



RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES

αwakenings

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



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Follow Herb!



@HerbMontgomery



Herb Montgomery

"Our experiences determine not only the questions we ask, but also the answers we get back. Plain readings are not plain but are read through the lens of our own paradigms and fears. And this is one reason why it is so vital, if we are going to make our world safe and just for everyone, that we learn to listen to stories, experiences, and interpretations of our sacred texts from the most vulnerable communities in our society."

"It is necessary for enticements to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! It is better for him if a millstone is put around his neck and he is thrown into the sea, than that he should entice one of these little ones." (Q 16:17)

Companion Texts:

Matthew 18:6-7: "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes!"

Luke 17:1-2: "Jesus said to his disciples, 'Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to anyone by whom they come! It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble.'"

We stumble when we're learning to walk. This week, we are focusing on those who are walking toward a safer, more just, and compassionate world, and we'll be considering how as they move forward, others will actively obstruct their path rather than smoothing it out. Obstructionists place stumbling blocks in the way of those moving forward, causing their advance to be harder than it should be.

We are, again, considering one of Jesus' sayings about "little ones." As I wrote in Thanksgiving that God Reveals Only to Children:

"The family structure in Palestine in the first century was a hierarchical pyramid with the male patriarch at the top. On the

bottom rung of the social ladder, below slaves, were children (see Galatians 4:1).

Social status is typically evaluated by the degree to which one has both power and resources. Those with large measures of control over power and resources operate in higher social positions, while those with very little access to power and resources live at the bottom.

Children have access to neither power nor resources. The typical avenues to power and control of resources are education, income, or work. In our societies, children have none of these, and they are vulnerable to abuse and neglect so child advocacy and children's rights are much needed. Discrimination on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, religion, disability, color, or ethnicity are also compounded when they apply to children."

Our focus in this week's saying is directed toward the "little ones" Jesus spoke of—the most vulnerable sectors of society. In the Greek, "little ones" (mikros) can not only refer to children, but also any who are vulnerable to exploitation by the status quo. It doesn't have to mean a young person; it can also refer to a person's "rank or influence" within a society. Christianity has a long history in doing damage to our most vulnerable and most marginalized.

Native People

One example in this history is the way Christian preachers and missionaries used the Canaanite conquest and genocide stories in the Bible to legitimize the genocide of Native peoples here in the U.S.:

"Biblical notions of extirpation influenced colonial America from the earliest days of the settlement. In a tract publicizing the new Virginia settlement, Robert Gray expressed the hope that Indians might accept Christianity, but if they did not, biblical commands were clear: 'Saul had his kingdom rent from him and his posterity because he spared Agag...whom God would not have spared; so acceptable a service is it to destroy idolaters, whom God hateth.'" (Philip Jenkins, in *Laying Down the Sword: Why We Can't Ignore the Bible's Violent Verses*, p. 133).

During the colonial era, many New England preachers such as Cotton Mather

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Against Enticing Little Ones

by Herb Montgomery

Quotable Quotes

"Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister."

— Paul,
Romans 14:13

Front cover artwork by Ali Montgomery.



“Cristo de la Liberacion” (Christ of the Liberation)
by Maximino Cerezo Barredo, who’s been dubbed “liberation painter.”

Against Enticing... cont'd from page 2

compared Pequot Indians to modern Ammonites and New England to a modern Israel (see *Cotton Mather, Magnalia Christi Americana*, vol. 1, p. 553). With this interpretation, if Saul had had his kingdom taken away because he failed to utterly destroy the Ammonites, the new American Christians were not to fail in the complete annihilation of their modern, native “Ammonites” if they wanted ensure their place on this continent, their “promised land.” The genocide of Native people was rooted in Christians’ lethal interpretation of violent Bible passages; it was a genocide they believed God had commanded them to execute.

