



Awakenings

"Only by love is love awakened."

::::: The Official Newsletter of Renewed Heart Ministries ::::: Volume 8 ::::: Issue 10 :::::



Inside This Issue:

Page 2

What Does Advent Mean
If Not Liberation?

Page 4

Ministry Update:
#godidbeautiful

Page 5

Ministry Update:
Rhema Christian Center

Page 6

HeartGroups Testimony:
Open Mutual Sharing
in Kapolei, HI
Schedule

Page 7

Ministry Update:
To the Church That
Meets in the House of
Dave & Sandra

Page 8

Featured Presentation

Renewed Heart Ministries
P.O. Box 1211, Lewisburg, WV 24901
Phone: 304.520.0030
Email: info@renewedheartministries.com

Follow RHM!



@RenewedHeartMin



Renewed Heart Ministries

Follow Herb!



@HerbMontgomery



Herb Montgomery



What does the Advent mean if not Liberation?

by Herb Montgomery

Quotable Quotes

"Neither the familiarity nor the season's festivities should prevent us from realizing the scandal that God came into human history completely helpless, as a newborn, and was laid in a feeding trough... By entering human history this way, God identified with the powerless, the oppressed, the poor, and the homeless."

—R. Alan Culpepper

"He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever." Mary; Luke 1:52–55)

As the season of Advent has begun, I find myself, this year, not so much needing the story to be "true" as much as needing what the Jesus narrative promises to be possible. By this, I do not mean that I need heaven to be real. I do not mean that I need an afterlife to be possible to assure me that this is not all there is. I do not mean that I need even our origins to be explained. What I mean is that I need to know that a world where there is no oppression, injustice, and violence against an oppressed people by those who are advantaged and privileged is possible, here...now.

The Jesus narrative, with all its challenges to us today, is proclaiming that this new world has actually begun. I'm also well aware that when the Roman Empire coopted the Jesus movement in the fourth century, in what many scholars call "the Constantinian shift," what the Jesus narrative says to those who are oppressed became eclipsed and largely lost as the church (those by whom the Jesus narrative was taught) would eventually become the Empire itself and almost irredeemably attach the name of Jesus to one of the most oppressive structures in the history of the Western world. Even with the protestant reformation, "Christianity" today continues to be one of the most oppressive voices in the West regarding issues of race, gender, sexuality, and economics. How has that which claimed the Jesus of the Jesus narrative to be its central object of reverence veered so far from what that Jesus taught in regards to liberation?

From all the pictures of God within the Jewish scriptures that this Jesus could have chosen to characterize his movement, he chose an advocate God who liberates the oppressed.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me

to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the
captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."
(Luke 4:18–19, emphasis added.)

When John's disciples came asking Jesus if he was really the one they had been looking for, this Jesus offers his work of liberation for those socially oppressed as the conclusive evidence.

He answered them, *"Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them"* (Luke 7:22).

Remember, those who were blind, lame, and deaf were not considered objects of compassion, but "sinners" being punished by God and thus oppressed as well by those who were seeking this God's favor (We do this socially as well. One of the ways we become "friends" with someone is to show ourselves to be against those who they are against as well.) Jesus came, instead, announcing God's favor for those who were being oppressed and calling for oppressors to embrace this radically new way of seeing God and to begin standing in solidarity with the oppressed as well.

Notwithstanding all of the challenges that the narrative of Jesus' birth produces for us today, we can trace this picture of an advocate God of liberation all the way back to the words of Jesus' mother Mary.

"He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever" (Luke 1:52–54)

Let's unpack this.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly.

Mary first portrays the work of her son to be subversive to monarchy. Her son's work would decenter a world that functions

cont'd on page 3

Liberation... cont'd from page 2

hierarchically where humans “reign” over other humans. We can see this in Jesus’ words to his disciples in Luke 22. “He said to them, *“The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.”* Jesus came announcing the possibility of a world that does not depend upon hierarchical structures for it to function. Hierarchy rules coercively; love inspires compellingly. Jesus came with the message that we can live together without being “ruled.” Jesus cast a vision of a world inspired by the beauty of egalitarian love (Matthew 23:8) where each person treats every other simply the way one would like to be treated (John 13:35; Matthew 7.12).

