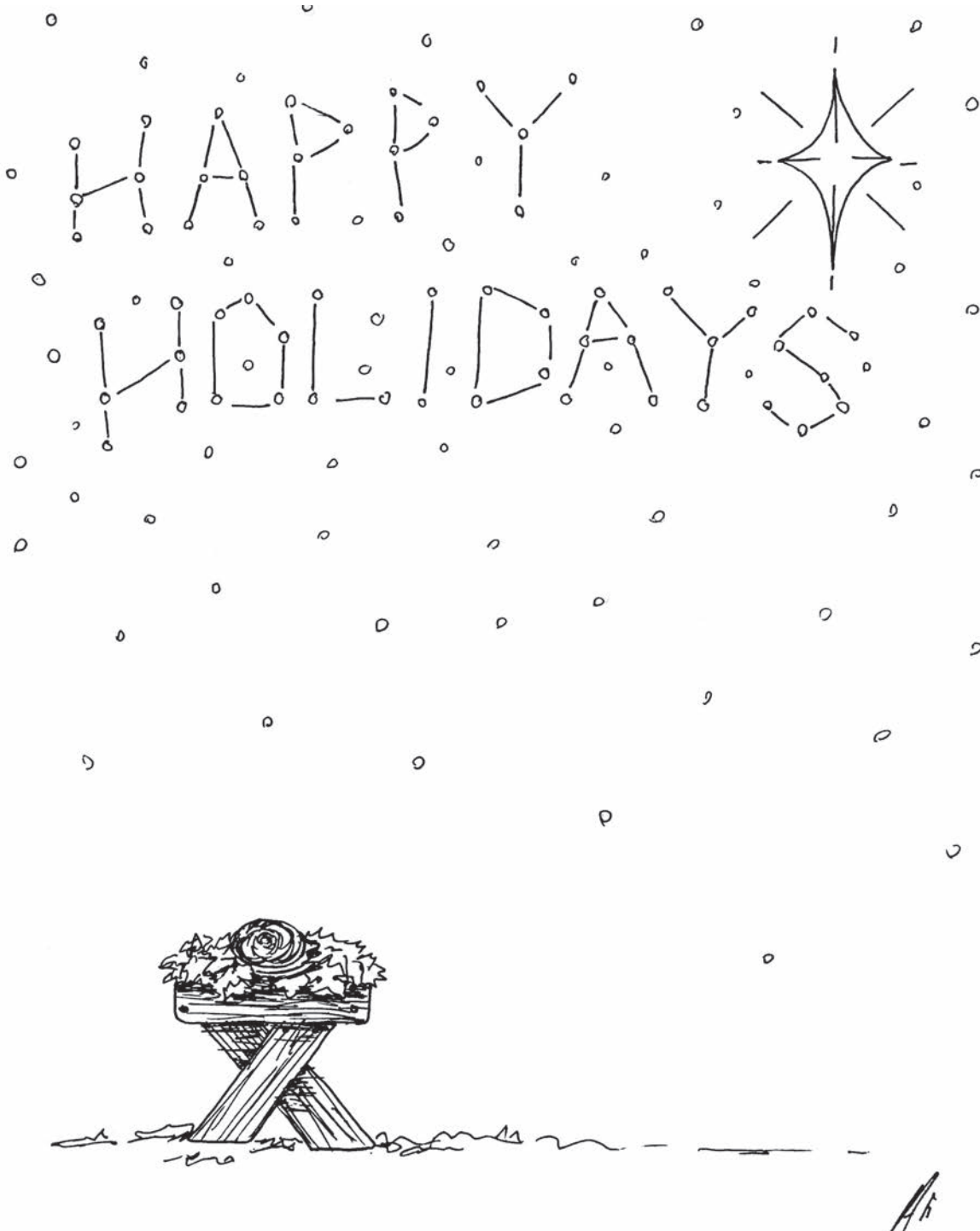




RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES

Awakenings

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



Inside This Issue:

Page 2

The Kingdom of God
Within You

Page 4

RHM Annual Reading
Course Book for December

Page 5

Giving Tuesday

Page 6

RHM and the Philippines

Page 7

Special Year-End Giving

Budget Thermometer
Schedule

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

"But on being asked when the kingdom of God is coming, he answered them and said: The kingdom of God is not coming visibly. Nor will one say: Look, here! There! For look, the kingdom of God is within you!" (Q 16:17)

Companion Texts:

Matthew 24:23: "At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it."

Luke 17:20-21: "Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, 'The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst.'"

