



αwakenings

:::: The Official Newsletter of Renewed Heart Ministries :::: July 2017 ::::



Inside This Issue:

Page 2

More than a Prophet
(And the Inability of Those
in "Fine Clothing")

Page 3

500:25:1

Page 4

RHM Annual Reading
Course Book for July

Page 6

Schedule

Jesus for Everyone
Podcasts

AmazonSmile

Page 7

Budget Thermometer

Page 8

Featured Presentation
RHM's Free Resources

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Herb Montgomery



More than a Prophet (And the Inability of Those in "Fine Clothing")

Originally posted online on May 27, 2016

by Herb Montgomery

Quotable Quotes

"And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace"

— Luke the physician, Luke 1:76-79

"And when they had left, he began to talk to the crowds about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A person arrayed in finery? Look, those wearing finery are in kings' houses. But then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, even more than a prophet! This is the one about whom it has been written: Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your path in front of you. I tell you: There has not arisen among women's offspring anyone who surpasses John. Yet the least significant in God's kingdom is more than he.'" (Q 7:24-28)

Companion Texts:

Matthew 11:7-11: "As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you." Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.'"

Luke 7:24-28: "After John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you." I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.'"

Gospel of Thomas 78: "Jesus says, 'Why did you go out to the countryside? To see

a reed shaken by the wind, and to see a person dressed in soft clothing [like your] kings and your great/powerful persons? They are dressed in soft clothing and will not be able to recognize the truth.'"

In the Jewish tradition, the role of a prophet was to be a gadfly to those at the top of the Jewish domination system, both priests and kings. The common thread in their work was a call for justice for the oppressed, marginalized, vulnerable and exploited. The clearest example of this focus is Amos. Hebrew prophets were not prognosticators. Rather they were those who cast a imaginative vision of a future where all violence, injustice, and oppression were put right.

Yet John the Baptist was more than this. He emerged not by casting a vision for a distant hope, but by announcing that the vision long hoped for had arrived. It was here, now, today!

Last month, we discussed the differences between the proclamations of John and the actual ministry of Jesus. In our saying this week, however, Jesus reveals deep respect for John and those who followed him. John was the "real deal" calling for social change now! And, he practiced what he preached. He did not come in "fine clothes" and "luxury" bringing good news to the exploited and subjugated. He had abandoned the luxury of the priestly aristocracy (in Luke John's father was a priest). He was a voice, in solidarity with the exploited, crying out in the wilderness, to prepare the way for the coming that Isaiah had announced.

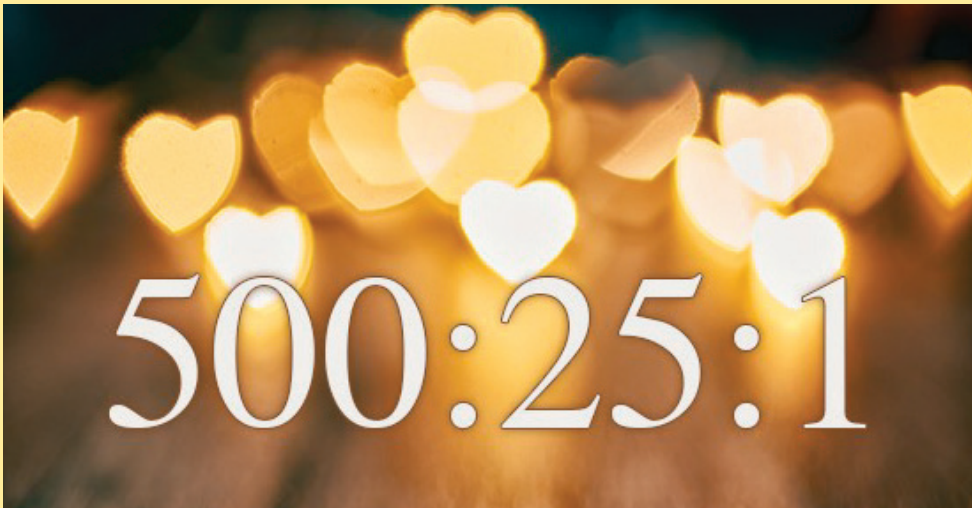
This connection to Isaiah's (and Malachi's) liberation theme was central to the community that cherished *Sayings Gospel Q*.

