

First Impressions...of Four Gospels

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- [0 : 00] I was reviewing my notes here for this talk this morning. These are notes towards what might become a talk someday.
- So I have to be patient with the continuity here and how it unfolds. I know it's a big topic when you talk about four Gospels.
- As you see in the handout, how they open. Speaking of quoting people, I'll start right away by referring to, I'm sure you've heard of them, the late, controversial at times for sure, the late U.S. Supreme Court justice.
- I'm told his name is pronounced Anthony Scalia. Learned justice on the U.S. Supreme Court. I saw him interviewed once and he told a story to highlight his, he had a great sense of humor.
- He was a very lively, loving life kind of fellow. You could tell by his whole demeanor. He told a story to his interview, the man interviewing him to highlight his approach to reading, to interpreting, of course, the Constitution of the United States, the job of a high-ranking jurist.
- [1 : 19] So the story is he told the teachers at the Supreme Court building in Washington would often stand in front of a displayed copy of the U.S. Constitution.
- And the teacher would, standing in front of their young charges, would assert to them, these students, that this is a document, this is the document that governs our country.
- And they would proudly say, it's a good thing to say, it is, the teacher would say to the young students, it is a living document. A living document governs our nation.
- A nice thing to say, one might think. But again, Mr. Slea, distinguished scholar of things legal, of course, said to his interviewer that I was always tempted, he said, to, of course, he would never do this being a gentleman, but he was tempted to yell out over the heads of the students at the teacher, no, no, no, sorry, it is not a living document, it is really quite dead.
- It is a dead document, and it should be read as such, dead, not living. He thought that was an error to think of it as a living document.
- [2 : 36] In very general terms, and I think I get his point, he believed that another branch of government produced, as they should, living documents.
- Legislation, that's very much a kind of living document dealing with right now issues needing to be addressed. Those were the living documents in the system, his was dead.
- Interesting stuff. I don't know if it has anything to say about how we might approach the Bible. A dead document, of course, that is, of course, a metaphor, isn't it?
- Dead means, I take it, it means stable. It means a fixed point for making decisions about important matters. Our current solutions to current problems consistent with our founding values.
- It's the way a Supreme Court deals with things. Progress, on this view, is only possible if measured by something which stands still.

[3 : 49] That's the underlying foundation thought, I take it. Living documents, again, judged by a dead document. The word of God is living, active, sharp.

It discerns, says the letter to the Hebrews. But it is also, we're told in Holy Writ, it is reliable. Properly understood, it is unchanging.

No, the word of our God shall stand forever, says Isaiah. So it might be easy, too easy, maybe, just to say that this issue, as addressed in that kind of context, the Constitution, how it's interpreted, is just too easily addressed this way.

The Bible is received by the Church as reliable, as stable, and at the same time as very living, as both. So, no problem here.

We don't have much of a problem there. I would think that that's true enough. So, we have not progressed very far at all, alas, in this introduction so far. So, there you go.

[4 : 54] That's the way it is with introductions. They sort of weed out the people who are interested. And yet, there is something to ponder here, I'm sure. Reading, we will agree as Christians, reading is a profound thing in our faith.

Not to be merely dramatic, but to be casual about reading is dangerous, or it has very undesirable outcomes.

Great Church councils have been about, very broadly speaking, how to read. How will we read what's been given to us? How will we say what we've been reading?

One, John, John's first epistle, I would think is a witness to these things, the importance of reading. I've never really seen this before, so I thought about this topic, and then of late I've been reading John's epistles.

John likes to say things like, you remember this. It seems obvious, but it got my attention for the first time. He says, you remember John's epistles? I have written these things.

[6 : 02] As if the readers and the hearers of that document didn't know that. They know that. But he wants to emphasize that. I have written these things, and then, that your joy may be complete.

Or he says again in the same epistle, I have written these things, so that you may know that you have eternal life. I have written these things. It is written, says Jesus, to the tempter, when he's tempted in the wilderness.

If written, then, of course, it is to be read. Is it going too far? At least, maybe not. We receive, that we have in our presence in the church, divine writing.

So it must involve the attempt at, what, divine reading? If we've got a divine document written, we need to approach, at least, divine reading.

Reading must be, of course, discerning. It is a work of comparing, of weighing. Reading inevitably involves interpreting.

[7 : 09] What is enduring here, as I read something? But what is truth for just now, but waiting for more meaning? Constitutions are read to bring about more of their meaning for now, in a nation's life together.

A big question, then, is simply this, I think. Is reading, as understood as discerning, as comparing, as weighing, as interpreting, is this task for the church, is that a bad thing, or is it a good thing?

Is the task set to us to interpret, do we see that as good or bad? Would it be better if we didn't have to interpret, if the meaning was just right there on its surface, obvious?

To echo the title of a book by James Smith, the fellow who we studied, who's one of his books we looked at here, a great professional philosopher, James Smith.

He's got a first-rate mind. He asked this question in one of his books, is interpreting a result of the fall? The traditions fall, obviously, Genesis.

