Columns
Spirituality



"Jesus Christ riding into village on donkey to both fear and adoration" by Anonymous, 1890 (Artvee)



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September 1, 2025

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New discoveries about the universe, as well as a deeper understanding of evolution, lead naturally to new thinking about fundamental beliefs about God and his role in our lives. We now know that there was no perfect world and no fall from that perfection. The natural world evolved steadily to the world we know today.

But if there was no fall, does it follow that there was no redemption? Christians have always believed that Jesus died on the cross to redeem humankind.

In pondering this, I thought of Jesus' own words that new wine must be poured into new wineskins. New scientific revelations demand new theological thinking.

Jesus was Jewish and lived deeply within that tradition. He followed the law with love and common sense, and he challenged people who got stuck on rules instead of focusing on compassion. People failed to realize that the law of love was superior to all other laws. Many became rigid and unthinking in their observance of the law.

Absent a historical "fall," Jesus' mission may well have been to show the people of his time, and anyone ever created how to live. He kept the Jewish law with reasonable common sense. He reached out to sinners and to the just. He bestowed his love on everyone he met, even on the Sabbath.

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By reading scripture deeply, we can see Jesus living a life of realistic faithfulness to God and self-giving love for every human being that he met, and all of us who would follow. Because he lived his life by God's standards, he was eventually captured and killed by Jewish leaders who feared his quiet power. He was disturbing the status quo, as all prophets did.

The resurrection of Jesus changed everything. United with the Father and the Holy Spirit, he rose as Jesus the Christ. But his 33 years of human life became an everlasting model for our lives. He taught us how to live a life of fidelity to God and intense love for all humankind.

As we read the gospels, we see Jesus in many situations that mirror our own.

Reflect on Jesus' rejection at Nazareth. What a startling moment! People were used to seeing Jesus in the synagogue on the Sabbath. They probably were used to his

reading. But this time was different. He unrolled the scroll to find and read the description of Israel's traditional prophets. Then, in guarded language, he announced his own prophetic ministry. And "all spoke highly of him."

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But almost instantly, when Jesus reminded the listeners that local prophets were spurned by their own people, the fervor changed into denunciation.

Jesus spoke with integrity. What his mind knew and his heart affirmed, his mouth spoke. (That unity, that integrity, is in short supply today.) He knew that local prophets were universally rejected, as he would be.

If Jesus were walking the earth today, he would be in step with those who take a strong, honest position on controversial matters, are willing to listen to and consider other views, but trust their inner integrity when they must hold their position in spite of the opposition.

New wineskins hold the power of this new wine: viewing Jesus not primarily as a redeemer, but as a model for our everyday lives to teach us how to live as he lived.