

Interpreter Notes

September 23, 2024

Opening Music: 2-3 minutes

Welcome:

Good evening everybody, and welcome to the Gender Justice JAM! I'm your host Aaron Scott (pronouns he/him) and I am the Staff Officer for Gender Justice for the Presiding Bishop Office of The Episcopal Church, which means I work for our church—at the denominational level—to support all of our LGBTQ+ and women's ministries churchwide. And this is the very first program of the Gender Justice Office, and our very first session of the Gender Justice JAM—"A Faith-Based Understanding of Gender Justice."

[Pause and check that translation is all ok, give directions for connecting translation if needed]

Land Acknowledgement:

We are calling in from many different lands tonight, so if you know the original people of the lands you're currently on, feel free to drop their name in the chat and honor them. I'm Zooming in from Tacoma Washington, and acknowledge that I'm on traditional homelands of the Puyallup and Nisqually Tribes, as well as on lands with deep significance to other Coast Salish tribes. Coast Salish people have lived on and stewarded these lands since time immemorial and continue to do so today. And I extend my deepest gratitude goes to past, present, and future generations.

Introduce Liz:

I am THRILLED to be joined by our theologian-in-residence for this series, The Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis, my friend and mentor in walking the revolutionary way of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Rev. Liz is the Executive Director of the [Kairos Center for Religions, Rights, and Social Justice](#) and Co-Chair of the [Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival](#). She is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and teaches at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Rev. Dr. Theoharis has been organizing among poor and low-income communities for thirty years. Raised in a family committed to social justice, civil liberties and human rights, she has been involved in the movement for her whole life. Rev. Liz is also a prolific writer, and we'll be pulling from some of her work later on in this series.

But before we go any further, let's ground ourselves in a little bit of prayer and Bible study.

Prayer:

Spirit of love and power: You who knows each of us, who makes and remakes and remakes each of us in your own image both fearfully and wonderfully—come sit with us a while tonight. God some of us are showing up here joyful and some of us are showing up heavy-hearted, some of us are showing up energized and some of us are showing up exhausted, but we are all here, and we all got questions for you, God. Questions like how long it'll be until all of your children of every gender and orientation, every race and place, are safe, free, and thriving. Questions like what you're calling each of us to do, God, as individuals in our own lives and questions about the holy work you're calling us to do together as your church. Come sit with us tonight. Open our eyes to see your face in the faces of those we meet here, open our minds to receive your wisdom, open our hearts to receive your loving courage and your

revolutionary tenderness. Come sit with us tonight God. In the name of the One who creates, redeems, and sanctifies us all, no exceptions. Amen.

Who's in the room?:

We have a pretty incredible spread of folks joining us for this series, with registration coming in from nine different countries including Zimbabwe, South Africa, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Honduras, Colombia, Albania, Canada, United States. Within the U.S. we have people joining us from 33 states, and we are providing live simultaneous translation in both Spanish and American Sign Language.

[Pause again and check that translation is all ok, give directions a second time for translation if needed]

Why are we here?:

We are here because, as Episcopalians, we have promised God and one another that we will strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being (and it's ok if you're here and you're not Episcopalian, but you should know that about us!). So what that striving means is that when we see injustice in the world, when we see human beings being denied dignity, we have to get to work. And justice means specific things to us: our church has explicit commitments to racial justice, to economic justice, to environmental justice, and in this series we are going to be studying and skilling up on our faith-based commitments to gender justice. And I will just say bluntly that we have a lot of baggage in this department. I think it's important for us to acknowledge that and not gloss over it. Many of us, myself included, have experienced serious gender injustice and spiritual harm within the fundamentally flawed, fundamentally human institution of this church, and a 12 week Zoom series is not going to absolve any of that.

And yet we also find ourselves at a very specific moment in history right now: where worldwide we are seeing gender-based violence being legislated and perpetrated at a horrific scale, **while also** seeing movements for gender justice for women and LGBTQ+ people push and fight harder and demand even fuller inclusion and thriving than ever before. We have a critical role to play in this moment, as people of faith. And our church has a critical role to play, too.