[8 : 28] Or, he asks, is interpretation, in fact, nothing less than a good gift to us from our Creator? Is tradition a problem, or is it a good thing to be received with joy?

The task of interpreting. Mr. Smith asks, I think that's a good question to ask. Bad, is it good, or is it both? One answer, jumping right into where we're going with today's talk, obviously.

It is a good thing, I will argue, because heaven has given us four Gospels, which is a bit vague. And maybe it should be said something like this, to bring out what I think is a good question to ponder here.

And I'll use, without apology, our traditional Christian discourse, our community's way of speaking. Seems to me that the Holy Spirit has instructed the Church something like this.

If we remember, and certainly the Church wants to, if we remember the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, the Spirit has said to us, you are to remember it as one story, but told in four ways.

[9 : 39] Which always surprises me a bit, I don't know if it surprises you. Or this life is told in four ways, and it will remain, of course, one story.

This is a bit odd, it seems to me. Stable, reliable, and inviting, as told in four ways, inviting, discernment.

It's an invitation, it seems to me, to interpretation. So it's as if the Spirit answers Mr. Smith's question. We'll say, no, the task of interpretation is a gift I'm giving you.

I want you to struggle and interpret the Scriptures. I will not give you their meaning too easily. I think that's part of why we have four Gospels.

This would seem to be nothing less than a guarantor, a guarantee of interpretation for sure. Interpretation is a form of reading, surely. And it's meant to be, I take it, careful, slow, measured, watchful reading.

[10 : 44] It will not yield up its meaning to easy, sloppy reading. It discounts, in fact, hurry, easy conclusions.

If we're anxious to get to a conclusion, the Scriptures won't cooperate with us very easily. So, interpretation may challenge, of course.

Luther, we're going to hear about Luther this year a lot. Sheila's going to tell us lots about Luther down the road. Luther regarded reading Scripture as a form of prayer.

You read and pray at the same time. You struggle with the text. You fight it as it fights with you, reading as a form of prayer. In principle, we want to say, though, I'm sure, it does not decline conviction.

No, it's not an ever-ending game of let's interpret some more. But it makes conviction weighty, responsible, and mature.

[11 : 49] One would hope. So today, just a taste, a very small spoonful, if you will, of looking, in the light of these kinds of questions, of looking at four Gospels, just a first glance, about the one Son of Man.

A four-fold look at the one unchanging Lord. Again, an affirmation of interpretation, which I'll have a look at a couple of examples of it, how it might unfold for the Church.

An affirmation of interpretation as nothing less than blessing. The best way to begin interpretation, Martin Luther would certainly affirm this, I'm sure, is to begin with prayer.

So, before we have a go at this topic, let's say a word of prayer. Lord, we have your word in front of us, which we always do.

We ask you to teach us how to read, how to ponder in a way which pleases you, so that the richness and fullness of what you have given us, we may benefit thereby, to your glory and to our great, great benefit indeed.

[13 : 05] Amen. Openings. We're going to look at the openings of the Gospels, at least as part of this talk, and then move on to other things in the Gospels.

Just generally, I love this kind of thing. If you don't find this exciting, just sip coffee now and close the mind down, if you haven't already. Openings, I've always found openings are memorable.

I don't know if you find them so. They invoke openings in significant literature, something loved perhaps. They become the opening to works of art written, can become iconic in our lives, very powerful.

Whole traditions may be present in just the way a text announces itself, how it should be read.

Here's this text, remember it perhaps this way. Here's a few examples of my favorite. I'm sure you would, maybe in discussion time, we can talk about this.

[14 : 11] Remember, we're going to read how the Gospels open with four startling openings, it seems to me. But from literature more generally, yeah, it is a truth universally acknowledged.

That's a great opening. It is a truth universally acknowledged. Who can forget that? Jane Austen, of course, she also tells us right off the bat, lived before postmodern thought.

Universal truths universally acknowledged are not popular these days. It was the best of times and it was the worst of times. There you go. Great, great storytellers invoke the way they start something.

They create a feeling, don't they? Not the first words by any means, but I never forget Tolkien's tone. If you love The Lord of the Rings, I'm one of the lovers of that text.

You remember how Tolkien, early on in his introduction, he says something like, you can see that little gnomish man telling a story this way. This is a book, he says, you know, largely about hobbits. Let me tell you a few things about hobbits.

[15 : 22] Yeah. That's, take that kind of literary art for granted. That's perfect, it seems to me, the way he does that. That says, as I hear it, well, let's have some fun.

But then, just maybe something a lot more than fun, because he's almost hinting that I know something about hobbits, let me tell you about them. But we know there aren't hobbits, Mr. Tolkien. Eh, let me tell you about them anyway.

I think we can learn from that. I take it, some of our Lord's parables start with that tone. You know, remember that woman who had married a guy who had six more brothers, and she ran through the whole family.

You know, some of our Lord's has that sort of a tone of, oh, how ridiculous this is. Something serious is about to be told to you about that story. You know, there you go.

