

Should Easter be surprising?

By [David Keck](#)

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*This week, we're posting three lectionary blog posts: [Maundy Thursday's on Monday](#), [Good Friday's yesterday](#), and Easter Sunday's today. For more commentary on the readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes current Living by the Word columns as well as past magazine and blog content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

In my experience, Easter Sunday is a fairly scripted event. For weeks, the choir has been practicing special music, perhaps a cantata. Extra bulletins have been printed since there may be visitors to the church, those Christmas-and-Easter Christians we are always talking about. Additional worshipers means that preparing and serving communion will take longer. There may be a bit of exhaustion—Holy Week services have drawn us into the agonies of Jesus' last days. Pastors may have bags packed, ready to head out for a few days after all the extra work.

Easter has been coming, and we've made sure to be ready. We want to do it well. Easter can be so well-prepared that it sometimes seems rather un-Easter-like.

I wonder if the first disciples also had their bags packed. After all, their leader was a condemned criminal, and when they met they wisely locked the doors. Two departed for Emmaus, even after hearing the story of the women at the tomb (maybe even *because of* the story of the empty tomb). When were the rest heading back home and getting back to normal?

Then their resurrected Lord appears, wounds and all, and nothing remains the same. Shouldn't Easter services be just a little bit surprising?

A part of me very much wants to recover and re-present the drama, the mystery, the shock, and the wonder of the first Easter. It's a stunning thing, God's victory over death and all that opposes God's rule. It is a demonstration of the sovereignty of God, mighty beyond all imagining. Jesus' dying on the cross and God's raising him from the dead are love's triumph. Behold a new creation! Shouldn't our hearts be burning as we are overcome with the spontaneous need to rejoice?

But another part of me respects the ordered Sunday that is Easter. We are not the first disciples, and we find ourselves as part of a church militant, in it for the long haul. On the cross, Jesus cries out the beginning words of Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" As his church, we make our promise with the last verse of the same psalm, to "proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn."

I believe that the creative love of God is far from exhausted and that there are many generations to come. Thus, I believe in the wisdom of preparing for the ongoing work of witnessing. This requires patient work. And drama for drama's sake detracts from the beauty and nobility of its steadiness. It is not flashy, but it is faithful, and God nourishes us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation not just once, or once a year, but forever.

Nothing is the same. God's victory is the new normal.