It might be said that today, at least here in America, we no longer practice monarchy but democracy. Nevertheless, even within democracy, hierarchy is still practiced. Privilege and advantage cause those of a different race, gender, orientation, or economic status to be “ruled over” by laws and policies written by white, wealthy, straight, cisgender males like myself. What does it mean, within a democracy, for the “powerful” to be pulled down “from their thrones?” Those who wear the name of this Jesus should not be supporting the status quo, but subverting it, pioneering a new way of “doing life,” calling those at “the top” of a nation founded on privilege to follow this “dethroning” Jesus as well. It is my belief that there is no better place for this to begin than within Ecclesiastical structures themselves. Until religious hierarchy ceases to be practiced and protected by those who say they are following Jesus, the church is betraying itself. Until those who claim the name of Jesus begin themselves to follow this “dethroning” Jesus, we cannot even begin to dream of (much less pioneer) a world that is truly different. New hierarchical structures will simply replace old ones. The names of the streets will be changed, yet the same old ways of mapping those streets will remain the same.

He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

It would be well to remember the words of Jesus in Luke’s version of the Jesus

narrative in Luke 6:20–26:

“Then he looked up at his disciples and said: ‘Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh...But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.’”



Not as an outsider, but as one of us, Jesus had come to bring about a great reversal, a rearrangement, a redistribution of resources, here and now. Those who were presently poor, hungry, and weeping as a result of how the present society was arranged would be particularly blessed by the new world Jesus had come to found. Those who had been privileged, those who were rich, those who were well fed, those who rejoiced in the present structuring of resources would go hungry, would mourn, and weep.

Yes, Jesus came announcing good news to the disadvantaged, but it was not perceived to be good news by all. There were the few at the top of the political, economic, and ecclesiastical structures who viewed Jesus’ “good news” as a threat to be swiftly dealt with (see Mark 11:18 cf. John 11:47–50).

As Peter Gomes writes in his book *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus*, “Good news to some will almost inevitably be bad news

to others. In order that the gospel in the New Testament might be made as palatable as possible to as many people as possible, its rough edges have been shorn off and the radical edge of Jesus’ preaching has been replaced by a respectable middle, of which ‘niceness’ is now God. When Jesus came preaching, it was to proclaim the end of things as they are and the breaking in of things that are to be: the status quo is not to be criticized; it is to be destroyed.”

And again,

“When the gospel says, ‘The last will be first, and the first will be last,’ despite the fact that it is counterintuitive to our cultural presuppositions, it is invariably good news to those who are last, and at least problematic news to those who see themselves as first” (Ibid.).

Today wealth and prosperity is taken as evidence of God’s blessing. Jesus did not teach this. Jesus taught that wealth and prosperity reveal an inequality in foundational structures that left some hungry while others were well fed. This new world pioneered by this Jesus was a world where “the hungry would be filled with good things,” and the stockpile reserves of the “rich would be sent away empty.”

He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to

cont'd on page 4

Abraham and to his descendants forever.

The great hope of the Hebrew people was not to die and go to heaven, but that some day, on earth, all oppression, violence, and injustice would be put right. This hope was held to be precious by a people whose history was one of being the sweatshop workers of Egypt, then the conquered natives of the Babylonian Empire, and presently the victims of Roman colonization.

What Mary is announcing is that her son would be the liberator of her people from the oppressive presence of the then present Superpower of the known world. What Mary as well as many of the others within the Jesus narrative do not perceive is that this Jesus, whenever followed, would be the liberator of all who are oppressed in every generation. One needs only think of Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for the evidence of this being true. What I find most ironic is that Gandhi, in being inspired to follow the teachings of Jesus in the "sermon on the mount," found liberation from British Christians. And King, by doing the same, found liberation from white Christians in positions of privilege here in America.

What does this mean to us this Advent season?

For me, it means that as someone raised as Christian, I need to allow the Jesus narrative to confront me first and foremost, seeing that Christians have been, historically, oppressive first and foremost. As someone who is mostly white, I need to allow the Jesus narrative to confront me in matters of racism. As someone who is mostly male, I need to allow the Jesus narrative to confront me in matters of male privilege. As someone who is mostly straight, I need to allow the Jesus narrative to confront me in matters of LGBTQ rights. As someone who is mostly cisgender, I need to allow the Jesus narrative to confront me in regards to the threatening reality that my transgender friends live within every day. As someone who is mostly wealthy by global standards, I need to allow the Jesus story to confront me in matters of economics, especially in regards to justice for the poor. As someone who is mostly privileged, I need to allow the Jesus narrative to wake me up to the degree to which I am participating in oppression, even unknowingly, and to allow the beauty

of this Jesus to inspire me to compassion instead of fear, and love instead of self-protection, and a letting go, instead of the death-grip grasp on my life as it presently is.