One more, just speaking of one more, I can't resist it, because I think it's one of my favorite. If I had, if I'm in the desert, if someone put a gun in my head, what's your favorite opening in literature, I'd say, oh, it's this one. And we all know it, of man's first disobedience.

[16 : 30] Opens, one of the great works of our civilization, of English literature. Of man's first disobedience. I wonder how long Milton lingered over just that.

I don't know if anybody could possibly answer that. Of man's first disobedience. Maybe Milton just came with that easily. I mean, probably did. Of man's first disobedience.

The S sound. Do you hear that? Of man's, of man's first disobedience. The S sound.

Speaking of, someone else is in the text there. The snake sound. Of man's first disobedience.

The snake is unnamed, but he's present in the first four words. Milton puts him there, just beneath the surface. He's waiting to appear. Of man's first disobedience.

[17 : 32] Much present, but not on its surface. Does scripture have that quality? Might all of each of the four gospels be present in its opening?

You know, all present, at least could it all be present when you're doing a second reading? Reading, we think about reading. Reading is, sometimes a first reading is one experience.

A second reading is quite another experience. And a third, and a fourth, and a fifth, that some people in the life of the church have memorized the gospels. Isn't that amazing?

How many readings do they do? They read it in their sleep, presumably. All of the gospels, does the creator work this way in speaking to us?

Might all of an oak tree be present in an acorn? It's the way our creator does it sometimes. Just a little acorn. Boy, you wouldn't believe what's in that acorn.

[18 : 35] So we might begin just by looking. And you've got what we're going to look at in front of you. And we're all so familiar with these words that that's a problem, I take it.

It's not a new idea that what you're super familiar with, you become unfamiliar with it because you're so familiar with it. So we'll just look.

I won't apologize. We'll just look. I don't know if you've ever done this in a Bible study. I don't remember ever in a formal Bible study that I was in we ever did this. So I've done this really for the first time. The first one, the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

That's Matthew, of course. The book, the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God. You've got to study Bible. You always know, they always tell you some manuscripts say son of God, some don't. We'll go with the manuscripts that say that son of God.

[19 : 44] It's consistent, obviously, with the rest of what Mark says. The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God, begins Mark. In as much, it's all one word there, in as much as many have undertaken to compile a narrative, and that goes on, of the things accomplished amongst us.

Luke, in as much as many have undertaken to compile a narrative. And then the best known opening in, some people say, in all of literature. One of the most quoted set of words ever.

People who don't even know they're quoting John know these words, don't they? In the beginning was the word. John's famous opening. Now, there's a really well-known opening.

In the beginning was the word. Four openings. Have you ever done this in a Bible study? I haven't again, but I've done it now because I'm going to read it to you.

I have tried to read those together. An initial summary might go something like this. In a Bible study, you might somebody get bored with what you're doing in your Bible study. Do this little project.

[20 : 56] Put these in front of everybody. Come back next week and give us a summary. I would do a summary something like this and it's open to, of course, the challenge and discussion time we will.

I don't see a clock over there. Something like this. The expected one, like Israel, God's son, this one who commands attention and the one through whom all things were made of this presence in the world, we write.

We, of course, is a fiction you want to say right away because no one said what I just said. Not in the canon. We is the we of interpretation.

Of course, we, the church, read these four Gospels and then we think about them. They're like a stereo going around in our mind. Demanding interpretation. Demanding summary at times.

Or even more succinct, you might go something like this. expected son of God, a commanding presence, the ordering originating power before all things of this one we write.

[22 : 15] Expected. Expected. The book of the genealogy, he's a part of an ongoing story. He's the son of God. Israel was called the son of God in Israel's story.

So now the son of God appears. I've gone with inasmuch as many have undertaken. Lots of people were writing about Jesus. He's commanding attention now amongst us.

Commanding attention. A lot of folks want to write about him. And he's nothing less than, again, the ordering, originating power of all things. Of this one we write. I want to interpret that this way.

I've said this before in this place, I'm sure, but I've really been helped with these simple thoughts. Forgive me for being so simple, but I need simple things. The Gospels present us, again, this simple idea I first heard from the New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham, a New Testament scholar that used to be at St. Andrews.

The Gospels present us with what he calls a novum, a Latin word, N-O-V-U-M, a novum, a nice Latin word.

[23 : 25] This I find very clarifying. It's so simple, but I find it clarifying. They present us with, again, a novum. That is to say, the Gospels are not an argument about anything.

They are, rather, the Gospels, a witness. The Gospels are not an argument for Jesus. They're a witness to Jesus.

Maybe we could call them a witness, argument. For some, this doesn't mean so what? This presence, Jesus, by calling him a novum, you see, it highlights something.

This presence will define itself. That's what a novum does. Here is a completely unique new thing. We have no categories in which to define an absolutely new, unique thing.

A novum defines itself. All that the Gospel writers do, in a sense, is to point, like John the Baptist. This, to quote one John again, this we have seen and heard.

[24 : 40] This. This we have seen and heard. Not an argument to prove something, but a witness. this we have seen and heard.