Gospel of Thomas 3:1-3: "Jesus says, 'If those who lead you say to you: "Look, the kingdom is in the sky!" then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you: "It is in the sea," then the fishes will precede you. Rather, the kingdom is inside of you, and outside of you.'"

Gospel of Thomas 113: "His disciples said to him: 'The kingdom – on what day will it come?' 'It will not come by watching (and waiting for) it. They will not say: "Look, here!" or "Look, there!" Rather, the kingdom of the Father is spread out upon the earth, and people do not see it.'"

The Privatized Individual Interpretation of this Saying

I want to begin this week by critiquing a popular privatized, internal, individualistic interpretation of this passage. One proponent of this individualistic interpretation is Eckhart Tolle. Here is a sample from his work, and then I'll offer my response from a liberation perspective.

"Jesus was once asked when the kingdom of God would come. The kingdom of God, Jesus re-plied, is not something people will be able to see and point to. Then came these striking words: 'Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.' (Luke 17:21) With these words, Jesus gave voice to a teaching that is universal and timeless. Look into every great religious, spiritual, and wisdom tradition, and we find the same precept — that life's ultimate truth,

its ultimate treasure, lies within us. As Jesus made unambiguously clear, we can experience this inner treasure — and no experience could be more valuable. 'But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," he declared, "and all these things shall be added unto you' (Matthew 6:33). From this interior plane of life, he is saying, we will gain all that is needful." (<https://www.tm.org/blog/enlightenment/kingdom-of-god-is-within-you/>)

"What you see, hear, feel, touch, or think about is only one half of reality, so to speak. It is form. In the teaching of Jesus, it is simply called 'the world,' and the other dimension is 'the kingdom of heaven or eternal life.'" (Eckhart Tolle; *A New Earth*)

"When you hear of inner space, you may start seeking it, and because you are seeking it as if you were looking for an object or for an experience, you cannot find it. This is the dilemma of all those who are seeking spiritual realization or enlightenment. Hence, Jesus said, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, "Lo, here it is!" or "There!" for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.'" (Ibid.)

"No inner baggage, no identifications. Not with things, nor with any mental concepts that have a sense of self in them. And what is the 'kingdom of heaven' is. The simple but profound joy of Being that is there when you let go of identifications and so become 'poor in spirit.'" (Ibid.)

"I think if [Jesus] lived nowadays, instead of 'kingdom,' he would have said, 'dimension.' And 'heaven' refers to a sense of vastness or spaciousness. So if we retranslate the words of Jesus into modern terms [it would be] 'the dimension of spaciousness is within you.' And then Jesus said — when they asked him, 'Where is the kingdom of heaven and when is it going to come?' — he said, 'The kingdom of heaven does not come with signs to be perceived. You cannot say, ah, it's over here or look, it's over there, for I tell you the kingdom of heaven is within you.'" Eckhart Tolle (Lecture, February 12, 2013, Stanford University's Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education)

The Kingdom of God within You

by Herb Montgomery

Quotable Quotes

"[The Christmas stories] are about a different kind of world. God's dream for us is not simply peace of mind, but peace on earth."

— Marcus Borg & John Dominic Crossan,
The First Christmas



Kingdom of God... cont'd from page 2

Three Critiques from a Liberation Perspective

My first critique is to the idea that you can find this kingdom within yourself as an individual rather than within yourselves as in a community. This individualistic interpretation stands in contrast with the majority of Jesus' teachings that taught a form of communalism. The "kingdom" in the gospels is a community of people who are committed to putting into action God's distributively just vision for the world.

Latin American liberation theologian Jon Sobrino critiques theologies in first world countries where "the Kingdom" can be reduced to "the purely personal dimension" (*Jesus the Liberator*, pp 110-121). The "you" that Jesus' kingdom is "within" or in "the midst of" is not singular. It's not singular! The "you" where Jesus locates the Kingdom is *plural*: "among you" as a collective—a community.

When Angela Davis speaks on community, she speaks of a community that includes not just those who are alive now but also those who have gone before us in our work, our ancestors in social change movements. This community also includes those who will come after us, who stand on the shoulders of our work the way we stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us. She speaks of our need to contradict "the neo-liberal individualism that persuades us that we are single solitary individuals in the world. We have lost so much as a result of capitalism and not just in terms of material goods. We've lost a sense of our connectedness to one another" (*Spirit*

Of Justice: A Conversation Between Michelle Alexander And Angela Davis, 1:11:30-1:12:30)

This communal interpretation should lift the hopes of someone coming in contact with Jesus' kingdom as an individual who is part of a larger community, not alone.

