

Surprise and delight

By [Marilyn McEntyre](#)

April 8, 2013

For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes McEntyre'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 love Don Juel's description of Jesus as a "[master of surprise](#)." The ways Jesus reveals himself to his followers in the post-resurrection stories testify to his delight in surprising those who love him, and whom he loves.

Jesus' moments of self-revelation are not only world-shaking but intimate, relational, invitational and even clever. Today's story has an element of an affectionate practical joke. Jesus doesn't interrupt the disciples' work of the moment; he invites them to engage more deeply in it, and in doing so to recognize him first in the abundant blessing it yields. They're fishermen, so he says, effectively, "Watch this" and multiplies fish—again.

The day of his resurrection Jesus leaves a little clue for Peter: the head covering "folded up in a place by itself." When he appears to Mary he lets her think he is the gardener before surprising her into joy by speaking her name. Shortly thereafter he appears in a safe space where the doors were locked against intruders. Later he does it again, so Thomas can inspect his wounds.

And in this week's story Jesus makes the disciples breakfast on the beach, hospitably allowing them to provide the fish for the occasion—guests always want to bring something to the table.

In these stories, the sheer kindness and playfulness of Jesus' strategies of self-disclosure add an important dimension to what are already amazing testimonies. He reveals himself in different ways to different people, easing their astonishment and fear in gracious ways. It reminds me of his act of kindness at Cana, where his first

miracle is to ease the host's embarrassment.

Even at his most astonishing, Jesus' point never seems to be primarily to astonish. It's to invite, to open a path to understanding, to comfort his witnesses even as he shakes the ground under their feet—with a reassurance that must come with a smile or a little hidden laughter. *See? It is I. Don't be afraid.*