And when all, once this is fully embraced, this simple idea, for some, I'm one of them, this will work towards, it has in some cases, saved people's faith, at least apparently.

Because it gets rid of great confusion and anguish. It makes it just disappear. You see, we may critically embrace all of that wondrous world out there, that strange world of what is called historical critical scholarship, and yet at the same time receive the Bible as a divine gift.

It happened in real history, the New Testament is saying, and it says, this we have seen and heard. Whatever you make of it, this we have seen and heard.

we didn't make this up, it's just there. We have no argument for it, we're just a witness to this event, this we have seen and heard.

[26 : 00] There it is. Both Testaments, the Gospels, the Old Testament may be received as divine gift, and yet be quite open to the wondrous world of historical, critical scholarship, and or, same thing, the world of interpretation.

We don't have to play one off against the other. We can, with a clear intellectual conscience, receive them as divine gift, and allow the full bore of interpretation to be unleashed upon them.

They're not afraid of that, because they're a witness to this magnificent novum, this unique presence in the world. No contradiction here. The gift, again, invites, it invites, a world of interpretive response.

Interpretive response, that is to say, is inherent in this gift. Or a dead historical past may be livingly present to us, because of the nature of what that witness was.

There you go. The church pays attention, that is to say, to the Bible, in many and various ways. Because heaven speaks in many and various ways.

[27 : 20] Even the witness to Jesus takes four forms. Again, this is an amazing fact, too little acknowledged in the life of faith, at least it was for me for the longest time.

just a little interlude for people who are interested in this kind of thing. For the past 200 years, this simple fact has simply not been acknowledged in the prevailing approach to gospel study.

I know of them, a unique presence that is, has been seen as, oh, that's simply unmanageable. We can't deal with that. And so Jesus has been reduced, as you all know, those of you who pay attention to this kind of thing, to a product of sorts.

He was mainly the product of church synagogue hostility, which ignores why did the church arise. He's a remembering of a rabbi through the lens of a Pauline mission to the Gentiles.

The gospels are forms of preaching. Some people have said, all fascinating and wondrous, but all ignoring the simple, surface, obvious witness that this novum, this mystery, was seen and heard in the first century, and the gospels are a witness to that novum.

[28 : 46] There it is. Jesus, a prophet, Jesus, a teacher of wisdom, Jesus, a proclaimer of a coming kingdom, all pretty interesting stuff, but of course the gospels say a lot more than that.

For sure. End of interlude, you know. Where a big question that you can pose, therefore, to the gospels to make progress in understanding this task of interpretation that we believe or we're posing that the spirit gave to the church to indulge in or to quest, herself, in understanding Jesus, we can ask a question like, were the gospel writers themselves interpretive witnesses?

When they said, this we have seen and heard, were they also interpreting what they saw and heard? Did they frame their witness in a certain view of the world?

that's a question that is often posed with various agendas probably at work. But a question that should be pushed further than that question, a man like Richard Hayes, and I lean a lot on Richard Hayes this morning for some biblical examples of biblical interpretation, Richard Hayes would push the question more and more, was Jesus of Nazareth an interpretive witness to himself?

Was this novum teaching his disciples what to make of him? Was Jesus an interpretive witness to himself?

[30 : 37] I think that's the kind of question that if we really push it and stay with it will deepen our reading of holy scripture. Let's see, a moment of high drama in the gospels goes like this.

Does anyone have a Bible in front of them? I forgot to bring a Bible in with me. Does anyone have a Bible? I'm sorry. Oh, let me.

How would ESV a Bible? You don't have a Bible. This is a little interlude for you. I'm sorry.

You need a break from my voice. This won't come out. Can I bring this back to you?
Thank you. You need a break.

Have some coffee, Mark. You know this story, I think it's a good example of how this kind of question might be answered with a text in front of us.

[31 : 43] Mark 11, those of you who know scripture by number will know what I'm referring to here. Mark 11, 15 to 19. Let me read this for you.

It's a well-known story, we all know it. And they came to Jerusalem, Mark says. again, 4, 11 at 15. And they came to Jerusalem.

And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple. And he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons.

And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. And he was teaching them and saying to them, is it not written, my house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations.

But you have made it, you have made it, a den of robbers. Well-known story. We all know that very well.

[32 : 44] You have made it a den of robbers. What does this kind of story mean in Mark's gospel? You know, this story shows up in all the gospels.

What does this mean? It's sometimes called, quite reasonably, you'll agree, a kind of street theater, this action, a kind of prophetic action in the temple.

According to Mark, Jesus said what it means. Jesus interpreted his own action here, quite obviously.

Is it not written, Jesus says, is it not written? How do you read here? He's asking his disciples. Is it not written? My house, we've just heard, shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.

But you, he says further, you have made it a den of robbers. Again, noting the very obvious here.

[33 : 50] This is presented as Jesus interpreting Jesus. This is presented as Jesus telling us what this action in the temple means.

It is presented as not Mark interpreting Jesus. This is presented as Jesus interpreting Jesus. how does the interpretation proceed?