Change doesn't have to be scary. For those at the top, following Jesus will change everything. But the beauty of the world promised by the Jesus narrative, I choose to believe, is possible. And it's the beauty of this new world that wins me, at a heart level, to allow my present world to be "turned upside down" (see Acts 17:6).

Will it be costly? Of course it will be. But it's worth it.

"The kingdom of heaven [this new world]

is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes **and sells all that he has** and buys that field" (Matthew 13.44).

Until the only world that remains, is a world where love reigns, may this Advent season mark a furthering and deepening of the world that babe in Bethlehem came to found.

Together we can ensure a better world is yet to come.

I love each of you, and remember the advocating, liberating God we see in Jesus does too.

Happy Holidays and Tikkun Olam. ■

MINISTRY UPDATE

#godisbeautiful
Coquitlam, BC, Canada
October 17-18

Last January, I embarked on a week-long series at this church that had to be abandoned midway through due to the passing of my mother. This past weekend, I returned to this church to finish what we began last winter.

The title of this event was *God is Beautiful: A Thoughtful Weekend with Herb Montgomery*.

At the heart of Jesus's teaching is the discourse that has been labeled the Sermon on the Mount. This series, like none other I have ever given, dives deeply into the Sermon on the Mount in search of discovering the God that Jesus Himself sought to reveal to this world.

I want to encourage you to take advantage of this presentation especially. It is available for listening and free download on our website at renewedheartministries.com/presentation/GodisBeautiful

We concluded the weekend with a contemplative look at what Jesus meant when He said, "If you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and

not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent." (Matthew 12:7)

How are we condemning those who, in God's eyes, are innocent?

What do Jesus's words mean that the God we claim to worship does not desire sacrifice (and actually never has), but only mercy?

And how does embracing this revolutionary insight into God's character of love save us from not simply condemning others who in our eyes are guilty, but in God's eyes are innocent?

(Unfortunately the recording for this second presentation was tampered with. A rerecording will be coming soon!)

This weekend was aimed at the goal of seeing this beautiful revelation of God and allowing this revelation to awaken a beautiful people in response.

We will become the kind of God we worship.

An encounter with the beautiful God revealed in Jesus is desperately needed once again. But, we must be attentive. It is this same revelation of the beautiful God that so threatened the status quo in Jesus's day and that got Jesus crucified.

In the words of Jesus, "Go learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'" (Matthew 9:13, cf. Hosea 6:6)

MINISTRY UPDATE

Rhema Christian Center
Lewisburg, WV
September 7, 2014

Two weekends ago, I had the distinct privilege of speaking here in Lewisburg at Rhema Christian Center. This is a church whose pastor I have been friends with since I was six. Actually, I believe he baptized me at that age as well. I also went to Rhema's "church school" from kindergarten through second grade before my family moved to Charlotte, NC. But that is a completely different story. This church has roots in the Church of God denomination, yet it has not identified with that denomination since the eighties. Today it considers itself to be an interdenominational church.

One of the things that caught my attention the most, and will for you too if you have spent any time studying what Jesus taught,

was a statement made by the pastor of this church in the week leading up to my presentation. He said, "I'm convinced, most Christians have accepted Heaven, but they have yet to accept Jesus and His Kingdom!"

So what did I choose to speak on? I chose to speak on Jesus' favorite topic, as well as that of all the Apostles—the Kingdom. The title of the presentation I gave is, *A Time For Change: Rediscovering the Gospel Jesus Taught*. You can listen to this presentation here: www.renewedheartministries.com/presentation/The-Kingdom

What encouraged me most about my time with this church is that it is in process. It's a church that although, by definition, is nontraditional, it realizes that it has "nontraditional" traditions of its own now, after being in existence for some thirty years. It's a church that wants to follow Jesus and wants to begin doing things differently. (That's one of the many reasons why I was invited to share.)

