

Word of faith

By [Rufus Burton](#)

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*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes Burton'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's an old saw: When Protestants say “the Bible” they mean the New Testament, when they say “the New Testament” they mean Paul, and when they say “Paul” they mean Romans. I was looking forward to this opportunity to write [Living By the Word](#). Then I received the specific Sundays I was assigned, and I confess I rolled my eyes a little. I could be yet another Presbyterian to write on Romans!

[I went with Romans anyway](#). Here's an excerpt:

For the Bible—and here especially for Paul—the gospel and faith are not about seeing something so much as hearing something. It is in hearing the word of Christ that we are given the language to change our thinking. Or, to borrow from Paul again, in hearing the good news our minds are transformed by what we have heard.

Which puts the preacher in a difficult place, I think.

I chose the Romans passage because this was the first biblical text I handled in Greek for my senior undergraduate seminar in rhetoric, on the power of the spoken word to create worlds of thought. This writing assignment also offered me the opportunity to contact an old professor who, since my graduation, has become very active in a church community. We didn't speak past each other as much as we did back in the day.

I took up the passage in college because I knew there was a link between our faith and the word proclaimed about the Word made flesh. I'm not sure why the lectionary ends the passage at verse 15 instead of continuing through 17 (“faith comes from

what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ"). This is not the first time I have been mystified by the choices of those creating the lectionary; nor will it be the last.

Faith makes all the difference in life. One lives either in an impersonal universe that literally does not care—is incapable of care—or in the midst of a creation ordered, ruled, and sustained by a loving God who knows it intimately. And sound words make a difference. They are given power by the Spirit, who is the Holy Spirit of the Living Word, the Holy One of Israel. Creation and redemption are works of the triune God—and we, as the people of God, are given the work of proclaiming the word of faith.