What does The Episcopal Church say? Opening Context/Givens/Ground Rules:

I think it's good to say a few things out loud as a starting point:

1. [As a member of the Anglican Communion, The Episcopal Church has explicitly supported the use of contraceptives since 1930.](#)
2. [The Episcopal church has publicly supported IVF since 1982.](#)
3. [The 2018 General Convention of The Episcopal Church called for "reproductive health and reproductive health procedures to be treated as all other medical procedures" and declared "that equitable access to women's health care, including women's reproductive health care, is an integral part of a woman's struggle to assert her dignity and worth as a human being."](#)
4. [The Episcopal Church has ordained women since 1974; gay, lesbian and bisexual people since 1994, and has prohibited discrimination against trans and gender non-conforming people in the ordination process since 2012.](#)
5. [The Episcopal Church has permitted holy matrimony for LGBTQ+ couples since 2015.](#)

Now: I think most of us on this call recognize that even as our church took these stances, it was (and still is) often at war with itself. Not just about *whether* to take these stances, but also on whether we will actually LIVE into them—it's fine to support IVF in a statement, but what has access been like? It is very important to affirm the spiritual authority of women and LGBTQ+ people but what has our lived experience of leadership in this church really been like? And how does the church make amends for whole previous centuries of gender injustice in this church, especially when tied to our role in the transatlantic slave trade, or Indigenous boarding schools? Because those evils, and their ongoing legacies, are also incidents of mass gender injustice. We will get into that further down the road. But I share this specific timeline of our church's public positions on some key gender justice measures just to clarify the things we will **not** be walking back on in this series. We will discuss lots of things over these twelve weeks but we are not discussing *whether* people should have a legal right to abortion or IVF. We are not discussing *whether* women and LGBTQ+ people are called to spiritual leadership, including ordination. We are not discussing *whether* consent is a sacred and fundamental baseline. And we are not discussing *whether* transgender and non-binary people are exactly who we say we are—our right to exist and to live into the ways God has revealed us to ourselves is not up for discussion in this series. God and the people have already discerned where our church publicly stands on these things, and our conversation in the Gender Justice JAM will be moving forward from these points.

Security/Housekeeping:

1. **We have a zero-tolerance policy for bullying, harassment, threats, and hate-speech** in this series. Anyone who undertakes any of these will be immediately removed from the Zoom room by our tech team, and will not be able to rejoin future sessions.
2. This is a public series, and we are recording each of our sessions, which we will then post on The Episcopal Church's website afterwards for anyone who wants to watch/listen. **This means you should not out anyone who isn't already out.** You may, for example, have a grandchild who just came out to you as trans, but maybe they haven't come out at school. And you have questions about how to support them, and that's great, and we can talk about that here—but just make sure you aren't sharing any details that other people could identify them by. So instead of saying, "I'm Ethel from St. Barnabas Church in Wichita, and my grandchild who goes to the same church as me just came out as non-binary..." you can say, "I'm Ethel from St. Barnabas Church in Wichita, and there is a young person who I love who just came out..."
3. This is a public series, so please also be mindful with the information you choose to disclose about yourself. We honor people's choice to share their testimonies publicly, and we also recognize the fact that it's often unsafe to do so. The last thing we want is for you to put yourself at risk unnecessarily.
4. If you have any tech issues, please chat us! We will be watching and responding to tech and accessibility issues in the chat.

I think that's it for housekeeping. Let's do what we came to do.

Scripture:

The first thing we're going to do in this series is Bible study. We will actually do this every single session, but we'll get an extended one tonight since it's our first meeting. And I'm gonna turn it over to Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis to say why it matters for us to read the Bible, struggle with the Bible, and even battle for

the Bible when it comes to gender justice. Even though we're Episcopalian and the Bible makes us squirrely.

