

What's God up to?

By [F. Dean Lueking](#)

March 19, 2012

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

Among the most stimulating books I've read recently is Samuel Wells's *Be Not Afraid*, from which I picked up the phrase repeated several times in my [current lectionary column](#) for the *Century*: "What's God up to?" This is the question that counts.

In this week's Old Testament lesson, Jeremiah proclaims a new covenant. At its core is what God is forever up to: forgiving sins and creating the community of the forgiven with a calling in the world.

I understand What God Is Up To as God's astonishing decision to take the power to save and renew and entrust it to our human lips--in a gospel word men and women are called to preach. I learned this about preaching well over a half century ago, from Richard R. Caemmerer at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. Over the years, this bit of wisdom has outlasted all my periodic wonderings whether preaching "works" any more.

Wells puts it another way: the preacher's first task in approaching a text is to ask what God is up to. Then the preacher goes forward in the conviction that the living God is indeed up to nothing less than mighty works for the rescue and renewal of the world--the world for which God's son died and rose again.

I served the same congregation--Grace Lutheran in River Forest, Illinois--for more than four decades. Many of our faithful folks heard some 2,000 of my sermons. They would have long since given up and moved on--and quite rightly--if sermon after sermon depended primarily on what I was up to. I would have, too.

But one thing I learned in a long pastorate is a keener awareness that it's not about the preacher's persona, IQ or dogged determination. It's about what God is up to, and the grace of learning what that priority leads to--week in and week out, decades on end.

Wherever you are on your journey, that grace is for you.