HOW THE BIBLE CAME TO US:
ITS WRITING, USE, AND AUTHORITY

SESSION 5:
PEOPLE OF THE WORD
HOW SHALL WE READ THE BIBLE?
Session 1: March 19 – The Bible Has a Story, Too: Part 1 – Old Testament

Session 2: March 26 – The Dead Sea Scrolls: Writings and Living Communities in Dialog and Dissent


Session 4: April 9 – Which Writings Shall We Use? Collection, Acceptance, Authority

Session 5: April 16 – People of the Word. How Shall We Read the Bible?
http://www.enterthebible.org
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible

http://www2.luthersem.edu/jboyce
"The writings of Scripture were shaped and hammered out in the blacksmith shop of real life " (Lace)

The writings grew out of the heart of a living, witnessing, suffering, worshipping community of ordinary people. In these writings we can hear their cries and prayers, their praises and their arguments.
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. (Isaiah 55:10-11)
The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. (Jeremiah 31:30-34)
People of the Word

1. Bible authority: Not what it *is*, but what it *does*

Reading: Not for *information*

Reading: Ones called into being by the Word
“One thing I know, I was blind and now I see“ (John 9:25)

*I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel...* (M Luther, Catechism)

Reading: Expecting that God will do so again
We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers. (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

And regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. (2 Peter 3:15-16)
Two terms - Two perspectives

“Scripture”
Conviction that through these writings God calls us into being and gives us identity, hope, and mission

“Bible”
A book, a collection, a history, a community of faith as the context of its formation and witness
People of the Word

3. To Create and Nurture Faith

**Incarnation:** *the Word became flesh and lived among us; Jesus is the Christ*

**Preaching of the Word**
“your sins are forgiven”

**Sacraments:**
Lord's Supper: bread/wine/body/blood
Baptism: water/word/life/salvation

*Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation... (Small Catechism)*
People of the Word

4. Hearing God’s promises involves risk

God's Word is never abstract truths
Addressed to specific situations

Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean."

But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned and went away in a rage.

(2 Kings 5:10-12)
Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" (Luke 7:46-49)

"Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner."

...Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost." (Luke 19:1-10)
People of the Word

5. Being People of the Word Means

A Hearing that is Dynamic not Static:
Read/Study/Listen/Understand
Resources: Tradition | Reason | Experience

Hearing new Word for new occasions
No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. (Luk 5:37)

Living with Ambiguity

Living with Diversity
Faithfully
Through the eyes of faith --- Prayerfully

Theologically
What is God doing?
"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (Luke 12:32 )

What does this have to do with Jesus the Christ?
For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. (1 Corinthians 2:2 )

Communally
Connected with the many voices and experiences of God's people; living faithfully in the present context
We *all* interpret when we read
The church has from the beginning and still regularly *differs* in its hearing

We Debate meaning for today

Experience and Knowledge matter
Reading of the Scriptures/ Community consensus/ Experience

Bible is *not* first 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
Listening to the Scriptures

Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30-31) (John 20:30)

My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, (1 Corinthians 2:4)

For in him every one of God's promises is a "Yes." For this reason it is through him that we say the "Amen," to the glory of God. (2 Corinthians 1:20)
Listening to the Scriptures

Two Disciples on the Way to Emmaus Encounter Risen Jesus: They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him."

Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.
When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"

That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

"Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.
Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you-- that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

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....

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.

Martin Luther, *Freedom of the Christian*, 1520
Unless I am convinced by the **testimony of the Scriptures** or by **clear reason** (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen.

Martin Luther, *Diet of Worms, 1521*
The first thing needed is to master the terminology.

**law** - fulfilling the law is a matter of the heart; obedience comes only with and through faith given through the Spirit. **sin** - is nothing more than trusting in external works, ...thus sin is ultimately unbelief, not trusting that all my power comes from the power of the Spirit living in my heart through faith.