LIZ:

1. WHAT IS THE BATTLE FOR THE BIBLE?

- a. The Bible has been contested throughout US history, especially when it comes to issues of justice, love and inclusion. Perhaps you all are familiar with this phenomenon but to share even a short history: in the 1700s and 1800s, slaveholders quoted the book of Philemon and lines from St. Paul's epistles to claim that slavery was ordained by God. They also ripped the pages of Exodus from bibles they gave to the enslaved. During the Gilded Age of the nineteenth century, churches and politicians alike preached a "prosperity gospel" that extolled the virtues of industrial capitalism.
- b. Decades later, segregationists continued to use stray biblical verses to rubberstamp Jim Crow practices, while in the late 1970s the Moral Majority helped to mainstream a new generation of Christian extremists into national politics. In my own youth, I remember politicians quoting Thessalonians in the lead up to the passage of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act as proof that God believes in work-requirements for public assistance programs. And have had many seminary and ordained colleagues who have struggled with ordination because of their sexual orientation (God created Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve) and gender (Women should not speak in church).
- c. But Christian religious thinking has been a key ingredient in positive social change in this country. In every chapter of American history, abolitionists, workers, labor organizers, civil rights leaders, and other representatives of the oppressed have struggled for a better nation not just in streets and workplaces, but in the pulpit.
- d. Escaped slave Harriet "Moses" Tubman understood the Underground Railroad as a Christian project of liberation, while escaped slave Frederick Douglass fought for abolition through churches across the north in the pre-Civil War years. A century later, near the end of his life, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. explained how, to achieve his universal dream of justice, a beloved community of God would be built through a "freedom church of the poor." And I call myself blessed to be surrounded by the likes of Aaron Scott and others in this zoom who are deeply committed to Jesus and justice.

2. WHY DOES IT MATTER FOR GENDER JUSTICE?

- a. Perhaps folks are familiar with biblical scholar Phyllis Trible's concept of "texts of terror" and especially the way that women and non-male gendered figures are portrayed and treated in the Bible. She discusses Hagar, Tamar, the unnamed woman who is tortured and dismembered in Judges and the daughter of Jephthah
- b. Or in general the depiction of women and gender non-confirming people in the Bible (as I soon learned in my own ordination process having to take a Bible content test) with women being painted as prostitutes or barren or unfaithful or weak and gender non-confirming
- c. And then there's what the Bible says about sex and sexuality – or more accurately the misinterpretations of sexuality in the Bible (I look forward to looking at some of the passages that have been used against LGBTQ communities and showing how extremists have gotten these stories so wrong).

- d. But no matter how much we know about what I've just raised here, it is clear that people who call themselves Christian have used the Bible and Christianity to justify some pretty unjustifiable things like attacking a person's right to choose (there were abortions when Jesus walked the earth but he didn't say anything about it but what he has commented on is how we are to treat the poor, those without health care, immigrants and we can see how our nation is doing on those), attacking trans kids, criminalizing the unhoused (especially harassing gender non-conforming unhoused young people) and in general preying on the poor and marginalized.
- 3. WHY DOES READING SCRIPTURE TOGETHER LIKE THIS MATTER (i.e. what is Reading the Bible with the Poor and what have we learned from it?)
 - a. But if we look at what the Bible has to say about gender, sex, sexuality and justice, we can't just concede the Bible and biblical interpretation to those who demean, defraud and degrade.
 - b. In this methodology, we start with passages that are controversial, not easy, have been divorced from it's historical context. We then put these texts and the historical context into conversation with stories of people organizing today, organizing around gender justice, economic justice, etc.
 - c. We shine light on what is possible and not just curse the darkness 😊

Text for Tonight: Acts 8:26-40, Ethiopian Eunuch

Why this text?:

- ➔ Some passages, it takes peeling back the layers of centuries/millennia of distorted interpretation, and they've already been used so harmfully that it can be hard to even want to work with them in a new way
- ➔ This is not one of those passages—the gender justice is pretty out front. So we figured we'd use this one to warm up the crowd
- ➔ A quick note on translation—this is a text about a third-gender person. Historically, bible translators have used “he/him” pronouns to identify this person in the text, a practice that has contributed to making third-gender Biblical figures invisible to us as contemporary readers. So (in the English slide here) we have used the pronouns “they/them” for this character—and in Spanish we have used an @ ending instead of o/a, to highlight a third-gender identity that would have more obvious to ancient readers of this text.

