

Paul's urgent appeal

By [F. Dean Lueking](#)

March 26, 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.*

This week is Palm and/or Passion Sunday, and choices will vary as to the form of worship and the point at which the sermon falls. Palm Sunday, with its palms waving and salutations sung to the Savior, is an event that children will enter into readily even if adults are a bit shy. If the choice is for a Passion Sunday emphasis, a dramatic reading is memorable for those who speak the parts and those who listen--and the passion narrative lends itself particularly well to this approach.

It is, after all, the greatest story ever told.

Another option is to focus on the second lesson. This profound Christ-hymn is Paul's pastoral appeal for harmony and one-mindedness in the face of petty divisiveness in the Philippian congregation. How urgent is that appeal in our day?

In 2000, there were 34,100 denominations in the world. That number [has now reached 43,000](#) (free registration required)--a 26 percent increase over a dozen years. While formal organizational diversity is not all negative, neither is it a glowing witness to the unifying, eschatological vision of Philippians 2:5-11.

This Sunday appeal for Christ-given harmony is not April Fools' silliness. It lifts the essential witness of the local congregation as a work-in-progress to what counts for the well-being of the global Christian community.