Isaiah 40:3: "A voice of one calling: 'In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'"

Isaiah 57:14: "And it will be said: 'Build up, build up, prepare the road! Remove the obstacles out of the way of my people.'"

Isaiah 62:10: "Pass through, pass through the gates! Prepare the way for the people. Build up, build up the highway! Remove the stones. Raise a banner for the nations."

cont'd on page 4



500:25:1

Beginning in August!

Renewed Heart Ministries edifies and educates. We teach people how their faith can concretely impact the suffering in our world. We are passionate about rediscovering, following, and helping others to rediscover the teachings and sayings of the historical Jesus. We believe his teachings have an intrinsic value in informing our work of making our world a safe, more just, more compassionate home for us all.

And as of this August, we are taking our educational weekends on the road! Beginning this next month, we'll be holding weekend seminars in areas where we're desperately wanted, and have not previously been able to visit.

We're so excited!

Our first venue is in Asheville, North Carolina. We've rented space for Friday night and Saturday at the First Congregational United Church of Christ in Asheville, N.C. and the weekend we have chosen is August 4-5.

Our weekend events tangibly change people's lives!

"Thank you for coming and sharing with us about God. Your talks have given me hope. You've given me a new way to see God, to understand myself, and to treat others." –D.D.; Washington

"Your message has kept me from giving up because of my previous view of God. God has given you a gift of presenting who Jesus reveals Him to be." – S.J.; Oregon

"Thank you for helping me regain a beautiful picture of Jesus and our Father." – C.S.; North Carolina

"This ministry shows me God like I've never seen Him before, and at the same time challenges me to my core and calls to me to rethink things and ultimately to change." – K.G.; Missouri

"There are times in the ministry of Jesus that His total audience was one. This week, I believe I am that one." – Anonymous Note; California

"I have listened to many of your talks, and I just really wish my church could have you visit and share." – K.D.; Massachusetts

With your support for these new, self-hosted events, we'll be able to work where people can be challenged, changed, inspired to make a difference right in their own communities. And I can't wait to be able to schedule a weekend of teaching in your area with YOU, too! If you would like us to come to your area, drop us a line at: <http://bit.ly/RHMSeminar>

What will these gatherings cost?

These events will continue to be free of charge. Freely we have received, and so we want to continue giving freely too.

At many locations we will take collections to offset the costs. In other venues, that won't be possible. This is where YOU come in.

These 500:25:1 events will cost RHM

more than our traditional seminars, where organizations that invite us cover our travel expenses and host us. For these weekends, Renewed Heart Ministries will have to cover travel and space rental costs.

How can I help?

Be one of **500 people** who'll support Renewed Heart Ministries with a donation of **\$25 or more each month** for this new project—for **one year!**

You can sign up to support these new events at:

<http://bit.ly/RHM500Support>

What will I get in return?

You'll know you've made it possible for others to explore the liberating gospel of Jesus in locations that **RHM wouldn't normally be able to visit.** We'll also be able to visit you!

Let us know if you'd like Renewed Heart Ministries to host a weekend in your town and we'll add it to the calendar!

Request Seminar in your area at: <http://bit.ly/RHMSeminar>

With your support, we'll also be able to partner with other speakers and authors. I can't wait to invite new voices to share with our community from time to time.

Can we count on you to be one of 500 folks who partner with us for 500:25:1?

Thank you so much for helping us to take this next step!

Sign up at: <http://bit.ly/RHM500Support> or you can mail in our support to:

Renewed Heart Ministries
PO Box 1211
Lewisburg, WV 24901

With much love and gratitude,

Herb Montgomery
Director | Author | Speaker
Renewed Heart Ministries

Malachi 3:1: "I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me."

Inability to Recognize The Truth

This saying appears in Gospel of Thomas as well as in the canonical texts. This gospel captures the inability of those benefited or "privileged" by the status quo to rightly characterize the movements of John and Jesus. Those who represent the institutional establishment, its apologists, and its complicit supporters do not internally resonate with a revolution: they aren't in a position that enables them to recognize "good news" when it emerges.

