

## Unpleasant messages

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

It is often observed by my friends, and even by my wife, that I might be a little too “angry” for someone who supposedly is called to a ministry of presenting the gospel to others. They don’t go so far as to call me a hypocrite, but I do think they’re pointing out that I’m not always that nice, that I don’t necessarily embody forgiveness (or even the golden rule), that “Christian” implies a graciousness I simply lack.

To be honest, I’m okay with the criticism. It all seems pretty accurate. Besides, I’m not sure that a message about being nice or forgiving or gracious is what people need to hear right now. Okay, maybe they do need all of those things. What I mean to say is that we’ve been preaching them for a long time, but they don’t seem to be inspiring a whole lot of new people to engagement and transformation.

This week’s readings are certainly not nice messages. They are far too challenging to be called that. They tell us that we have a choice between living the world’s way (which seems sensible for now) or living God’s way (which requires faith and not sense). There is no in-between way—and we have to decide now, because we don’t know when God’s world will be the reality for our lives.

If we understand that our calling is to prepare people for that world to come—to make God’s world a real basis for living—how might we live out our faith differently?