

Clear texts and troubled times

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

I have finally gotten around to putting away the green garden hose I tripped over all fall. After some extended travel time, the sudden frigid weather caught me off guard. Trying to coil cold plastic hose in a chilly garage seems impossible. Getting the job done properly requires time and patience. I was determined to take hours if necessary and to do it with humor and the long view.

My goal: a sleepy, green, snakelike, circular calm in the corner, so that every time I entered the garage I could gaze with satisfaction. The hose had not gotten the best of me.

So it feels at times with the biblical text. A clear gospel passage collides with troubled times, and often it seems impossible to uncoil a coherent concept as a counterpoint to tangled lives and cultural discord.

After years of ministry, the Gospel of Matthew has become new to me through my faculty colleague Dale Allison's [study](#). It takes patience to see an old story in new ways, to clarify what he calls "a coincidence of opposites." The nearer we come to the crucifixion moment, the more we discover darkness and confusion. This week's reading, however, is a mountaintop experience, all affirmation and bright light. Allison's work is a strategy for straightening old assumptions.

This week and [last](#), I chose to focus on the gospel passages because they tell of the life and ministry of Jesus. Often I wonder if we too easily put the church before Jesus--and in so doing lose the patient work of discovery of who he is in a new time.