Let's try and be, I say this to myself, you guys already are, let's try and be good readers. How does our Lord's interpretation proceed?

Well, broadly speaking, to note the obvious again, it proceeds in two parts. My house, he says, shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.

Okay? This is a direct citation of Isaiah chapter 56. The Lord is quoting from the prophet Isaiah from a passage which speaks of Israel's God welcoming all nations into his temple presence.

[35 : 09] This is another word, a passage from Isaiah which is about, in modern interpretive language, this is about an eschatologically restored Jerusalem, an eschatologically restored temple.

I will gather others to them, that is, to Israel besides those already gathered. So says Isaiah chapter 56 verses 7 and 8.

I will gather others to them, to my people, besides those already gathered. A temple area reserved for Gentiles must be set apart, it must be honored, it must not be used for temple money transactions, the Lord is apparently saying here.

And then the Lord moves on, but you have made it, he says, a den of robbers. This, again, is a direct citation, this time from Jeremiah chapter 7.

Jeremiah, in that chapter, Jeremiah had a habit of doing, as you know, delivering a scathing denunciation of the temple, and speaking of its complete destruction, which then happened in Jeremiah's time, you know, he, what Jeremiah saw coming happened.

[36 : 42] All this quite obvious, but it's very good just to slow right down as careful readers, and just ponder what's going on here.

the temple cleansing is here portrayed as meaning, apparently, that the time of Israel's fulfillment is coming to some sort of fulfillment, it is at hand, but this fulfillment may, or perhaps will involve the temple's destruction.

The time of the coming in of the Gentiles is approaching, therefore, keep the temple area where they gather, clean and ready for them, but also the destruction of the temple appears to be at hand.

Wow, that is quite a lot, but it seems to be obviously there in Jesus' teaching here as he goes to Isaiah for what we would call a little phrase, a little fragment, then he goes over to Jeremiah for a little fragment, and he fuses them.

bears a demand for careful reading, surely. Again, that's a lot. A lot of implied meaning is invoked by two phrases, one from Isaiah, one from Jeremiah.

[38 : 10] If you will, all of that meaning unnamed, but almost certainly present. all of that meaning is there apparently, but it's not on its surface.

See how apparently Jesus of Nazareth taught according to Mark? Just fragment, fragment, I fused them, got that? How is it with your reading?

It is written. How did Jesus teach? almost he taught a way which demanded that you immerse yourself in these texts and know how to put the pattern together.

Nothing obvious. This is amazing. How much meaning, how much interpreting challenge, how much challenging discernment a call for, sits before us in scripture.

As some would have it, I totally agree with them, much in every way. They just will not yield their meaning easily. The New Testament, like Jesus says, Martin Luther, lies in the manger of the Old Testament.

[39 : 37] There's a Luther quote to remember. like Jesus, the New Testament lies in the manger of the Old Testament. You will not understand Jesus unless you thoroughly immerse yourself in Hebrew scripture, the Old Testament.

This novum is a fulfillment of a given text. Jesus is, what these kind of texts seem to clearly indicate, Jesus is Israel's God returning to his temple, returning to Jerusalem, returning to his people.

Can you tell me the time? I have no idea. Quarter to two. Wow. Judges and learned lawyers argue about great texts, about great constitutions.

And constitutions make great demands on what is called reader competence. what reading, what interpretation commends itself, even commands itself to a community of readers such as ourselves.

Let's talk about reading. How concerned are we about being a competent community of readers and willing at times in all humility to challenge at times easily accepted readings that we've lived with for a long time.

[41 : 23] The scriptures sometimes engaged in deeply would just not allow that old interpretation to stand. Luke says I want time for interaction here.

I want to race to a conclusion. Luke says that on a Sabbath the Lord healed a woman. Luke 13 I won't read it.

Long afflicted and remember this story bent over with suffering. She was in the synagogue and our Lord healed her and famously an objection to this healing was raised.

Why this kind of healing work on a Sabbath? The leader of the synagogue said. But Jesus said famously that Sabbath slightly unfolding what Jesus says here but it's clearly what he seems to be saying that Sabbath is a remembrance of our liberation what better thing to do on the Sabbath therefore than to set someone free.

And when he said this a little passing throwaway line makes perfect common sense. All those who opposed him all those who opposed Jesus on this occasion were put to shame.

[42 : 53] It's a famous story should be famous lovely healing story. But does reader competence demand sooner or later that we get around to saying to ourselves does Luke mean us to continue the story as competent readers perhaps like this for you are God says the prophet Isaiah for you are God and we did not know you the God of Israel the Savior all those who oppose him shall be put to shame.

Does Luke plant underneath the surface of his text for a competent prayerful reader for the church of Jesus Christ is he saying I'm telling you about Israel's God embodied amongst us and he puts all those who oppose him to shame.