SCRIPTURE, GENDER & JUSTICE

ESCRITURA, GENERO & JUSTICIA

A CASE STUDY IN ACTS 8
UN ESTUDIO DE CASO EN LOS HECHOS 8

ACTS 8:26-40

26 NOW AN ANGEL OF THE LORD SAID TO PHILIP, "GO SOUTH TO THE ROAD—THE DESERT ROAD—THAT GOES DOWN FROM JERUSALEM TO GAZA." 27 SO HE STARTED OUT, AND ON HIS WAY HE MET AN ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH, AN IMPORTANT OFFICIAL IN CHARGE OF ALL THE TREASURY OF THE KANDAKE (WHICH MEANS "QUEEN OF THE ETHIOPIANS"). THIS PERSON HAD GONE TO JERUSALEM TO WORSHIP, 28 AND ON THEIR WAY HOME WAS SITTING IN THEIR CHARIOT READING THE BOOK OF ISAIAH THE PROPHET. 29 THE SPIRIT TOLD PHILIP, "GO TO THAT CHARIOT AND STAY NEAR IT."

30 THEN PHILIP RAN UP TO THE CHARIOT AND HEARD THE EUNUCH READING ISAIAH THE PROPHET. "DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE READING?" PHILIP ASKED.

31 "HOW CAN I," THEY SAID, "UNLESS SOMEONE EXPLAINS IT TO ME?" SO THEY INVITED PHILIP TO COME UP AND SIT WITH THEM.

HECHOS 8:26-40

26 Y EL ÁNGEL DEL SEÑOR HABLÓ A FELIPE, DICENDO: LEVÁNTATE Y VE HACIA EL MEDIODÍA, AL CAMINO QUE DESCIENDE DE JERUSALÉN A GAZA, EL CUAL ES DESIERTO. 27 ENTONCES ÉL SE LEVANTÓ, Y FUE; Y HE AQUÍ UN ETÍOPE, EUNUC@, GOBERNADOR DE CANDACE, REINA DE LOS ETÍOPES, EL CUAL ERA PUESTO SOBRE TODOS SUS TESOROS, Y HABÍA VENIDO A ADORAR A JERUSALÉN, 28 Y SE VOLVÍA SENTADO EN SU CARRO, Y LEYENDO AL PROFETA ISAÍAS. 29 Y EL ESPÍRITU DIJO A FELIPE: LLÉGATE, Y JÚNTATE A ESTE CARRO.

30 Y ACUDIENDO FELIPE, LE OYÓ QUE LEÍA AL PROFETA ISAÍAS, Y DIJO: PERO ¿ENTIENDES LO QUE LEES?

31 Y DIJO EL EUNUC@: ¿Y CÓMO PODRÉ, SI ALGUNO NO ME ENSEÑARE? Y ROGÓ A FELIPE QUE SUBIERA, Y SE SENTARA CON ÉL.

32 THIS IS THE PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE THE EUNUCH WAS READING: "HE WAS LED LIKE A SHEEP TO THE SLAUGHTER AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE DID NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH. 33 IN HIS HUMILIATION HE WAS DEPRIVED OF JUSTICE. WHO CAN SPEAK OF HIS DESCENDANTS? FOR HIS LIFE WAS TAKEN FROM THE EARTH."

34 THE EUNUCH ASKED PHILIP, "TELL ME, PLEASE, WHO IS THE PROPHET TALKING ABOUT, HIMSELF OR SOMEONE ELSE?" 35 THEN PHILIP BEGAN WITH THAT VERY PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE AND TOLD THEM THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS.