Slavery

During the abolitionist years leading up to the American Civil War, many Christian preachers quoted Leviticus’ passages affirming slavery and claimed that neither Paul nor Jesus had reversed those passages. One famous preacher, ironically named Moses Stuart, wrote:

“Not one word has Christ said, to annul the Mosaic law while it lasted. Neither Paul nor Peter have uttered one. Neither of these have said to Christian masters: ‘Instantly free your slaves.’ Yet they lived under Roman laws concerning slavery, which were rigid to the last degree. How is it explicable on any ground, when we view them as humane and benevolent teachers, and especially as having a divine commission how is it possible that they should not have declared and explicitly [so] against a malum in se [something evil in itself]?”

He confidently pronounced that those calling for the end of slavery “must give up the New Testament authority, or abandon the fiery course which they are pursuing” (Moses Stuart, *Conscience and the Constitution; with Remarks on the Recent Speech of the Hon. Daniel Webster in the Senate of the United States on the Subject of Slavery*, 1850).

Another minister, a Southern Methodist named J.W. Tucker, proclaimed to his Confederate audience fighting for their right to own slaves, “Your cause is the cause of God, the cause of Christ, of humanity. It is a conflict of truth with error-of Bible with Northern infidelity-of pure Christianity with Northern fanaticism.” (Kurt O. Berends, “Confederate Sacrifice and the ‘Redemption’ of the South,” in *Religion and the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture*, ed. Beth Barton Schweiger and Donald G. Mathews, p. 105.) Tucker’s rhetoric sounds almost identical to the rhetoric of Christians today as they condemn movement in many faith traditions toward the affirmation of LGBTQ people.

Against Women

Christianity also has a long history with patriarchy and misogyny. Roman Catholic writer John Paul Boyer explains in Some thoughts on the Ordination of Women:

“Being a Jew, being a Palestinian, being a first century man—all these are what we might call, in the language of Aristotelian metaphysical, the ‘accidents of Christ’s humanity;’ but his being a man rather than a woman is of the ‘substance’ of his humanity. He could have been a twentieth-

century Chinese and been, cultural differences notwithstanding, much the same person he was, but he could not have been a woman without having been a different sort of personality altogether.” (A Monthly Bulletin of the Church of St. Mary the Virgin)

Womanist scholar Jacqueline Grant rightly states in her book *White Women’s Christ and Black Women’s Jesus* that “the most significant use of this argument” came from Pope Paul VI on October 15, 1976, when he approved and published the following declaration:

“The Christian priesthood is therefore of a sacramental nature: the priest is a sign, the supernatural effectiveness of which comes from the ordination received, but a sign that must be perceptible and which the faithful must be able to recognize with ease. The whole sacramental economy is in fact based up on natural signs, or symbols imprinted up on the human psychology: ‘Sacramental signs’, says Saint Thomas, ‘represent what they signify by natural resemblance.’ The same natural resemblance is required for personas as for things: when Christ’s role in the Eucharist is to be expressed sacramentally there would not be this ‘natural resemblance’ which must exist between Christ and his minister if the role of Christ were not taken by a man. In such a case it would be difficult to see in the minister the image of Christ. For Christ himself was and remains a man.” (Franjo Cardinal Seper, Vatican Declaration, Feb 6, 1977, p. 6)

Never mind that the church’s own creation story states clearly that both male and female were made in the image of God. There have long been interpretations of these stories that have marginalized, wholly excluded, and damaged women personally and institutionally. Because of the patriarchal nature of many sectors of Christianity, and despite the fact that there are feminist and womanist Christians, some have gone so far as to say that Christianity is a man’s religion.

LGBTQ Fear

Anyone who lived through the 1980s here in the U.S. knows all too well how Christianity has done untold damage to the LGBTQ community, legitimizing the inmate homophobia of straight parishioners through interpretations that are trans-, bi-, genderqueer-, and homophobic.

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RHM's 2017 Annual Reading Course Book for November

If Christianity is going to participate in the work of making our world a safe, compassionate, just space for us all, then we need to be willing to listen to the voices of those who point out where we have done just the opposite.

