

Stories that speak for themselves

By [Katherine A. Evensen](#)

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Recently I spent a week on retreat with my book club. It's a smart and kind and diverse group of people. But one of the greatest pleasures of their company is that only two members are Christian—and very different Christians in terms of theology and tradition. One woman, a psychologist, laughs out loud because she can't believe that she has a friend who is a pastor. That would be me.

When you're a pastor, you're always a bit of a pariah in groups that don't consider themselves terribly religious, like my book club. Yet it's through literature that some of the most profound and articulate Christian theology is framed. My preaching professor taught us that to stay on top of our preaching, we need to read great literature. Though it's important to keep up with current trends in theology, it is in the architecture of words that we discover theological elegance. Through literature we can speak of the sublime, of grace, of the thank you and of the lament. Through literature and art we find life as it exists. And here, right now, in life, we find the life of our God—the thing of which pastors speak.

When I read the texts about Abram and God and Jesus weeping over Jerusalem, I see both the foundational stories of our faith and also the profound stories of great literature. There is something epic and heartbreaking about this God who appears in a vision to Abram to offer comfort. There is something painfully exquisite in Jesus, our God, weeping over the very place in which he is about to be betrayed. I don't have to convince anyone about our God; I don't need to present God as an idea. There are no arguments, no apologetics: the profundity and sheer beauty of these stories speak for themselves.

I don't have any compulsion to save anyone; my book group is fine without my evangelism. Anyway, if God is truly a God of grace, then I can simply trust this to be so, and the details of this God who knows the falling of sparrow can lay themselves out over time. But I do find the stories of our faith compelling: this absurdly beautiful and odd God has chosen our lives to enter and so engage with creation. I cannot

reconcile this God and this divine pathos for our world with the ordinary metrics of our life together. Yet I believe this deeply troubling story is also deeply true.

*Additional lectionary columns by Evensen appear in the February 23 issue of the Century—click [here](#) to subscribe.*