

May 5, Easter 3C (John 21:1-19)

It takes Jesus to introduce something new into the disciples' routine.

by [Lisa D. Jenkins](#) in the [April 24, 2019](#) issue

I'm a Marvel Universe fan, and I'm very excited about the latest movie, *Captain Marvel*. The press has said that it doesn't rank as high as previous Marvel movies. That's fine with me; I always root for the underdog, anyway. And the way things are going in our country and in our world, we need a hero—even if it's a woman in a red-and-blue uniform with a giant star on the chest. Between the comic books and the movie, the origin of her superpowers may have shifted, but Captain Marvel's purpose is clear: to save humanity, by any means necessary.

In our Gospel passage this week, in which the resurrected Jesus appears, we see a hero who came to save humanity. We don't need to go to the local movie theater and hand over our money to recognize a hero when we see one. A hero is someone who operates with courage and does something out of the ordinary for the sake of others. Heroes consider the welfare of others before their own. And they know that the most important thing is not their fame but their deeds and their intentions.

That's what we see in the resurrected Jesus: a real hero. The one who died and then rose is now showing his heroic self to his disciples. Jesus has already shown himself to his disciples earlier (20:19-29); now he shows up again to seven of them. These seven disciples have gone fishing, and they have been out all night trying to catch something so that they can earn their living. They are working the night shift in order to make ends meet—and despite their best efforts, they have caught nothing.

The disciples are working, but there is no evidence of their work. Often we feel like we've worked hard and done everything that we can. We've pulled the night shift; we've put in our overtime. But there's no evidence of what we have done. We pour all our energy into a project, a relationship, a job, and still it seems like we're no better off than we were when we first started.

But God sends a hero. Heroes, of course, rarely come in a red cape or a black panther suit; they don't usually carry shields or swords or giant hammers. What they do is change lives for the better—sometimes with nothing but a word of advice.

The disciples are working and coming up empty, and here comes a man. We readers know it's Jesus, but the disciples have no idea who it is. This man is on the shore while the disciples are still in the boat, and he asks them, "Do you have any food?" Their answer is no. They do not have food—neither the food they need to trade and sell for their survival as fishermen nor food in the form of a simple meal they need for their own bodies. They have nothing, even though they've worked hard, and they are ready to call it a night and bring in the boat.

But now Jesus, whom they still do not recognize, tells them to do something different. He says, "Cast your net on the right side of the boat." That is, the *right-hand* side, not the *correct* one—in sailing terms, the disciples have been casting their net on the port side all night, and Jesus tells them to switch to the starboard. Seems like a simple change. But often all it takes is a simple change to make a great difference. And it takes Jesus to introduce something new into the disciples' routine.

They change their routine; they try something different. And when they try something different, as suggested by this man they think is a stranger, the disciples don't just increase their haul and their assets. It's when they do this that they receive the revelation that Jesus, their savior and hero, is in their midst. Only when they are open to something (and someone) new do they realize that Jesus is in their midst. He saves the day (and the night). He's the hero who rescues the disciples from the failed efforts of their routine.

What is it that we need to change? What can we do differently? Are there people whom God sends to help us, but because we do not recognize them, we are not open to them being the heroes in our lives?

One of the things that I find most interesting in this story is that this is not even the first time Jesus, the risen hero, has appeared to these very disciples. In chapter 20 the disciples were hiding in fear behind locked doors, and suddenly Jesus just appeared in their midst. Just like that—now that's some superhero stuff. Are the disciples now so consumed with what they lack—the much-needed fish—that they still cannot see what they have? They have a risen savior, an all-powerful one, a hero.

We've seen God's awesome and heroic works before. Let's remember God's ability to show up in every situation. Let's not miss God's next move in our lives.