**grace** - the kindness or favor God bears towards us of His own choice; and through which he willingly gives us Christ, ...God's grace does not came in pieces; rather it takes us up completely in its embrace for the sake of Christ so that his gifts may take root in us. **faith** - not something dreamed up or a human illusion of the mind; so it doesn't just mean to believe "things" even things about God and Jesus; rather faith is something that God effects in us; it changes us and we are reborn from God.
Righteousness - what we call that kind of faith which comes by God's gift and shapes us to do good to all.

flesh - means everything that is born from the flesh; including the entire self, body and soul, including our reason and all our senses;

spirit - means that total life that is lived in service by the power of the spirit that is given by the gift of God.

"Unless you give these terms this connotation, you will never comprehend Paul's epistle to the Romans, nor any other book of Holy Scripture."

(Martin Luther, Preface to Romans, 1522)
This church confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the Gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.

a) **Jesus Christ is the Word** of God incarnate, through whom everything was made and through whose life, death, and resurrection God fashions a new creation.

b) The **proclamation** of God's message to us as both Law and Gospel is the Word of God, revealing judgment and mercy through word and deed, beginning with the Word in creation, continuing in the history of Israel, and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

c) The canonical **Scriptures** of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.
Some Fruitful Approaches

**Traditional 4-fold Approach**
- Historical (literal/plain sense)
- Allegorical (beneath the surface/hidden)
- Tropological (manner of life/ethical)
- Anagogical (spiritual/eschatological)

**Martin Luther’s Modification:**
- Temptatio (reading through/in light of the experience of suffering/service)

**Lectio continua – Reading as a whole**

**Traditional “Lectio Divina”**
- *Lectio* | *Meditatio* | *Contemplatio* | *Oratio*

“journeying with” as a lifetime venture

cf. James Smart, *Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church*
Some Fruitful Approaches

Reading from the Center

“was Christum treibet” that which “drives/points to” Christ (Martin Luther)

Reading in Light of Church Doctrine/Tradition

- Ecumenical Creeds (Nicene, Apostles, Athanasian)
- Small Catechism
- Augsburg Confession
- God’s Word as Law and Gospel (Promise)
Some Fruitful Approaches

Considering the “Worlds” of the Text

- The world “behind” the text (author, events)
- The world “of” the text (what it says)
- The world “in front of” the text (how addresses me)

A Rhetorical Perspective:
How does the text Persuade/ Move the Hearer?

Augustine: “To teach, to delight, to persuade”

- The “ethos” (authority/author) in the text
- The “pathos” (hearer/audience) in the text
- The “logos” (word/language/discourse) in the text
A Road Map for Readers

• Know about the Bible

• Use Bible Helps (NET, study Bibles, etc)

• Reflect on Nature of the Word

• Read as a Living Word
  • Read with expectation that understanding is new each day
  • Read watching for the surprises/ the “speed bumps”
  • Read with expectation of complexity and diversity
  • Read in light of judgment and promise// law and gospel
  • Read in light of the good news of God’s promise in Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 8: 1, 28-31)
Some Fruitful Approaches

- Read devotionally: attend to what you understand, not to what you don’t understand

- Read with others

- Read repeatedly/ in different ways/ in different translations

- Pay attention to feelings, images, questions evoked by the reading

- Pay attention to experience and memories both personal and communal
Nine Theses on Interpreting Scripture

*The Art of Reading Scripture*, Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays.

1. Scripture truthfully tells story of God’s actions of creating, judging and saving the world.
2. Scripture to be understood in light of church’s faith as coherent dramatic narrative.
3. Faithful interpretation requires engagement with the entire narrative.
4. Texts of scripture have multiple and complex meanings not limited to intent of original author.
5. Four canonical gospels narrate the truth about Jesus.
6. Faithful interpretation takes place with a community of believers.
7. Saints of the church provide guidance in how to interpret and live the scriptures.
8. Christians need to read in dialogue with others outside the church.
9. We always live in the tension between the “already” and the “not yet.” The meaning of scripture is constantly unfolding in new insights at the leading of the Holy Spirit.