

Worship with the other side

By [Bill Goettler](#)

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*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes Goettler'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.*

In October, a newly formed Right to Life group sponsored a week-long conference, entitled "Abortion and Feminism," on the campus of Yale Divinity School. The pro-choice posters posted by the Students for Reproductive Justice made it clear that seminarians are not of one mind on the issue.

I watched the rising tensions with great interest. A theologically grounded pro-choice position has long been of great importance to me, an important tenet of the Reformed theology that I hold dear. I was glad to see students who share my perspective lifting their voices in the public realm.

But just when the tension around these disagreements seemed most fierce, I entered the chapel one morning for the 10:30 a.m. worship service. A Taizé service had been planned for the day, and the congregational singing had begun by the time I arrived. All of the chairs in the space had been removed, replaced by long, blue floor cushions. And there, across the chapel from where I was seated, sat the leaders of the two opposing sides in the abortion debate, both with eyes closed, both moved by the Taize chant that filled the sanctuary.

I don't know if they talked together after the service. But it was clear to me that when our eyes and our hearts are focused on the holy in our midst, we lower our defenses a bit. Perhaps we share no more than a song. And perhaps, a bit more tolerance and some sense of mutuality begins to inform our spirits.

[As I say in my Century lectionary column](#) for this week, John the Baptist is most troubling to those who imagine that they alone are the rightful bearers of the light. If Advent is truly a time of preparing to celebrate the birth of God made flesh in Jesus,

then these must be days to renew our willingness to be vulnerable to all of the ways that God is speaking in our lives. Even if it just means sitting at the side of someone who we think has got it all wrong. Even if it just means 30 minutes of shared prayer.