In Mark, too, the Jesus movement isn't perceived as good news by Herod, Caiaphas, or Pilate, but rather as a threat to each. The Gospel of Thomas expresses this universal truth explicitly when it states that these leaders "will not be able" to even "recognize the truth." The truth could be all around them and they would either miss its significance or proclaim it as dangerous or even heretical. But the oppressed know good news when they hear it.

In matters of theology, and I would now also argue in economics and politics, it is important to listen to the perspectives and interpretations of those who don't benefit from the present system. In matters of theology, as we have discussed in previous articles, it is white, colonial, European, and patriarchal theologians that struggle to "recognize" liberating truth, and the Church desperately needs the voices of our liberation, black liberation, feminist, womanist, and queer theologians. As a result of their places in the present society, they are best positioned to recognize what is genuine good news and what is the same old religious endorsement of exploitative systems that benefit some at the expense of the many or benefit the majority at exclusion and marginalization of a few.

Egalitarianism in the "Empire" of God

Also notice that even though John was "more than a prophet," in Jesus' subversive "empire," those considered the most insignificant are esteemed even more than

cont'd on page 5

RHM's 2017 Annual Reading Course Book for July

It is with great pleasure that we announce our book for this July is:

White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide

by Carol Anderson Ph.D.

National Book Critics Circle Award Winner

New York Times Bestseller

A New York Times Notable Book of the Year

A Washington Post Notable Nonfiction Book of the Year

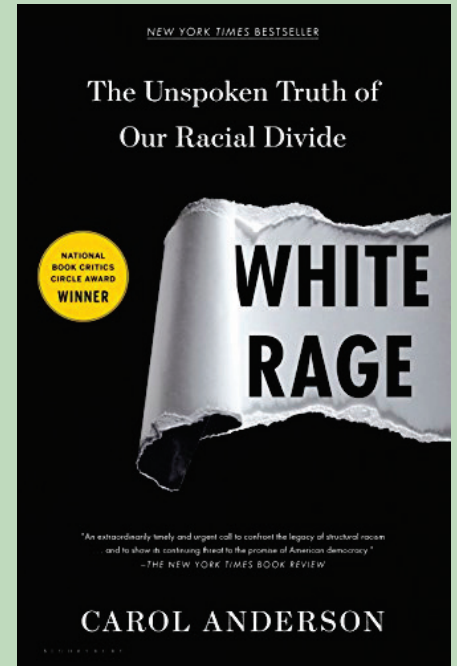
A Boston Globe Best Book of 2016

A Chicago Review of Books Best Nonfiction Book of 2016

"From the Civil War to our combustible present, acclaimed historian Carol Anderson reframes our continuing conversation about race, chronicling the powerful forces opposed to black progress in America.

As Ferguson, Missouri, erupted in August 2014, and media commentators across the ideological spectrum referred to the angry response of African Americans as black rage. Historian Carol Anderson wrote a remarkable op-ed in *The Washington Post* suggesting that this was, instead, 'white rage at work. With so much attention on the flames,' she argued, 'everyone had ignored the kindling.'

Since 1865 and the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, every time African Americans have made advances towards full participation in our democracy, white reaction has fueled a deliberate and relentless rollback of their gains. The end of the Civil War and Reconstruction was greeted with the Black Codes and Jim Crow; the Supreme Court's landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was met with the shutting down of public schools throughout the South while taxpayer dollars financed segregated white private schools;



the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965 triggered a coded but powerful response, the so-called Southern Strategy and the War on Drugs that disenfranchised millions of African Americans while propelling presidents Nixon and Reagan into the White House, and then the election of America's first black President, led to the expression of white rage that has been as relentless as it has been brutal.

Carefully linking these and other historical flashpoints when social progress for African Americans was countered by deliberate and cleverly crafted opposition, Anderson pulls back the veil that has long covered actions made in the name of protecting democracy, fiscal responsibility, or protection against fraud, rendering visible the long lineage of white rage. Compelling and dramatic in the unimpeachable history it relates, *White Rage* will add an important new dimension to the national conversation about race in America."

