

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

In the not-too-distant past Christian clergy were well respected and many in their flock considered pillars of the community. Now we are barely tolerated, even derided as haters, worthy of destruction, because of our Biblical doctrine.

We are often mocked. Indeed, along with many religious folk today, Christians are considered fools, believing as fact nothing but myths and fairy tales. The atheist says that he and Christians are a lot alike. We don't believe in Zeus, or Baal, or Osiris, and no modern person has to explain why. There are thousands of gods that the atheist and the Christian alike do not believe in, he says. It's just that he believes in one less god than the Christian. He doesn't believe in Yahweh, either.

Somewhat amusingly, the radical atheist tries to marshal "science" into his corner; the Christian is, so the accusation goes, unscientific. But the atheist here is being "unscientific." Science, as we know it today, has nothing to say about God for God is supernatural, above and outside of the natural, and that is, by definition, outside the realm of science.

So can we have proof for the God of the Bible, for Yahweh? If so, what is it? How can we know Him? How do we come to Him?

The answer, of course, is Jesus. He is the Son, the One who knows the Father and reveals Him to us (Matt. 11:27). He is the One who descended from the Father's side and tells us the heavenly things of the Father (John 3:12-13). He is the Son, whom to know is to know the Father, whom to see is to see the Father. Jesus is the way to the Father (John 14:6-7).

Moreover, Jesus does not "*suffer fools gladly.*" That little phrase is from St. Paul, from 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 11, King James Version, where Paul with biting sarcasm calls the Corinthians out for their putting up with false teachers. We use it more often in the negative today, not "suffering fools," that is, not putting up with the stupidity of people who should know better.

Jesus does a bit of that with the two on the road to Emmaus. He begins gently enough. It's the afternoon of the third day since Jesus had died, the day of His resurrection. The two were walking along discussing sorrowfully all the things that had happened in Jerusalem during the past week, As Jesus came up to them, hiding who He was from their eyes, He asked them, "*What are you talking about?*" They were astonished at Him: "*Are you the only one that doesn't know about the events of the past week?*" And they proceeded to tell Him: "*Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people*" was

*“delivered ... up to be condemned to death, and crucified”* by *“our chief priests and rulers.”*

These two disciples were sad, because they *“had hoped that [Jesus] was the one to redeem Israel,”* but they were no longer hopeful. They walked along dejected, for everything that they had hoped for and everything that they had done for the last several years had just died away along with Jesus—so they thought. But the resurrected Jesus would have something to say about that.

The two even went on to dismiss the reports of the women who went to the tomb early in the morning, found the tomb empty, and were met with a vision of angels proclaiming Jesus risen from the dead. Even the confirmation of the women’s report by Peter and John was not credible, apparently.

Not One to suffer fools, Jesus’ gentleness is gone as He upbraids them: *“You foolish ones and slow of heart to believe”* what you have been taught from the Scriptures. *“Foolish ones”* seems a bit harsh-sounding to me and may not capture exactly what Jesus was saying—He was scolding them for their dull-wittedness. They should have gotten it. They had witnessed the ransom payment being made: *“not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”* And they could have thought about the ram that was sacrificed in the place of Isaac. They could have thought about the Passover lamb sacrificed and roasted as part of God’s rescue of enslaved Israel. They could have thought of the lambs offered up every day as sin offerings.

They could have, for they had been taught *“the living and abiding word of God”* by the very Lamb of God Himself, but they did not. And, to be sure, this message is hard; the message of the cross sounds like foolishness. This Divine message especially is only received by the enlightening and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

In this case, Jesus Himself explained the Scriptures to the two disciples, and, as we heard, their hearts burned with the Holy Spirit’s fire as they came to understand the meaning of Jesus’ cross and resurrection, and faith and hope were reborn in them through this imperishable seed of God’s word.

But the two disciples still did not understand fully; they still did not see clearly who it was with them. They invited Jesus to stay with them, for it was evening, and the day was almost over. And so He did, and at table, *“he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them.”* Jesus, who had instructed the two on the road, now served as host of their meal, and in these actions culminating in His giving the bread to them, their eyes were opened, and Jesus disappeared from their sight.

It was all that was necessary — they had recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread. It was true. Jesus, who had died and was buried as they had described

earlier, lives again. Faith and hope blossomed into a joy unrestrained. That very evening they hurried back to Jerusalem to report their good news. The Eleven reported to them that Jesus had already appeared to Simon Peter, but that took away nothing from the Emmaus disciples' joy, nor their eagerness to share their own experience with the risen Jesus.

Luke records all this, but Luke does not tell this story as if he is some itinerant bard singing an epic tale or spinning a cleverly-devised myth. Luke writes as a historian, relating both the events of the prior week culminating in Jesus' death, and the resurrection appearance to these two disciples on the road to Emmaus that provides proof that Jesus lives.

And this is what sets Christianity apart from all those other religions — it's rooted in history, in a real man called Jesus who lived (and no serious scholar denies that Jesus lived), who died and rose from the dead, and who appeared to Peter and to the women and to the two and later to the Eleven and ... and ... and ....

And if He can do that, well, He's probably someone you should listen to when He talks about the Father — Yahweh (He's got first hand knowledge about Him), when He talks about paying the redemption price for your sins, when He talks about carrying your burdens, when He instructs the church of the importance of preaching repentance and forgiveness, when He talks about the Spirit-filled waters that give you rebirth into the kingdom, when He tells you that He serves you His own body and blood with the bread and wine in the Supper He gives His church.

Truly there is no reason to believe in Zeus or Baal or Osiris or any of the other idols made up in the heart of man. But that's not our God. Believe in the God who has a Son, who sent that Son from His side into our history, who was condemned and killed by chief priests and rulers — you know them: Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate, and we even have archeological evidence of them — believe in the Son, who rose from the dead and appeared alive to many, and who gives us His Holy Spirit by word and sacrament to call us to faith in Him who loved us and gave Himself up for us.

To be sure, we believe in the invisible God that no one has seen, but we focus on the image of the invisible God crucified for you, who in that way expresses the love of the Father. It may sound like foolishness to the world, but it's by this folly that the world is saved. Indeed, God grant that we may not be troubled by the world's foolishness, but suffer it gladly for the sake of Jesus, for Christ is risen! Alleluia!

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.