After my presentation, the pastor, a couple others, and I went out to lunch together. As we talked, it became apparent that we

should spend more time together, especially since we live in the same town. Neither of us knows what the future may hold or where any of this may lead, but what we do know is that we simply want to be following Jesus and putting on a display of God's love, wherever that may lead us. I'm excited to be entering into a friendship with the folks at Rhema. I can't thank Rhema enough for taking the risk of having someone from "outside" come and share. I see good things happening there, I love the trajectory I see Rhema on, and I love to see churches that aren't afraid of change but that only want to follow Jesus, wherever that may lead.

The pastor and I are going to be endeavoring to spend some time together periodically. The first subject we've chosen, and which we are both keenly interested in, is what this "Kingdom" thing is that Jesus was so passionate about.

For those of you who were praying for this presentation, again, thank you. I wish you could have been there to see how well received I was by this congregation. We are still receiving positive feedback here locally as a result. Again, you can listen to the presentation at the above link. Remember, together we are enlarging Christ's Kingdom, putting on display a God who looks like Jesus, and impacting lives both for today and for eternity, one heart at a time.

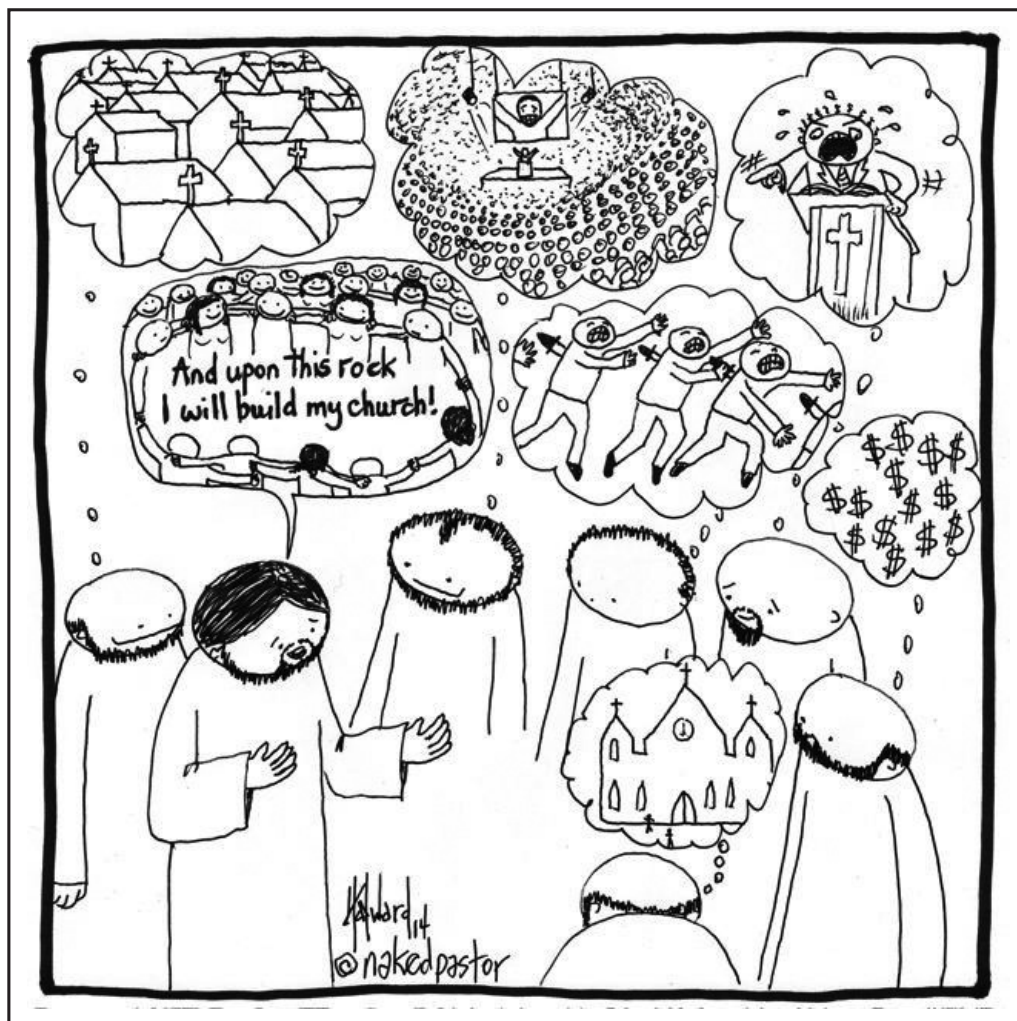
For partnering with us here at RHM and in the proclamation of Christ's gospel, thank you.

I love each and every one of you. And remember, God does too.