36 AS THEY TRAVELED ALONG THE ROAD, THEY CAME TO SOME WATER AND THE EUNUCH SAID, "LOOK, HERE IS WATER. WHAT CAN STAND IN THE WAY OF MY BEING BAPTIZED?" [37] [C] 38 AND THEY GAVE ORDERS TO STOP THE CHARIOT. THEN BOTH PHILIP AND THE EUNUCH WENT DOWN INTO THE WATER AND PHILIP BAPTIZED THEM. 39 WHEN THEY CAME UP OUT OF THE WATER, THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD SUDDENLY TOOK PHILIP AWAY, AND THE EUNUCH DID NOT SEE HIM AGAIN, BUT WENT ON THEIR WAY REJOICING. 40 PHILIP, HOWEVER, APPEARED AT AZOTUS AND TRAVELED ABOUT, PREACHING THE GOSPEL IN ALL THE TOWNS UNTIL HE REACHED CAESAREA.

32 Y EL LUGAR DE LA ESCRITURA QUE LEÍA, ERA ÉSTE: COMO OVEJA A LA MUERTE FUE LLEVADO; Y COMO CORDERO MUDO DELANTE DEL QUE LE TRASQUILA, ASÍ NO ABRIÓ SU BOCA; 33 EN SU HUMILLACIÓN SU JUICIO FUE QUITADO; MAS SU GENERACIÓN, ¿QUIÉN LA CONTARÁ? PORQUE ES QUITADA DE LA TIERRA SU VIDA.

34 Y RESPONDIENDO EL EUNUCO A FELIPE, DIJO: TE RUEGO ¿DE QUIÉN DICE EL PROFETA ESTO? ¿DE SÍ, O DE ALGUNO OTRO? 35 ENTONCES FELIPE, ABRIENDO SU BOCA, Y COMENZANDO DESDE ESTA ESCRITURA, LE ANUNCIÓ EL EVANGELIO DE JESÚS.

36 Y YENDO POR EL CAMINO, LLEGARON A CIERTA AGUA; Y DIJO EL EUNUCO: HE AQUÍ AGUA; ¿QUÉ IMPIDE QUE YO SEA BAUTIZADO? 37 Y FELIPE DIJO: SI CREES DE TODO CORAZÓN, BIEN PUEDES. Y RESPONDIENDO ÉL, DIJO: CREO QUE JESÚS, EL CRISTO, ES HIJO DE DIOS. 38 Y MANDÓ PARAR EL CARRO; Y DESCENDIERON AMBOS AL AGUA, FELIPE Y EL EUNUCO; Y LE BAUTIZÓ. 39 CUANDO SUBIERON DEL AGUA, EL ESPÍRITU DEL SEÑOR ARREBATÓ A FELIPE; Y NO LE VIO MÁS EL EUNUCO, Y SE FUE POR SU CAMINO GOZOSO. 40 FELIPE EMPERO SE HALLÓ EN AZOTO; Y PASANDO, ANUNCIABA EL EVANGELIO EN TODAS LAS CIUDADES, HASTA QUE LLEGÓ A CESAREA.



EUNUCH FIGURES SCRIPTURE / L@S EUNUC@S EN LA ESCRITURA

- THIS IDENTITY EXISTS ACROSS A VAST SPAN OF ANTIQUITY AND CULTURES
 - WIDELY REFERS TO THIRD-GENDER PEOPLE OF LOW ECONOMIC STATUS
 - ANCIENT HEBREW TRANSLATION SARIS (סָרִיס)
 - WHILE OTHER BIBLICAL CULTURES PRACTICED CASTRATION, THE ANCIENT HEBREWS DID NOT—SO IN SCRIPTURE, THIS WORD MAY BE REFERRING TO EUNUCHS FROM OTHER CULTURES **OR IT MAY ALSO REFER TO THIRD GENDER PEOPLE MORE BROADLY**
 - CLASSICAL JUDAISM RECOGNIZES NO FEWER THAN EIGHT GENDERS
- ESTA IDENTIDAD EXISTE EN MUCHAS PARTES DE LA ANTIGÜEDAD Y EN MUCHAS CULTURAS
 - EN TÉRMINOS GENERALES, SE REFIERE A LAS PERSONAS DEL TERCER GÉNERO, Y DE BAJO ESTATUS ECONÓMICO.
 - TRADUCCIÓN EN HEBREO ANTIGUO: SARIS (סָרִיס)
 - MIENTRAS QUE OTRAS CULTURAS BÍBLICAS PRACTICABAN LA CASTRACIÓN, LOS ANTIGUOS HEBREOS NO LO HACÍAN. ENTONCES EN LAS ESCRITURAS, ESTA PALABRA PUEDE REFERIRSE A EUNUCOS DE OTRAS CULTURAS **O TAMBIÉN PUEDE REFERIRSE A LAS PERSONAS DEL TERCER GÉNERO EN GENERAL**
 - EL JUDAÍSMO CLÁSICO RECONOCE NO MENOS DE OCHO GÉNEROS