Remember, if you use Amazon.com, please consider using Amazon Smile and selecting Renewed Heart Ministries as your charity to support our work at no additional cost to yourself. You can do so at: smile.amazon.com/ch/20-8663541

More Than a Prophet... cont'd from page 4

John. Why? This upends the customs of the empire of Rome, but it works because in Jesus's new world people value and take care of people. Everyone is valued and that which dehumanizes or devalues is systematically dismantled. In Jesus's new "kingdom," every person is of equal worth and value. This value is based on their being not on their doing; their essence, not their performance. Their value is rooted in each person's humanity.

Again, as we have said for the last three weeks, the Q community seemed to place special emphasis on rooting Jesus's liberation in the "good news" of Isaiah and Malachi, a book written in the same era Isaiah was redacted.

What Does This Mean For Us Today?

We've discussed the egalitarian nature of Jesus' social vision at length. What I'd like to focus on this week is the inability of those in "fine clothing" to "recognize the truth." What does this mean?

This verse reminds me of comments I received the first time I wore blue jeans and a sports coat to a church service I was speaking at: people insisted that my clothes were not quite "fine" enough. It made me wonder whether there was a link between a congregation's fine clothes and their complicity with a status quo that leaves many impoverished for elite benefits.

The "fine clothing" in this week's saying represents an economic privilege: it is a symbol. That economic privilege is our spring board to other areas of social, political and religious privilege, too. Today, we can simultaneously exist in positions of privilege and disadvantage in multiple areas of our lives because of the social oppressions that influence our society. A white collar woman has a different set of privileges and disadvantages than a blue collar male. A man of color has a different social position than either White men and women or women of color. A White gay male will experience society differently than a straight man of color and a gay or bisexual man of color.

My most recent encounter with this dynamic was a discussion I had with two LGBT friends. One is a white collar professional while the other is an Appalachian blue collar laborer. Both have



"White North American Christians, especially those of us from the **privileged** strata of society, must come to terms with the fact that our reading site for the Gospel of Mark is empire, locus imperium . . . The 'irreducible meaning' of empire is the geopolitical control of the **peripheries** by the **center** . . . the fact remains that **those on the peripheries** will have '**eyes to see**' many things that those of **us** at the **center** do not."

—Ched Myers; *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*

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the same concerns right now about the protection of their rights in the U.S. Both favor individuals running for offices that will stand up for their rights. Yet what surprised me was my professional friend's inability to see the economic perspective of my blue collar friend. My white collar friend preferred candidates that are pro-LGBT and support corporatism. My blue collar friend supports candidates that are pro-LGBT and have more interventionist, pro-labor policies. I expected that much.

What surprised me was my white collar friend's inability to understand my other friend's priorities, even to the point of near insult and derision. Their final parting statement was, "Your candidate would have no significant effect on my life so why should I care about a candidate that won't affect me at all."

Politics can get ugly, and this is often demonstrated here in the States. The intersections of our own privilege and our disadvantage is complex. Our privilege and disadvantage overlap and "intersect" on multiple levels in society and at some point we must ask "What is best for us

all?" not just "What is best for me?"

How does this relate to our saying this week? In every area of our lives where we are in a position of privilege, or "wearing fine clothes," our saying this week states that we are unable to see things as they are for those who are not like ourselves. Someone else's truth is unrecognizable to us. In that very place, a humble posture of listening becomes important as we labor to transform our world into a safer, more just, more compassionate home for us all. We saw this vision last month in the words of Micah, "Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid" (Micah 4:4). As we each listen to the stories of those whose experience differs from our own, we can learn to build communities where each person receives what is necessary for them to thrive and develop into the best version of themselves that they can be.

But it's not easy. Our defenses are easily triggered. Listening takes practice.

We typically want to protect and preserve

cont'd on page 6

the "fine clothes" areas of our lives, and so listening to the experiences of others can be threatening. In these moments we must make the choice to lean into our discomfort rather than away from it. For it's in these moments of discomfort that we discover oppressive paradigms and gain an opportunity to reject them.

