PRESENTATION TO THE DIOCESE OF VIRGINIA

Developing Biblical Literacy in a Congregation

How do we help parishes move from simply respecting the Bible to actively reading, questioning, and living into its stories?

A keynote conversation designed to equip and empower leaders with actionable strategies to cultivate biblical literacy across all ages in the parish.

Dean Markham · Virginia Theological Seminary

A READING WE HEAR TODAY

For some Christians, the Bible justifies a *monochrome culture*, with little religious diversity, and therefore strong borders.

The key texts cited

1 TIMOTHY 5:8

Care for your own first

It is right simply to care for those who are closest to you.

REVELATION 7:9

A multitude of nations — in heaven

The multitude of nations is not intended to be realized on earth.

CREATION ORDINANCES

Each nation its own

Stephen Wolfe, *The Case for Christian Nationalism*: God intended each nation to have its own separate sense of self — designing that reality recovers the pre-fall state.

So, is this a right reading of Scripture?

FIRST RESPONSE

1 Scripture is a complex text with many voices

Many voices offering different perspectives — not a single proof-text that settles the question.

2

SECOND RESPONSE

The hardest teaching is Jesus's own

MATTHEW 6:34

Do not worry.

MATTHEW 18:22

Forgive another countless times.

It is a demanding ethic.

AN ANGLICAN LENS

Anglicans take seriously the *Eternal Word made Flesh*

So we read Scripture with a Christological emphasis — every text read in the light of Christ.

"And the Word became flesh and lived among us." — John 1:14

THIRD RESPONSE

The politics of Jesus: consistently critical of the powerful, supportive of the poor and the oppressed

LUKE 1:46–55
The Magnificat

LUKE 18:22
The rich young ruler

LUKE 21:1–4
The widow and her gift

MATTHEW 25:34–40
The sheep and the goats

LUKE 3:11
The sermon on the plain

JAMES 2:15–16
Faith and works

Not partisan — but clear parameters

The politics of Jesus do not belong to a party. They do set the boundaries for Christian reflection on the political.

FORBIDDEN

We may not support explicitly racist programs.

THE DESTINATION IS CLEAR

Policies that enable the poor to flourish.

The route — market-driven or a government program — is a matter for Christian discussion.

A strategy for Biblical reflection on our times

1	**Read the Bible often**	Appreciate the primary Biblical themes. Understand how Jesus is properly understood in the tradition of the 8th-century prophets.
2	**Avoid simplistic critiques**	Often on social media, on all sides — they oversimplify a complex issue.
3	**Notice the ironies of our moment**	Acts 8 seems clearly to affirm the acceptance of non-binary persons; yet this small minority is such a major culture-war issue.
4	**Be a person of prayer**	In conversation with God about the text of Scripture and our political moment.
5	**Stay in conversation with all**	Keep the conversation open with everyone, whatever their politics.

BIBLICAL LITERACY IN THE PARISH

Biblical instruction matters for Christians of all ages

FOR CHILDREN

Godly Play

Children hear the stories, wonder about them, and make them their own.

FOR ADULTS

Bible studies

Adults read, question, and discuss Scripture together — and live into its stories.

BEING A BIBLICAL CHRISTIAN

Read. Resist the simplistic. Notice. Pray. *Stay in conversation.*

Thank you · Ian Markham, Virginia Theological Seminary