

God adores us

By [Samuel Wells](#)

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*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes Wells's current Living by the Word column as well as past magazine and blog content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

The three readings for this Sunday have few obvious connections. But they do each point to forms of holiness: Genesis points to vocation, Romans points to faith, and John points to rebirth.

In [this week's Century lectionary column](#), I talk about how most laypeople seem to feel utterly unworthy of the designation "disciple." They are all too aware that they don't fit the bill as far as doing the right things (professionally or puritanically), thinking the right things (doctrinally or politely) or feeling the right things (religiously or interpersonally). It's not wrong for the church to hold up an ideal of how Christians do and think and feel--but most pastors are well aware that their people are chiefly conscious of their failure to come anywhere close to the ideal.

I'm not making a passionate call to arms to address some social injustice or other, though there's a time and a place for that. Instead I want to highlight this week's psalm, in order to focus on a simple but abiding truth: the heart of Christianity is that God adores us--always has, always will--and our failures can't ruin this.

This sounds like a bland, blanket affirmation, but it isn't quite as bland as it first appears. The idea that we can ruin everything appeals to our ego--that we really are major decision-makers, and that God's plan for the universe really can be set off kilter by our tawdry missteps. Righteousness thus becomes a mixture of risk assessment and resentment.

In fact, righteousness is delirious joy and spontaneous gratitude. Such a shift seems an appropriate goal for a Lenten sermon.