

Free and flawed

By [Samuel Wells](#)

March 7, 2011

*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 first Sunday of Lent is the best time of the year to talk about sin. Many people in the church, especially the mainline church, are stuck when it comes to the overlap of sin and sensuality. No one really wants to be the pastor who comes over all judgmental about sex. Everyone is aware that negative attitudes toward the body lead to a host of ills, including eating disorders and various kinds of self-rejection. Many laypeople are aware of the theological turn toward original goodness, and it has become hopelessly unfashionable to associate the Fall narrative with sexuality in any way.

But that leaves us with nothing to say about sin in general--and no positive way of talking about sensuality without turning it into some kind of blanket affirmation.

In the [Century lectionary column](#) for this week, I attempt to address these cul-de-sacs with compassion, understanding and a fresh theological perspective. I make a connection between the Fall and adolescence--not to pillory adolescence, but to a recognition that both involve a loss of innocence and a change in relationship to one's own body.

Nakedness is a way of talking about the complexity of the human condition--free, flawed, but capable of being joyously embraced and renewed by God. A sermon for the first Sunday of Lent should prepare the congregation to enter a period of introspection and truth-telling, but in a way that points to Jesus--especially the cross--and carries with it the hope and promise of resurrection.