I'm convinced that Luke does mean that. Luke means us to see deeply here beneath the surface I'm telling you about God is present here we witness to him this we have seen and heard this is the God of Israel embodied in our presence yes the Savior who bore the world shame so that we may not be shamed this God who shames his enemies actually will take the shame upon himself the whole dynamic of who Jesus is and what he's come to do is set resonating in a competent reader's mind the prayerful reader as Luther would have it in the text just beneath its surface in terms of the history of the battles over who is

Jesus in historical critical terms you know the old story has been Matthew Mark and Luke are ambiguous about who Jesus is but it comes clean in John that shows that John is late John just says oh that's God in our midst the word became flesh on this reading no the synoptic gospels tell us that Jesus is God embodied amongst his people the synoptics tell us that there's nothing uniquely new about John Jesus is God Luke is telling us putting his enemies to shame he doesn't hate his enemies he's going to save them but he puts them to shame when they're so wrong about what the narrative of saving Israel of Egypt means God is going to liberate people there it is so my prayer today for so as we're headed towards 10 o'clock now I don't have a good

I want I must stop I just want I hope that the Lord makes us good readers this has just been an exercise in reading scripture again I hope it has been awfully simple for you learned bunch like you and I couldn't help but over here earlier there were some I don't know to overstate it but some ironic remarks about Marilyn Robinson have a reputation as being a bit obsessive about Marilyn which I am she's coming to town you know next month couple weeks I love this when she speaks about reading scripture she says gracious things like this by grace of my abiding ignorance it is always new to me I am never not instructed a great profound reader is

[47 : 12] Marilyn what a she commends the reformers especially her chief intellectual hero in life John Calvin for their lives of what's the right word she uses but their lives of intense self sacrificial reading the reformers didn't know anything by rumor they weren't content with that they knew the fathers they knew the medievals they knew scripture they kept going back to it they always wanted to hear it anew so I hope we've been instructed again you always will be instructed as Marilyn reminds us by going back to these amazing texts and feeling how fragments on a surface as profound as that is will reward that's the word arduous reading arduous reading why does the

Lord put them to shame because the prophet said when God is embodied when the God of Israel comes to his people he will put them to shame so Luke is saying God embodied amongst this I witness to this novum so again may the Lord let me say this as a closing prayer before our conversation may the Lord simply make us good readers it is written Lord make us good readers of what is written Amen of course some of you may have objections that this isn't all that isn't on the surface that it's maybe there's some other Will please what do you do about people who can't understand don't have a subtly of mind understand all analogies but I know you know that you're not left out of the equation but what do you have to say about that the people who won't see stupid people they're often asked to address

Larry's exchange well I think there isn't any the church as a whole is called to be profound in its reading but individual readers like me I don't have to feel that this makes my ordinary everyday reading scripture inadequate or bad or that it's a massive failure the Lord is patient with me he'll give me a surface and he'll bless me as I take in a surface would you think this is goodwill but then he beckons the church on to more more I'm speaking more to you here and otherwise I think the church has become casual especially about the Old Testament that Jesus fulfills it we forget it but Luther would say no he remains in the manger there Hayes puts it you will not understand the meaning of Jesus without the Old Testament you will not understand the

Old Testament without the witness to Jesus in the Gospels they are interlinked I tried to I stayed away from fancy language because fancy language will sometimes talk about things like metalepsis which I know over coffee I often hear you people talking about metalepsis which is a literary thing whereby citing a fragment beckons readers to become to recover more of an original subtext seeking the full force of the intertextual links which I know a lot of you do point out in coffee I never understand what you're talking about but I go slow there but yeah a fragment what does the Lord do in that in that in that mark thing are we really I've really been convicted by

Hayes Bill Reimer here has heard Richard Hayes in person he's a great New Testament scholar very very learned man he just says look look look look at mark Jesus grabs a few words from Jeremiah a few words from Isaiah says there that's what I just did now so it's not individual Bible facts it's the pattern of Bible facts that the Lord commands us to see so on the road to Emmaus I like this point some people have made on the road to Emmaus Jesus didn't say oh open your eyes I'll show you my hands and my feet he said let's have a Bible study and he opened to them the scriptures and all the things in the Psalter and the Pentateuch and the prophets he said you see the pattern got it the pattern should tell you that the

[52 : 40] Messiah is going to be rejected by his people so that his people may be saved God has a plan you should see this and that's the way the Lord unfolds his word I mean that must be an invitation if not a command to interpretation that it's a gift interpretation is a gift it's not a burden do you think in heaven we'll spend eternity interpreting God I suspect maybe we will the infinite mystery will go from one degree of glory to another I've interpreted them this much and then there'll be more and then there'll be an infinity an eternity of more and more of the mystery of who God is revealed in Jesus I think interpretation is our gift forever in some sense maybe that's just

Luther scholar over here please Sheila that'd be you Sheila oh sorry you're one of your many interests not a theology right no it's really important what you said about interpretation thank you for that and maybe someday you'll go further with it because this is dangerous when we have words that we do not understand or where we want to cite this little bit and run with it off into the whatever direction now they had Jesus the people that wrote the gospels we have the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit's job is to instruct correct and witness to Christ so interpretation without the spirit is not going to take us in the right direction oh sure thank you Sheila that's exactly right Susan please just following on from that going back a little bit to what we'll ask one part of my job is to have a