Quotable Quotes

"All the poor, insignificant, forgotten people of the world can gather around the manger and dare to believe that the Babe who lies there really belongs to them."

—M. O. Tobert



HeartGroups Testimony

Open, mutual sharing in Kapolei, HI

by Herb Montgomery

August 8–9 & 15–16, 2014

I've just returned from spending two weekends with the HeartGroup in Kapolei, and I can't possibly put into words how overjoyed I was to see what is taking place. I've watched this HeartGroup for two years now from a distance. I've seen it go through hard times as those in the group have faced life's challenges, and I have witnessed others come around and support them. I've watched them celebrate together as the group's members experience life's successes. They've laughed together; they've cried together. In short, this group has captured what, I believe, it genuinely means to do life together.

The first weekend that I spent with this HeartGroup during this visit was a time of mutual, open sharing as each member went around and shared with the others what Jesus was teaching him or her—showing them, leading them through. Then they did a unique thing called “Blessings,” where they each take turns sharing with each other how Jesus is blessing each of them presently.

What I witnessed was really encouraging. For those of you who may not be familiar with what a HeartGroup is, you can find out here: www.rhmheartgroups.com/



In short, sermons were not a central part of the early church's worship, which was centered around eating the Lord's supper together; combined with open, mutual sharing with one another; rather than the passive spectatorship we witness by most in today's worship services. In Paul's letter to the Corinth church, he writes, “What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up” (1 Corinthians, 14:26). One of the central purposes of HeartGroups is to give a group of today's disciples the opportunity to experience the “each one” of the above statement. It's an egalitarian community of Jesus followers who practice the mutual submission to one another of the New Testament, rather than in hierarchical authority structures. They fellowship as brothers and sisters, mutually submitting together to the headship of Christ.

The second weekend that I was privileged to worship with this HeartGroup, I was asked if I would share something with the group. But since even the teaching in a HeartGroup is not done through a sermon, we all participated in a group activity that took us through the narrative of the Jesus story, with special emphasis on understanding what Jesus meant when he told those in his day to go discover what “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” means. HeartGroups, especially, can experience unity in two very different ways. Unity is not the only important thing. Unity around hatred (or sacrifice) of a common enemy is not the kind of unity found in Jesus' Kingdom, but the kind of tribal unity too often found in the world

as it presently is. The unity a HeartGroup wants to experience is the type of unity that is Kingdom unity found in love for those we used to consider “enemies” (or mercy).

We ended this teaching time once again with “Blessings.”

There is something very beautiful and special about a group striving to practice the fifty-plus “one anothers” of the New Testament together. And the beauty of what this group is experiencing, I found especially amazing.

To all the other HeartGroups out there, please know that you are not alone. The New Testament community was putting on display what a world changed by the Lord Jesus looks like, and you are following in this revolutionary tradition (1 Corinthians, 11:2; 2 Thessalonians, 2:14; cf. 3:16).

And for all those who were praying for this event, thank you. Together we are enlarging Christ's Kingdom, one heart and life at a time.

Keep living in love and loving like Jesus. Let all that you do be done in love (1 Corinthians, 16:14).

Schedule

JANUARY 18 - 20, 2015

Building Safe Places Retreat
Nags Head, North Carolina
413.325.3648

JANUARY 23 - 25, 2015

Edmond Adventist Church
Edmond, OK
405.478.4401

MARCH 6 - 8, 2015

Waterloo Adventist Church
Waterloo, IA
319.233.2926

MARCH 27 - APRIL 5, 2015

Edmond Adventist Church
Edmond, OK
405.478.4401

Quotable Quotes

“Righteousness/Justice from God [is] the instrument of putting the world to rights—what we might call cosmic restorative justice.”

—N.T. Wright
Letter to the Romans

MINISTRY UPDATE

To the Church that Meets in the House of Dave and Sandra

by Herb Montgomery

Oshawa, Ontario, Canada
November 7–8, 2014

First, let me say that this last weekend was extraordinary. Rarely have I witnessed such radical, Jesus-following activity among a group as what I was immersed in last weekend.

Let me back up and start from the beginning.

Let me tell you briefly about Dave and Sandra. Dave is an attorney, and Sandra is a highly educated teacher. They had a beautiful home out in the country that they had restored, and they were living a life that many could only dream of having on their ten acres—creek included. They attended church every week as well as all the church functions. And then that's when it happened—they heard the call of Jesus.