BOOKS W/ EUNUCHS

- 2 KINGS
- ESTHER
- DANIEL
- ISAIAH
- JEREMIAH
- JUDITH
- MATTHEW
- ACTS

LIBROS CON EUNUC@S

- 2 REYES
- ESTER
- DANIEL
- ISAÍAS
- JEREMÍAS
- JUDIT
- MATEO
- HECHOS

ACTS 8 & GENDER JUSTICE WRIT LARGE / HECHOS 8 & LA JUSTICIA DE GENERO EN GENERAL

- SCRIPTURAL WITNESS ON GENDER IS OFTEN MESSY DUE TO OUR HABITS OF TRANSLATION, BUT DIGGING INTO THE HISTORICAL RECORD REVEALS A FAR MORE EXPANSIVE, COMPLEX SOCIAL UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER IN THE ANCIENT WORLD
- GENDER JUSTICE IN SCRIPTURE (AND OUR WORLD) IS NOT A ZERO-SUM GAME—PHILLIP IS NOT CONCERNED ABOUT LOSING HIS OWN STATUS OR IDENTITY WHEN THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH IS INCLUDED AND RESPECTED
- SCRIPTURAL ETHIC OF EXPANSIVE INCLUSION AND LIBERATION IN CHRIST
- "WHEN WE LIFT FROM THE BOTTOM, EVERYBODY RISES"
- EL TESTIMONIO BÍBLICO SOBRE EL GÉNERO ES FRECUENTAMENTE DIFÍCIL, COMO RESULTO DE NUESTROS HÁBITOS DE TRADUCCIÓN, PERO UNA INVESTIGACIÓN HISTÓRICA SE REVELA UNA COMPRENSIÓN SOCIAL MUCHO MÁS DIVERSA Y COMPLEJA DEL GÉNERO EN EL MUNDO ANTIGUO
- LA JUSTICIA DE GÉNERO EN LAS ESCRITURAS (Y EN NUESTRO MUNDO) NO ES UN "JUEGO DE SUMA CERO": A PHILLIP NO LE PREOCUPA PERDER SU PROPIO ESTATUS O IDENTIDAD CUANDO EL EUNUC@ ETÍOPE ES INCLUID@ Y RESPETAD@
- ÉTICA BÍBLICA DE LA INCLUSIÓN EXPANSIVA Y LA LIBERACIÓN EN CRISTO
- "CUANDO LEVANTAMOS DESDE ABAJO, TODO EL MUNDO SE LEVANTA"

LIZ: Open for Q+A/Discussion

How Q+A will work:

- Please use the "raise hand" button so our tech team can see you and take you off mute (don't just raise your hand on screen—there are too many people here for us to be able to find your little square!)
- Please have your name and pronouns shown the way you want us to call on you
- If you want to ask a question but you're not someplace where you can do that out loud, you can drop a question in the chat and we'll try to gather some of those questions as well

Questions:

- ➔ What jumped out at you about this text?
- ➔ What part of this text feels most live for you right now?
- ➔ Does this make you think of anything going on in the world/your life right now?
- ➔ **Discussion**

Closing

- ➔ Thank you so much for joining us!
- ➔ We will meet here again next week, same time same place (this Zoom room, 7-8:30pm ET)
- ➔ Our featured speaker will be Heron Greenesmith from the National Transgender Law Center
- ➔ Holding each of you up in prayer and protection until then