Bible study with international scholars it's an ESL Bible study most of these people well one woman asked me the other day what is Christianity that many of them are holding the Bible for the first time ever in their hands they didn't know what it was before they came to the study and but I can see exactly what Sheila says the Holy Spirit working in people as they read the scriptures almost always the New Testament the life of Jesus last term at the end of the term having looked at incidents in Jesus life we looked at the resurrection appearance with Thomas and one of the men in the Bible study his English name is Thomas and you know at the end I said so this is the conclusion they came to what's your conclusion after looking at Jesus and some of them get it and some of them don't but obviously they're not stupid people but they are people who know nothing about the stories and you know there is understanding there but it's not to the no I hear you no no

I know thank you that's why I think Bauckham's point is rich with ideas that we don't have to produce arguments that Jesus is the son of God and get people converted we can't spirit doesn't recognize flesh does not recognize divinity but the witness of the church just points and the spirit unfolds so there's no pressure on us anymore I like I'm going to get laughter here but I love Marilyn when she says along with along with New Testament scholarship she has that on her side for what that's worth Philippians 2 is probably a hymn maybe Paul wrote it but it's a hymn and it's a beautiful poem and I want Ed Norman someday to put it to music maybe a guitar Ed or guitar or organ I'm not sure which but I'm not a music guy though he was in the form of God he emptied himself and took the form of his servant and he died therefore

God has highly exalted him that's a hymn that's a poem it's a hymn so Marilyn says okay we got the earliest Christians singing hymns like that then we have gospel writers like Matthew and Luke coming around and producing what genealogies see a novelist sees this seems to me did they read the genealogies with irony that man from heaven who emptied himself and now we're told that he has a line behind him now what is going on here so what is the reading that makes that happen and we I said it this morning at church the the fathers and mothers at at Nicaea said I guess we just have to say very God and very man genealogy very man very God he's from heaven he emptied himself got it there's reading took the church about three centuries to figure out how to precisely say this after having read it for a long time the

[58 : 38] Arians never could read it that way bless them I don't mean to bless heresy but there's a way to read it hey the guy's got a genealogy he's a man he's a man he's not God he's God so good reading says very God and very man Martin please that's Maryland again so I never again not today anyway you've already touched on this but one question is who is to interpret it I'm sorry who is to interpret it so let me just say the traditional catholic view is it's a matter for the church as a whole to interpret the scriptures traditional protestant view is one man goes away into his study and he realizes that everyone up to now has got this first wrong then he goes with it or she yeah yeah right please martin please yeah yeah exactly yeah well

I would quote a catholic Hans Kong to reconcile the two positions and I think he wanted to do that the great because he would say that we just trust that the spirit will keep the church in his fancy word was indefectible that the church goes through tumultuous times to quote Isaiah 54 oh storm tossed one oh afflicted one not comforted the Lord's body goes through these times of big struggle but the spirit keeps the church somehow going down the right path who would have thought that today we'd be saying Nicaea the Nicene Creed because it took the church a heck of a long time to come up with the right words because each side had some argument genealogies flipping too as Maryland points out but the church so that's my best answer I think the church just gets it right and Lois should point out the church isn't as divided as the world says it is that the Orthodox and the Catholics and Protestants outsiders as Lewis said he once was he still heard the same witness from all those different quarters all that different literature over 2000 years he kept hearing the same message Jesus is Lord he died for your sins come and participate in his mystery there's different ways of doing that sacramentalism or preaching it's the same message so the spirit has done that work to keep the church indefectible the spirit knows how to bring about crises and get rid of bad things are you convinced

Martin you know more about these things than me I'm happy with your answer thank you I don't think it's the final answer sir I was thinking about I really appreciate a lot of what you've said such an important perspective to me it's a both and we have to keep in tension even if you move on in Luke for example in the introduction so you may have certainty or perfect understanding he studied these things so you may have certainty of what has expired so he's laying it out as certain truth and you know John records in John 17 the famous high priest before the prayer of Christ sanctify them by your truth and of course truth doesn't change so there's a fixed in this of the scripture but it isn't given in this cookie cutter kind of wooden form where we can just sort of look it up in a textbook and get the answer and Jesus

I think was touching on this when he was exasperated so often with the disciples saying you still don't get it right after all of this and how much longer do I can bear with this generation but the spirit will come and reveal all truth too so in other words there was more truth to be revealed that I think God does want us to wrestle with and interpret like I remember getting into a debate with a somebody who was saying the Bible teaches slavery no it doesn't and I went on and tried to expound that to them how it does not I believe but I think God in a sense wanted us to wrestle with that truth and come to the clear conclusion that you know what this is actually wrong to take our fellow man and enslave them and so the goal you touched on it again was in heaven what's it going to be like are we automatons God just wanted a bunch of children to come to heaven and tell us what we should believe God or are we going to be like him and actually grow in knowledge and that's what I think that he meant when he was saying you know in