I believe Christianity can be reclaimed. But before this can happen, we must openly listen.

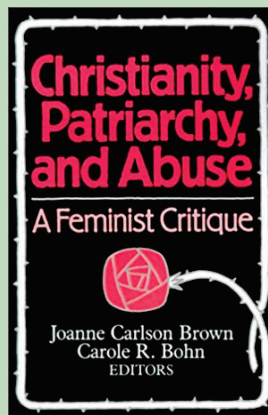
We are excited to this volume to our 2017 reading list this month.

Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique

by **Joanne C. Brown** (Editor),
Carole R. Bohn (Editor),
Elizabeth Bettenhausen (Foreword)

This is one of the most profoundly life changing books I myself have read. Learning to listen to the experiences of others in relation to our most deeply cherished theologies is vital if we are to move toward theologies that don't do harm.

From the publishers:



"Are patriarchy and the Christian faith so inextricably linked that the very theology glorifies violence, suffering, and sacrifice? Is it possible to be feminist and retain some attachment to the Christian tradition? Contributors to this classic address these questions from the perspectives of theology, history, ethics, and pastoral psychology."

We hope you enjoy reading this volume as much as we have.

And 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.

Against Enticing... cont'd from page 3

For a history that reaches back into the 1970s, the Southern Poverty Law Center offers an excellent history of the modern Christian anti-gay movement, starting with Anita Bryant in 1977. Just a quick read demonstrates how monstrously Christians have mis-characterized this community and used damaging interpretations of the Bible to bolster their mischaracterization. Jay Grimstead, a founder of The Coalition on Revival, bluntly stated that "Homosexuality makes God vomit." Many similar arguments are rhetorically identical to those Christians in the 1800's used in their opposition to ending slavery. The Christian Moral Majority didn't get its start opposing abortion or gay people, but by opposing integration after Brown v. Board of Education. They began a network of private Christian schools to make sure their white children did not have to attend school with black and brown children.

I've given you four examples of how interpretations of our sacred text have done and continue to do damage to those who are most vulnerable within our society. I also, wrote two weeks ago:

"Interpretations are not eternal. They change with time. As we see the harmful fruit of present interpretations, we can make those interpretations give way to new ones, in the hope that new interpretations will bear the fruit of life. And if we see that our new interpretations also do harm, we will challenge them too. The goal is to continue to seek life-giving interpretations for all, work with people's well-being and thriving in our hearts, and transform our world into a safe, just, compassionate home for us all. Anything less is not faithful to Jesus or the Spirit of our various sacred texts. Every time you're tempted to mistake your interpretation for the sacred text itself, remember that interpretations are temporary. It's okay

for them to change, as long as what they change to is life-giving for all."

In each of the above examples, you can come up with Bible interpretations to oppose valuing and protecting Native people and lands, ending slavery, promoting equity for women, and seeking justice for the LGBTQ community. Some claim they are just reading the Bible plainly. But we never see things objectively. As the saying goes, we do not see things as they are; we see things as we are.

Our experiences determine not only the questions we ask, but also the answers we get back. Plain readings are not plain, but are read through the lens of our own paradigms and fears. And this is one reason why it is so vital, if we are going to make our world safe and just for everyone, that we learn to listen to stories, experiences, and interpretations of our sacred texts from the most vulnerable communities in our society. This is how liberation theology was born: those in South America read the Bible very differently than their colonial Christian exploiters. It's how Black liberation theology was born: Black Christians in the U.S. read the Bible radically differently than white Christians read it. It's how feminist and womanist theologies were born and how queer theology was born. We need these voices and perspectives if we are to arrive at interpretations of our sacred text that cease to do harm.

