“People of the Word: First Things”
Perspectives from which we read/ study/ understand the Scriptures

We are People of the Word
- More than that we read the Bible
- We read as ones called into being by the Word of God
- We read expecting that God will continue to do so again

Nature of that Word of God
- God's Word and Human Words
- Treasure in earthen vessels (2 Cor 4:7)
- Two Perspectives:
  - Bible
  - Scripture

Analogies for our Reading
- Incarnation: the Word became flesh and lived among us
- Sacraments:
  Lord's Supper: bread/wine//body/blood
  Baptism: water/word//life/salvation
- Preaching of the Word

A Hearing that involves risk
- God's Word is never abstract truths, but addressed to specific situations

Being People of the Word means:
- Authority and Interpretation: Dynamic not Static: Read/Study-Listen/Understand
- Living with Ambiguity
- Living with Diversity
- Hearing new Word for new occasions

In other words:
1. The Bible is our Norm because of what it does.
2. God uses Human means of Grace
3. To Create & Nurture Faith
4. Through Hearing God’s Promises:
   - Unity in Christ
   - Diversity and Differences in Secondary matters
5. Resources for our Reading:
   *Tradition / Reason / Experience*

Isaiah 55:10-11 For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.
Assumptions that Accompany our Hearing of God’s Word

- We all interpret when we read
- The church has from the beginning and still regularly differs in its hearing
- We Debate its meaning for today: Reading of the Scriptures; Community consensus; Experience
- Experience and Knowledge matter
- Bible is not about ethics. Ethics are conditioned by context as we are drawn into the story of God’s people, and our stories are shaped in our faithful hearing and experience

*Traditional Four-fold Model of Interpretation:*

- Historical (literal/plain sense)
- Allegorical (beneath the surface/hidden)
- Tropological (manner of life/ethical)
- Anagogical (spiritual/eschatological)

*Traditional “Lectio Divina”*

- Lectio
- Meditatatio
- Contemplatio
- Oratio

*Martin Luther’s Modification:*

- Temptatio

I believe that it has now become clear that it is not enough or in any sense Christian to preach the works, life, and words of Christ as historical facts, as if the knowledge of these would suffice for the conduct of life. Yet this is the fashion among those who must today be regarded as our best preachers. Far less is it sufficient or Christian to say nothing at all about Christ and to teach instead the laws of men and the decrees of the fathers. Now there are not a few who preach Christ and read about him that they may move men's affections to sympathy with Christ, to anger against the Jews, and such childish and effeminate nonsense….

Rather ought Christ to be preached to the end that faith in him may be established and that he may not only be Christ, but be Christ for you and me, and that what is said of him and is denoted in his name may be effectual in us.

Such faith is produced and preserved in us by preaching why Christ came, what he brought and bestowed, what benefit it is to us to accept him. This is done when that Christian liberty which he bestows is rightly taught and we are told in what way we Christians are kings and priests and therefore lords of all and may firmly believe that whatever we have done is pleasing and acceptable in the sight of God.

(Martin Luther, *Freedom of the Christian, 1520*)

Traditional biblical scholarship has usually attended to such matters by asking historical questions: Who was the author of Mark’s Gospel? What can be known about the original audience and their location? Many within the discipline of biblical studies have understood themselves to be historians, interested in the Bible as something that, to be understood properly, must be located at another time and place for a distant audience. A prominent New Testament scholar put it this way: “The task of the biblical scholar is to understand what the original author intended for the original audience.”

One might propose, on the contrary, that the task of biblical scholars is to help a contemporary audience understand the Bible, and that the task of a contemporary audience is to experience the force of the narrative’s argument in the present. Historical information may be important for such an enterprise, but it is neither the beginning nor the end of the task.