Amos 3 where he says God does nothing unless he reveals it first to his prophets and it's not just a go and tell them and shut up but so often the prophet would answer God Moses would say God are you sure you want to do that Abraham does not the judge of all the earth want to do right and God sort of takes counsel and says okay Abraham that's what you say and I respect you tells us about God's character there's a maturity I think that he wants us to grow into and that's a very adult thing because we will one day judge angels whatever that means and he's saying interpret and grow the truth with the guidance of the spirit is absolutely necessary as you respect staying within I appreciate Richard Hayes I never quite thought this thought before many thoughts I haven't thought before that he he says that we right in the gospels we have if you read Mark if you said to yourself oh it'd be good to have an annotated version of this he said turn to Matthew you do

[64 : 43] Matthew he reads as an annotated version of Mark Mark alludes Mark says this Matthew says this was to fulfill what the prophet said he's back in didactic mode Matthew whereas Mark alludes I think that's true so the gospels themselves witness to an interpretive process that that that that were meant to experience I think do you think the first readers of Mark's gospel intelligent first century Jews or instructed Gentiles when they read Mark when they said the gospel of Jesus Christ the son of God did they say okay that means he's Israel that means he's Israel's true identity out of Egypt see Matthew annotates out of Egypt have I called my son so he says see

Israel was the son of God and now the son of God is coming out of Egypt again so he sort of unfolds Mark's opening line in a sense serves I'm curious around the coupling of a humble and hungry mind and heart with the Holy Spirit wooing us to God and to Jesus and I'm thinking of Jesus' response to the question why do you talk in terrible Jesus and Jesus says for this people's heart has become callous they hardly hear with their ears and they have closed their eyes otherwise they might see with their eyes hear with their hearts and here's the words that really jump out and understand with their hearts and turn and I would turn and I would heal them so I'm just pondering in my own mind about the coupling of a hungry mind and heart such as

Jesus revealed when he said on the road to Emmaus which you referenced he had a Bible study with him so he came back through all the scriptures in other words are you hungry and ready to hear that yes or no and how much do we hunger for God by going after his revealed word and then that coupled with the Holy Spirit mysteriously wooing us through God through the revelation of Jesus yeah I guess my thought is that without an open heart how do we ever come to God yeah well we don't do we now I think I mean am I being provocative if I say wrote to Emmaus Jesus is a Protestant and then he breaks the bread for them and so he's a Catholic now know me in the word and know me as I give you myself in the bread that both are

I think both are but that's now there's a you know a kind of layered expansive exegesis that goes into there's a fullness of meaning now is that or is that my fantasy but why does he break bread with them Catholics would go right to that you know our brothers and sisters there and say no the Lord gives them himself in the sacrament Bill I was thinking somewhat along those lines the whole phenomenon of literacy in the history of the church very few people could actually read the gospels did I read at the time of the English Reformation that 10% of males and 1% of women could read I might have that wrong but if you follow the trajectory of the Reformation literacy is very much at the heart of that but if you go back most people couldn't read the gospels so the church then becomes a the church is the reader but

Larry Hurtado likes to say the Christians in the first three centuries are the most bookish people ever they're just totally bookish they're just saturated in books they're read too I suppose Nora Nora that's interesting that when Gary was heard that was why lectionaries had cycles for the Sunday lectionaries but not the big themes and if you were in church only on a Sunday that was the whole idea then you would hear those big themes that you're talking about and going back and forth between the that was so that people would at least absorb you know they would hear in that point they weren't reading reading and hearing are a different thing that's going on within your mind and heart but at least with that early in the early part of that part of the life of the church you got to hear the last story in the lection a literate a literate

[70 : 28] I won't mention her name a literate 16th century a very literate 16th century knew according to the girl that when Luther when Calvin calls human beings worms his modern introvert saying here's proof the guy was a humanity hater he's a monster we always said that we don't have to read any further Marilyn says Calvin's referring to psalm 22 I'm a worm and no man he's talking about humanity dies in christ in shame and rises with him in glory Calvin has the highest most exalted view of human beings you can imagine and modern stupid people think that Calvin hates people because we are illiterate not them we're illiterate and she hates and she attacks me I'm sorry I'm sorry a brief comment and a question because I don't know if you know the answer

Harvey but I'm wondering about the literature issue of east versus west right because one of the problems in the west was that it was always done in Latin and you know so they were reading from the Vulgate and you could be you know somewhere in England and you would go I don't know what that guy is saying but in the eastern orthodox churches they actually were reading from their own like the eastern orthodox did well to interpret the scriptures in their own vernacular was literacy different in the east I don't know you got me another topic it's a good idea for Christians to be literate isn't it yes we can encourage one another in that task well unfortunately our time has come we were blessed to have an interview so we had a little bit more time today for Harvey's talks is it by the time he gets to the end I get really excited and want to start the beginning again it's like a whole new launch pad it's fascinating thank you Harvey so much thank you for Rakrit thanks for this thank you and you