To each of you who are taking stands and feeling the pressure of being "shaken in the wind," may this saying be an encouragement to you. Those in "fine clothing" may not recognize the value of what you are doing. But those whom you're working alongside often will. Together, we can create a world where each of us are equally heard, listened to, valued, and understood.

"And when they had left, he began to talk to the crowds about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A person arrayed in finery? Look, those wearing finery are in kings' houses. But then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, even more than a prophet! This is the one about whom it has been written: "Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who

will prepare your path in front of you." I tell you: There has not arisen among women's offspring anyone who surpasses John. Yet the least significant in God's kingdom is more than he.'" (Q 7:24-28).

HeartGroup Application

This week, do two things with your group.

1. First, list all the ways you are different from one another. This list will be rather long!
2. Second, list all the ways in which you are the same or similar to each other. Then prioritize this list. Which areas of sameness are most important to each of you?
3. Now, focus on that second list. In the light of the ways in which you're the same, return to your first list and see if you have more respect for the areas that make your group different as well. Where our differences cause our experiences in society to also differ, maybe, just maybe, we can begin to reach out from our private experiences and stand in solidarity with others.

Thank you for joining us this month.

Keep living in love, till the only world that remains is a world where only love reigns. ■

Schedule

AUGUST 4-5, 2017

First Congregational
United Church of Christ
Asheville, NC, USA
304.520.0030

AUGUST 19, 2017

Jesus Untangled: North Carolina
Hickory, NC, USA
714.333.7574

SEPTEMBER 1-3, 2017

AWC
Phoenix, AZ, USA
480.878.8565

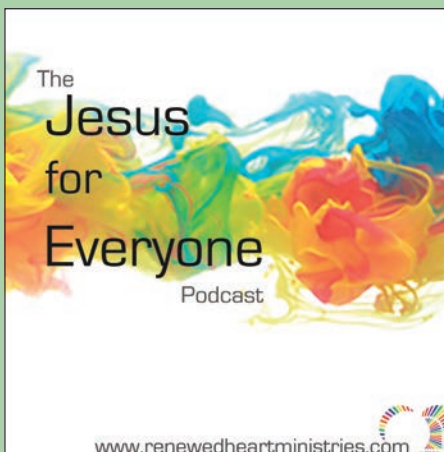
SEPTEMBER 8-9, 2017

Good News Fellowship
of Toronto
Toronto, Ontario Canada
416.960.9457

SEPTEMBER 29-30, 2017

Montana Men's Summit
Missoula, MT, USA
406.240.7267

The Jesus For Everyone podcast



New episodes every Friday!

Where we discuss, each week, the intersection of faith and social justice; what a first-century, Jewish prophet of the poor might offer us today in our work of survival, resistance, liberation, restoration, and transformation.

Find them on iTunes:

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/renewed-heart-ministries/id442036678?ign-mpt=uo%3D4>

or on RHM's website:

<https://renewedheartministries.com/Podcasts>

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Thanks in advance!
Every little bit helps!

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January

Father forgive them,
for they know not
what they do.