Today we have a broad swathe of people who want nothing to do with Jesus because of the history of the church as the largest stumbling block in the path of the vulnerable in their work toward a world of justice and compassion. They see a Christianity that seems to habitually do harm, ever landing on the wrong side of history. They don't see a Jesus who taught survival, resistance, liberation, and justice. They don't see a Jewish Jesus on the side of the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19). Rather, that Jesus is eclipsed by a religion that was formed in his name. This gives me great reason to pause. I know first-hand how my own faith has been fractured by watching Christian racism, misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia just in my local community here in West Virginia. I love Jesus, but I have zero tolerance for the kind of Christianity my family seems to be surrounded by where we live.

I do not apologize for this week's eSight. And I don't believe the truth of our history

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#GIVINGTUESDAY™

SUPPORT THE WORK OF RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES ON

November 28, 2017



RENEWEDHEARTMINISTRIES.COM

Get ready for RHM's biggest fundraiser of the fall!

Giving Tuesday ♥ November 28, 2017

This year make a special year-end contribution to Renewed Heart Ministries to support our work on what is becoming one of the most important days for Non-profits throughout the year.

On November 28 go to renewedheartministries.com/donate/ and help us meet our year end goal!

Thank you in advance for partnering with us to keep our much needed work going.

Against Enticing... cont'd from page 5

to be too harsh to share. As someone who loves the historic, first-century Jewish Jesus, I have simply become disillusioned with the most vocal sectors of Christianity in our culture. Just this week I've endured disappointment again as Christians who should have been passionately living out the value of compassionate listening to the voices of the vulnerable, who claim to believe God loves everyone, were passionate instead to protect their own cherished theology that has been shown to be hurtful to the vulnerable. Does your God love the vulnerable or your theology? Which is it that should be given a priority of worth? As Emilie Townes states, "When you start with an understanding that God loves everyone, justice isn't very far behind." But what happens when you believe God loves everyone and that doesn't lead to justice? What about when the ones preaching "God loves everyone" are the stumbling block for those working toward a safer, just, more compassionate world for the vulnerable?

As a Christian myself, I take this week's saying seriously. It was said to Jesus' followers, and we who take his name today must allow this week's saying to confront us:

"Woe to the one through [whom stumbling blocks] come! It is better for them if a millstone is put around their neck and they are thrown into the sea, than that they should cause one of the vulnerable to stumble." (Q 17:1-2)

HeartGroup Application

This week I want you to spend some time with the above article.

1. As a group discuss what challenges this week's eSight creates for you.
Discuss together where you feel encouraged by this week's eSight. Maybe encouragement comes just from hearing that you're not alone in your feelings of frustration toward your Christianity being a stumbling block to so many people.
2. If this is new to you, start out by making one phone call a week. Then graduate to two or three.
3. What are some ways you can move toward interpretations of our sacred texts that are not damaging and don't create stumbling blocks for those pushed to the edges of our society?

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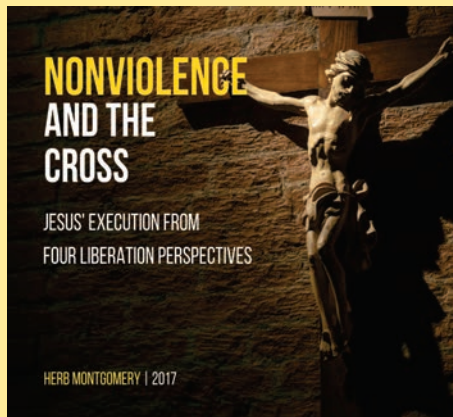


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Nonviolence and the Cross Jesus's Execution from Four Liberation Perspectives

**Garden Grove, CA, USA
October 13-14, 2017**

I'm just getting home from sharing at a conference on nonviolent atonement theories in which I was invited to participate in southern California this past weekend. For those of you to whom the term "nonviolent atonement" is new, this is a family of theories concerning Jesus' life, death and resurrection that look to Jesus's life and teachings or his resurrection for salvation, redemption or atonement value rather than the violence of Jesus' execution on the cross.

