

Bible 101

How do we read
and interpret
scripture?





Recap of Week 1

- ▶ We are “People of the Book”...and the book is the Bible.
- ▶ The Bible is a library of 66 diverse books and supplemented by other holy scripture.
 - Human lived response to God
 - Stories of how God has acted in history
 - Many different genres and layers of meaning
 - Translation matters!
- ▶ Episcopalians rely on a “three-legged stool” for interpretation
 - Scripture
 - Tradition
 - Reason

Many Lenses to View Scripture

- ▶ **Close reading** – what do the words say (and not say)?
- ▶ **Literary** – what type of writing is this?
- ▶ **Historical** – who is the author and to whom is he/she writing?
- ▶ **Context** – what is happening in their community and region?
- ▶ **Translation** – what words are different in various translations?
- ▶ **Symbolic** – what are the images and archetypes?
- ▶ **Metaphorical** – what metaphors are employed and what do they mean?
- ▶ **Social location** – how would people in a particular context today hear this story?



Navigating the “Via Media” with Scripture

Historical Lens

- ▶ Bible is historical artifact – geographic, cultural, political, linguistic
- ▶ Can flatten text, focus on minor things
- ▶ Only about what it meant in the past
- ▶ An intellectual project



Inishbofin, Ireland

Metaphorical Lens

- Meaning goes beyond historical particulars
- Multiple layers of meaning
- Seeks connection with modern wisdom
- Intuitive, unitive understanding
- Can get a little far-fetched!

Powerful Words

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image . . . and let them have dominion over [creation]" – Gen 1:27

God said, "Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" – Gen 3:11

A voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; and with you I am well pleased." – Mark 1:11

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God"
– Luke 18:25

Neither death, nor life . . . nor anything in all creation, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus – Romans 8:38-39

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" – Mark 16:34

Fundamental questions . . .

In Scripture

Who is God and what is God's nature?

Who is Jesus, human/divine?

What is humanity in God's eyes?

What does God want from me?

In Life

Who am I?

How am I made in God's image?

What is my purpose?

How do I find meaning?

What does it mean to LOVE?

Pitfalls in Interpreting Scripture

Accepting anti-semitism

When it was evening on the first day of the week, and the doors of the house . . . were locked for fear of the Jews . . . – John 20:19

Reading verses literally or in isolation

After the flood, Noah lived 350 years– Gen 9:28

The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, Job is in your power; only spare his life" – Job 2:6

Avoiding difficult texts

The king said, "Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" – Matt 22:13

"Texts of terror": Hagar, Tamar, Sacrifice of Isaac

Portions of Epistles: Philemon, Corinthians, etc.

What else?

BINARY

THINKING

Lectio Divina



What word or phrase do you notice in the passage?



What questions do you have for the text?



Where is the meaning for you?

Lectio Divina

- ▶ The creation
- ▶ Moses and burning bush
- ▶ Widow and the unjust judge

Gen 1:1-5

King James: In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that *it* was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

Robert Alter: When God began to create heaven and earth, and the earth then was welter and waste and darkness over the deep and God's breath hovering over the waters, God said, "Let there be light." And there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good, and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And it was evening and it was morning, first day.

NRSV: In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

The Message First this: God created the Heavens and Earth—all you see, all you don't see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss. God spoke: "Light!" And light appeared. God saw that light was good and separated light from dark. God named the light Day, he named the dark Night. It was evening, it was morning— Day One.

Good News Bible In the beginning, when God created the universe, the earth was formless and desolate. The raging ocean that covered everything was engulfed in total darkness, and the Spirit of God was moving over the water. Then God commanded, "Let there be light"—and light appeared. God was pleased with what he saw. Then he separated the light from the darkness, and he named the light "Day" and the darkness "Night." Evening passed and morning came—that was the first day.

Exodus 3:1-6, 13-14

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.' ⁴When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' ⁵Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' ⁶He said further, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

But Moses said to God, 'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your ancestors has sent me to you", and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?' ¹⁴God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' He said further, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "I AM has sent me to you."'

Luke 18:1-8

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, 'In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, "Grant me justice against my opponent." For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, "Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" ' And the Lord said, 'Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?'