To make a long story short, they sold their beautiful property and purchased an old crack house (literally) in downtown Oshawa that had been burnt out by a fire. They restored the old building and turned it into their home. They are two blocks away from the men's halfway house where they show up and hang out with the men weekly. They started a community garden behind their home, and this decision literally changed the life of one of their neighbors! Sandra teaches at the public school a few blocks away, and each day, as she walks to and from work, she passes the homes of the children with whom she spends her days. And last, but not least, they have a house church that meets at their home every weekend.

These people aren't driving into the city to do "ministry" and then return home. No, they heard the call of Jesus and moved their home to the inner city to bring hope and light from the inside out to a street known as Oshawa's "skid

row." And what I believe both Dave and Sandra would be quick to tell you is that the folks in their new neighborhood have actually brought hope and light to them.

Needless to say, I loved spending the weekend with this little house church. Two blocks away is the YWCA, where they rented a room that would seat more than their living room could. That's where I gave a presentation on Friday night and Saturday afternoon. The rest of the time on Saturday, from early morning till late into the night, I spent sitting around a bustling house, sharing, laughing, dialoguing, and making friends with those who meet regularly in this amazing house church.

What I witnessed was beautiful. What I witnessed, without the slightest exaggeration, was the radically giving, others-focused, co-suffering, overwhelmingly inclusive ethos of Christ's radical new world.

On Sunday before I left, I had the opportunity to swing by The Meeting House in Toronto for a bit, where Dave, Sandra, and I were also able to have lunch with Bruxy and his family. Bruxy is a friend of mine who is a Brethren in Christ minister and the teaching pastor of The Meeting House. If you are not familiar with Bruxy, you owe it to yourself to change that. You'll be immensely blessed by what Jesus shares through him. Plus, he's my friend, and I'm quite sure you'll come to love him as I do.

All this adds up to a weekend that I will not soon forget. New Creation has begun. A world in which Christ's love reigns has dawned. This weekend, I had the privilege of experiencing its healing rays firsthand.

For all of you who were praying for this weekend, thank you. It's through partners like you that we, together, are able to participate in the enlargement of Christ's new world (rooted in Jesus' revelation of God, ourselves, and others) one person, one heart, and one relationship at a time.

Until the only world that remains is a world in which Christ's love reigns, I love each of you, and remember, God does too.

Quotable Quotes

But Jesus insists that he is not coming to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. This word in Greek can mean both fulfilling in the sense of meeting all the law's requirements, and it can also mean fulfillment in the sense of perfecting or completing something. Looking at what Jesus then immediately proceeds to do, it becomes abundantly clear that he is referring to this sense of perfecting the law, lovingly bringing it into its full intended purpose...that perfecting entailed a complete shift from the system of retributive justice to the system of restorative justice. That is the new law. God's justice is restorative.

—Derek Flood

*Healing the Gospel:
A Radical Vision for Grace,
Justice, and the Cross*



Featured Presentation

During this Advent season, we'd like to share what we feel is a return to the gospel preached by Jesus himself. Jesus came announcing a gospel that too many times is radically different from the gospel most have encountered from western



Christianity today. If you would like to revisit what Jesus considered to be the "good news" we want to encourage you to take advantage this month's featured presentation – ***A Time For Change*** by Herb Montgomery from the series *The Kingdom* at renewedheartministries.com/presentation/The-Kingdom

Quotable Quotes

"At the heart of Luke's understanding of the redemption wrought by Jesus was his knowledge that in him the excluded had been included and the outsider had been brought within the people of God."

–Eric Franklin

Renewed Heart Ministries provides its resources free of charge. Jesus commanded, "Freely you have received, freely give." We at RHM take this command very seriously. Philosophically we have a difficult time charging money to people for things God has given us for free.

In order to do this, we are entirely dependent on the contributions of our supporters. If you would like to make a one-time gift or offer monthly support.

Please send your contributions to the following address:

**Renewed Heart Ministries
P.O. Box 1211
Lewisburg, WV 24901**

Contributions can also be made online at:

www.renewedheartministries.com

*All donations receive a tax-deductible receipt.

Be sure to check out RHM's **FREE** resources at:

www.renewedheartministries.com

*"When they saw the star,
they were filled with joy!"*

Matthew 2:10

Wishing you a joyous holiday season
from all of us here at
Renewed Heart Ministries