Giving the violence of the cross an aura of the sacred has been shown to be deeply damaging to communities on the edges or undersides of our society. And yet this aura of the sacred surrounding Jesus' cross still stands at the center of much of the Western Christian teachings that find their source in European and American patriarchal and colonial theologies. Therefore, nonviolent atonement theories are those theories and theologies that have grown out of oppressed communities that seek to understand Jesus' salvific role through a

focus on the entire narrative of the Jesus story, the story of his birth, life, death and resurrection rather than solely isolating one's focus on only Jesus's cross.

I shared four different but related nonviolent views of Jesus's atoning work from four marginalized communities. My first presentation focused on the work of James H. Cone, considered to be the father of Black Liberation Theology, in his revolutionary volume *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. In this presentation we considered how Jesus' death was not something that satisfied Divine justice, but a gross miscarriage of justice by the then status quo through the lens of the lynching history in America. In my second presentation we considered what Feminist liberation theologians as Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker refer to as *The Myth of Redemptive Suffering*. We contemplated how viewing the sufferings of Jesus on the cross as redemptive have proven to be deeply problematic for women who are victims/survivors of violence and injustice. In my third presentation we considered the critique by womanist scholars as Delores Williams and Jacqueline Grant of presenting Jesus as substitute given the way substitution relates problematically with the experience of women of color with surrogacy. Lastly, I shared what I consider to be the perspective of the original, proletariat, liberation communities of early Jewish Jesus followers who in the synoptic gospels and the book of Acts focus on Jesus's teachings as salvific and his resurrection as being good news as contrasted with contemporary evangelical ways of presenting the gospel today which focuses primarily on Jesus' death.

It's my belief that one's social location makes a difference when we consider the meaning and implications of the

Jesus story. I also find it fascinating that, given the social location of early Jesus followers, their gospel bypasses and ultimately agrees with much of the emphasis and critique of contemporary oppressed communities as we seek together to reclaim the liberation themes of the Jesus story in response to European and American theologies which have historically used this story to oppress.

This material has been revolutionary for me and I'm so grateful for the opportunity to have been able to share it this past weekend. I'm also deeply excited to be able to share it with you, too, on our website. You can find this new series *Nonviolence and the Cross; Jesus's Execution from Four Liberation Perspectives* at:

renewedheartministries.com/Audio-Presentations

The titles for each presentation are:

The Cross and the Lynching Tree; The Injustice of the Cross

What If Jesus Had Been A Woman?

Substitution and Divine Surrogacy

First-Century Jewish Good News

Happy listening!

And for those of you who are supporting our work, I just can't thank you enough. This past weekend proved once again just how vital and much needed our work here at RHM is. We could not exist without you, and I thank you for your financial partnership with us. For those others of you who are interested in supporting our work as well, you can do so by going to renewedheartministries.com and clicking "donate." There you can become one of our monthly contributors or make a one time donation. Either way, every amount helps.

Together we are making a difference, carrying on the work found in Luke 4:18-19, one engagement at a time.

Against Enticing... cont'd from page 5

Which interpretations can also move you to take tangible, concrete actions as an individual and as a group to stand in solidarity with those walking toward a more just world? How can you smooth out another person's way toward liberation? As it states in Isaiah:

"Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;

the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain." (Isaiah 40.4)

Thank you for checking in with us this week. Wherever this finds you, keep living in love engaging the work of transforming our world.

And to each of you who are supporting the work of Renewed Heart Ministries, we simply could not do this without you. We have a lot of educational events lined up for

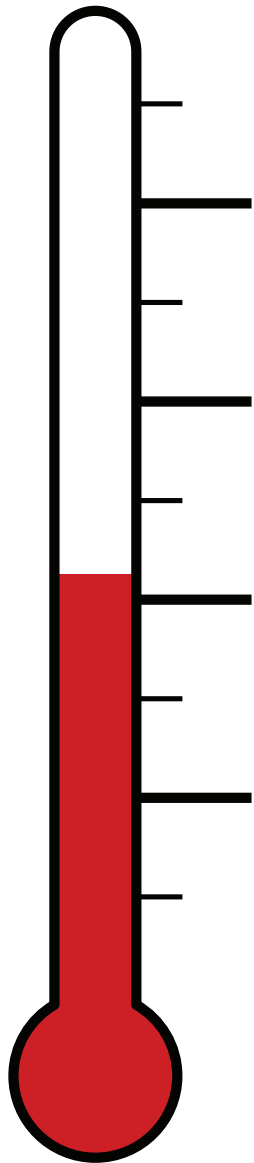
this fall. If you'd like to support our work you can do so by going to:

renewedheartministries.com/donate/

Or you can always mail your support to:

