

community, whether that's online, whether it's a house church. There are some of us whose wounds are transformed, who find balm, the moment that we cross the threshold of a worshiping community that's affirming, like people who say, "I didn't even know there was an affirming church," and they walk in and they're done. Their spiritual wounds are healed for them just by finding that welcoming and affirming space.

There are others for whom they're sort of in a space that I am where I'm carrying this spiritual trauma from having my holy text used against me in violence, and now that I'm healing that wound, that makes me look towards other groups that have been oppressed, either systematically in a secular way or by the same text. We start reading books about scriptural affirmation for slavery pre-Civil War, scriptural passages used against interracial marriage when that was an issue, passages used against systematically destabilizing the racist structure of our society, things like that. There's that community that says, "My marginalization has opened me up to other marginalization and I need to pursue that in a Christian forum."

There are others who the spiritual trauma runs so deep that we have to spend a lot of time and a lot of care in crafting spaces for them. I see in worship spaces and in bible studies, I see the people who flinch when I say sin, because it's been used so often against us that that word is now broken for us. The process of reclamation of that word or the process of finding a different word to put in there to help us reattach to the concept, that's a whole nother journey.

I think one of the things we maybe haven't done on a systematic level is figure out how do we assess where we're at as far as what our spiritual needs and our spiritual trauma are, and how do we move forward on that, because someone's looking at me going, "Why are you so concerned with racial issues? Why do you even care about the bible? This is stupid. I don't even like the bible. I just like the Jesus thing," and then someone else is looking at us and going, "Why do you even care about either of these things, because we have a place to be. We're welcome. Who cares about the rest of it?"

We're missing each other sometimes in that communication of we're all experiencing a similar deep need for healing, but it takes place in such different ways. One of the things that I love about scripture is that it has metaphors for so many of those different needs. There's so much truth in the stories, in the varied and diverse stories.

Matthias: Yes, and I feel like there's so much in the metaphor and in that wrestling for the blessing, there's so much healing available and present just in that text, in ethereal ways, like inexplicable ways it feels like, to turn to the very text that has hurt us so much for that healing seems like a very odd and strange thing to do, and yet it's there sometimes.

Emmy: Right, yes.

Matthias: Sometimes not.

Emmy: Right, sometimes not, and you need to have a good leader and a good sense of self to be able to say, "Nope, the blessing's not in there for me today. How am I going to reconstruct myself before I walk out of here?"

Matthias: Yes.

Emmy: Yes.

Matthias: Emmy, thank you so much.

Emmy: Thank you.

Matthias: This was just delightful. You're speaking at Why Christian here in a couple weeks.

Emmy: I am. Oh my goodness, is it a couple weeks?

Matthias: Yes.

Emmy: I am. I'll be talking at Why Christian. It's going to be absolutely fantastic. I've been to the last two. I can't even say how honored I am that I get to speak at it now and join that roster of women and of gay and trans men who have spoken. I have goosebumps, and I'm also terrified and may need to vomit out of anxiety for a minute. Then, once Why Christian is over, I know my editor's listening. Lisa, I promise I will get you a manuscript, because I'm working on a book.

Matthias: Oh my gosh, yes.

Emmy: The book is about, it's essentially about what we've been talking about, about the reclamation of scripture, about what it means to come back to scripture and claim it from a marginalized place and recognize that it's a story for a marginalized people and from a marginalized people, and how do we start to really find ourselves in that text again when it's been used against us in a variety of ways. I'm so, so, so lucky. I have a fantastic editor and am working with a great publishing house, and I promise, Lisa, you will have a manuscript, and then doing the pastor thing all day every day, which I love. I serve the most incredible community. Can I put in a plug?

Matthias: Please do, please do, yes.

Emmy: If you're a listener in the Twin Cities of Minnesota, St. Paul and Minneapolis, we have a worshipping community that gathers once a month in the evenings that is a blend of mainline and evangelical traditions that is specifically centered in the experience of being LGBTQ and Christian. All of our leaders, speakers, communion servers, we're all LGBTQ and Christian.

We also have a game night going for just regular community and fellowship and a bible study for engaging with the text using one of my favorite bible studies, and just how do we come back to the text and re-experience the bible in a way that's as gift and blessing

rather than as curse and condemnation. You can find more about that if you follow me on Twitter @emmykegler, or you can check us out on Facebook at Facebook.com/qgcomm for Queer Grace Community.

Matthias: I will put links to all of those things in the show notes so people can just find those in there. We will look forward to your book. My goodness, that's super exciting.

Emmy: I'm terrified, but yes.

Matthias: Well, blessings to you.

Emmy: No thank you. I have had enough up endings in my life. I am good. No, I do want to say what a blessing you are and this podcast is for so many to be able to connect us across, I was going to say across America, but I realized no, across the world. The care that you take with putting everything together, with editing, assembling, music choices, I'm always just so impressed and so moved by your graciousness and your engagement. I am so grateful for you and you are a blessing.

Matthias: Thank you. Thank you.

Like Emmy said, you can catch her at the Why Christian conference that's coming up here in the middle of March in Durham, North Carolina. That's a conference put on by Nadia Bolz Weber and Rachel Held Evans. I'm going to be there, as well. You can also keep up with her work over at EmmyKegler.com. She's on Twitter and Facebook @emmykegler.

Queerology is on Twitter and Instagram @QueerologyPod, or you can tweet me directly @matthiasroberts. Queerology is produced with support from Natalie England, Tim Schraeder, and Christian Hayes, along with many other Patreon supporters. To find out how you can help support Queerology, head over to matthiasroberts.com/support.

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