Monthly Budget Goal:
\$15,834.00

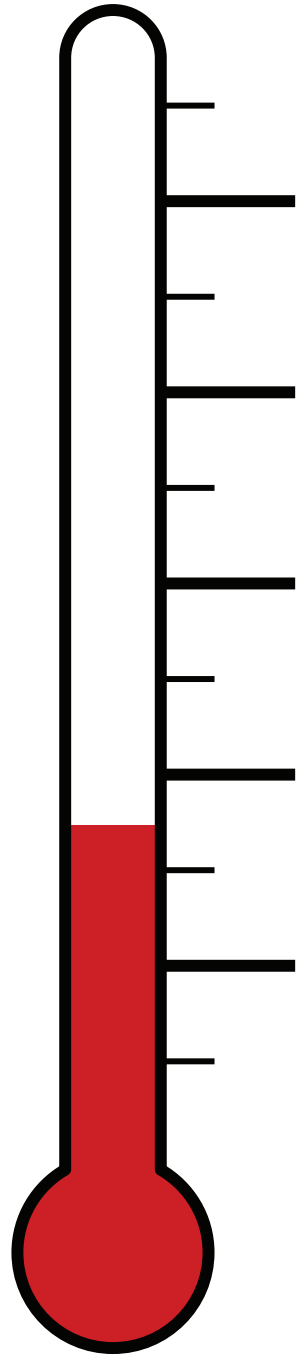
May's Contributions:
\$6,797.61

YTD Budget: \$79,170.00

YTD Received: \$45,235.47

GOAL: \$190,000

2017 Annual Budget



Quotable Quotes

"...two key themes that I believe should characterize our theological reflection and guide our practice . . . The first is repentance, which for us implies no only a conversion of the heart, but a concrete process of turning away from empire, its distractions and seductions, its hubris and iniquity. The second is resistance, which involves shaking off the powerful sedation of a society that rewards ignorance and trivializes everything political, in order to discern and take concrete stands in our historical moment, and to find meaningful ways to 'impede imperial progress.'"

— Ched Myers
Binding the Strong Man: a political reading of Mark's story of Jesus



Renewed Heart Ministries is a not-for-profit group that is passionate about rediscovering, following and helping others rediscover the teachings and sayings of the historical Jesus of Nazareth. We believe these teachings have an intrinsic value in informing the work of nonviolently confronting, liberating and transforming our world into a safe, more just, more compassionate home for us all.

Everything we do here at Renewed Heart Ministries is for free. Even the many educational events that we do in various venues. If you'd like to support our work you can make a one-time gift or become one of our monthly contributors by going to RenewedHeartMinistries.com and clicking the donate tab at the top right.

Or you can mail contributions to:
Renewed Heart Ministries
P.O. Box 1211
Lewisburg, WV 24901

Also, please sign up for our free resources and remember, every little bit helps.

Anything we receive over and above our annual budget we happily give away to other not-for-profits who are making both systemic and personal differences, significant differences, in lives of those not presently benefited but the status quo.

And to those already supporting the work of Renewed Heart Ministries, your generous support makes it possible for us to exist and to continue being a presence for positive change in our world. So with all of our hearts, "Thank You."

Together we are making a difference, till the only world that remains is a world where only Love reigns.



RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES

Featured Presentation

Jesus modeled the replacement of our world's domination pyramids and centralized control circles with the model of a share table. This shared table, by first-century standards, was characterized by inclusivity, equality, and diversity. In light of all that is transpiring in our society here in the U.S. presently, this month's featured presentation could not be more timely. It is our hope that, as you listen, your heart will be renewed and you'll be inspired to action as you follow the teachings of Jesus more deeply, engaging the work of love, survival, resistance, liberation, restoration and transformation of our world into is a safe, just, compassionate home for us all. ***A Shared Table*** by Herb Montgomery.



Sign Up for RHM's Free Resources!

If you are unfamiliar with Renewed Heart Ministries we are a not-for-profit group passionate about centering a set of values and ethics in the experiences of those on the undersides and margins of our societies, informed by the sayings and teachings of the historical, Jewish Jesus of Nazareth.

In addition to our educational events in various locations, we offer many other resources. These include materials on our website, daily inspirational quotations (eQuotes) and/or weekly articles (eSights) received via email, and a newsletter mailed monthly to your door. You can follow us on Facebook and Twitter. You can also

sign up for our news emails to be notified each time something new is available and to be notified of events happening in your area. And much, much more.

There are so many ways to take advantage of Renewed Heart Ministries' resources. If you have not signed up to take advantage of these, we invite you do to so at the link below. And they are all free!

[renewedheartministries.com/
Contact-forms?form=EmailSignUp](http://renewedheartministries.com/Contact-forms?form=EmailSignUp)

If you'd like to find our more about Renewed Heart Ministries, visit: <https://renewedheartministries.com/Who-is-RHM>

And for all those supporting our work, thank you. Without you we could not continue our participation in the work of shaping our world into a safe, just, compassionate home for us all. We are in this together, and together we are making a difference.