Renewed Heart Ministries
PO Box 1211
Lewisburg, WV 24901

Every amount helps. Thank you! I love each of you dearly. I'll see you next month. ■



The RHM team, in any given month, consists of a small team of ten to twelve people working either full-time, part-time or as volunteers dedicating hundreds of hours to make what we do possible.

If you find blessing, encouragement, and renewal in RHM, please consider becoming one of our Monthly Partners with a reoccurring donation or by making a one time gift.

2017 Annual Budget Goal:
\$190,000.00

Monthly Budget Goal: \$15,834.00

September's Contributions:
\$11,756.84

January–September Budget:
\$142,506.00

January–September Received:
\$84,270.43

Schedule

DECEMBER 10 - 17, 2017

Cruise With A Mission
Eastern Caribbean
304.520.0030

FEBRUARY 23 - 24, 2018

Race Matters Symposium
Lewisburg, WV, USA
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MARCH 11-18, 2018

Australian Speaking Tour
Locations to be Announced
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New episodes every Friday!

The *Jesus For Everyone* podcast

A weekly podcast where we discuss where faith in Jesus and social justice work for the vulnerable today intersect and what a first-century, Jewish, Galilean prophet of the poor might offer us today in our work of survival, resistance, liberation, restoration, and transformation.

RHM's website: renewedheartministries.com/Podcasts



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 hold in various venues. You can support our work either with a one-time gift or by becoming 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:
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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 personal, systemic and structural differences in the lives of the less privileged.

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

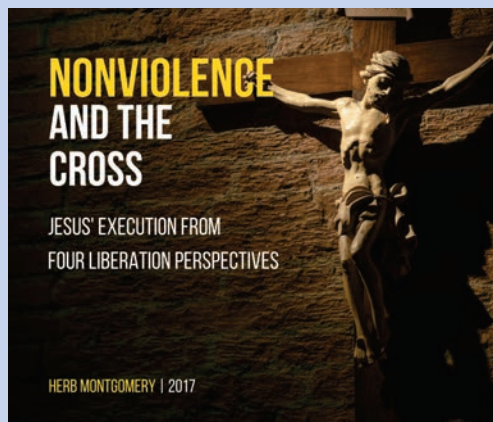
Featured Presentation

This month we'd like to feature the first prevention in Herb's new series *Nonviolent and the Cross: Jesus's Execution from Four Liberation Perspectives*. The title for this first presentation is from James H. Cone's book with the same title, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Before we rush off to cosmic explanations for trying to understand Jesus's death, we must first allow ourselves to be confronted by story in the Gospels and the book of Acts of the injustice of Jesus's execution.

Jesus's execution places him in the community of those who know what it's like to be threatened with being put on a tree. This Jesus, first and foremost, died for standing up to an exploitive status quo. His life of salvation work was interrupted by his arrest, trial and unjust execution. The resurrection was the undoing, overturning and reversing all that was accomplished by the execution of Jesus, causing his kingdom vision and to live on in hope through the lives of those who chose to follow him.

It's our hope that your heart and hope will be renewed, and the you, too, will be in-spired to take reparative action in our world today as you listen to this month's featured presentation:

The Cross and the Lynching Tree by Herb Montgomery.



"The denunciation of
injustice implies the
rejection of the use of
Christianity to legitimize the
established order."

GUSTAVO GUTIÉRREZ
A THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION

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