My second critique is that this individualistic interpretation makes the kingdom abstract. It does not address systemic injustice, oppression, or violence in concrete ways. This might explain why this interpretation resonates largely with the elites. It allows them to supposedly find Jesus' kingdom inside of them through personal disciplines without being called to confront their own complicity in injustice or the benefit they derive from their social location in the status quo.

My third critique is that one can read an entire volume expounding this interpretation of the kingdom as an internal level of consciousness and never encounter a mention of the poor. Not one! This is a huge red flag, a denial of the gospel Jesus taught. Jesus called his followers in the Kingdom to practice a preferential option for the poor, those this world makes last.

In Jesus's "kingdom of God," whomever the status quo places last becomes first. They are the ones to whom the kingdom belongs (see Luke 6:20). It is their experiences of life, facing marginalization, oppression, exploitation and/or discrimination, in which the community is centered and dedicated to the practice of bringing change in the larger society.

An Alternative

So how are we to understand Jesus' response to the inquiring Pharisee, "The

coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst"?

This response has a social/historical context that the writings of Josephus explain. Josephus writes of incidents that occurred around the mid-1st Century when revolutionary prophets would lead large groups of people into a desert outside Jerusalem on the premise that, once there, God would show them signs of approaching freedom. The Roman procurator, Felix, regarded one of these gatherings as the first stage of revolt, and so sent cavalry and heavy infantry to cut the mob into pieces (see *Josephus, The Jewish War*, Williamson and Smallwood, p. 147). The most infamous of the revolutionary prophets who promised "signs to be observed" was a militaristic messiah referred to as "the Egyptian." He's mentioned in Acts 21:38: "Then you are not the Egyptian who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?" Josephus describes the event as follows:

"Arriving in the country, this man, a fraud who posed as a seer, collected about 30,000 dupes, led them round from the desert to the Mount of Olives and from there was ready to force an entry into Jerusalem, overwhelm the Roman garrison, and seize supreme power with his fellow-raiders as bodyguard." (*Josephus, The Jewish War*, Williamson and Smallwood, p. 147)

Josephus wasn't a neutral reporter. Josephus believed the future of the Jewish people depended on the elites collaborating with Rome. He was definitely biased in favor of Rome. You can see it in the difference between the "4,000 assassins" mentioned in Acts and the "30,000 dupes" mentioned in Josephus' account. But the fact that he mentions the event is still important, even if his account possesses potentially exaggerated numbers. In a parallel account of this event, Josephus includes the "sign" that this "Egyptian" had claimed would be shown to the people. It would be a sign like Joshua's sign at the Battle of Jericho. At the "Egyptian's" command, the walls of Jerusalem would fall down so that his followers could enter and seize the city. However, before any such a sign could be

cont'd on page 4

attempted, the Roman cavalry and infantry slayed or captured hundreds and put the rest to flight, including the militaristic messiah himself. (*Josephus, Antiquities*, 170-172) These were not irrational leaders, but hopeful militarist messiahs, liberation prophets who tried to lead movements of Jewish peasants in action that would be accompanied by YHWH's power and deliverance.

Josephus gives other examples of the people seeking God's deliverance and meeting death instead. Roman soldiers massacred a thousand Jewish women and children who followed another Jewish militaristic messiah "prophet." This man had declared to the people in Jerusalem that God had commanded them to go up to the Temple to receive the signs of deliverance (*Josephus, The Jewish War*, p. 360). Josephus also describes

a "Samaritan prophet" who was a contemporary "messiah" of Jesus during the time of Pontius Pilate. This prophet's "sign" was to lead the people up the sacred Mount Gerizim to find holy vessels left there by Moses. Instead, the armed crowd was attacked and overwhelmed by Pilate's troops at the foot of the mountain (*Josephus, Antiquities*, 85-87).

When Jesus says "the Kingdom is not coming with signs to be observed," he is emphatically rejecting the specific way in which popular prophets led masses of Jewish people to their deaths at the hands of Roman soldiers. The reference to such leaders becomes more specific when he warns, "They will say to you, 'Lo there!' or 'Lo, here!' Do not go, do not follow them" (Luke 17:23). Those who followed these messiahs and their methods of liberation would perish needlessly in horrific slaughters by Rome.

Jesus instead offered a new vision for

human society in the form of a community that practiced survival, nonviolent resistance, liberation, and reparation, with the hope of both personal and societal transformation. This kingdom was within their grasp. Where other approaches were revolutionary suicide, Jesus gave them a methodology that was within their ability to accomplish. When Jesus says "It's within you," he's quoting Moses in Deuteronomy.

"Now what I am commanding you today is *not too difficult for you or beyond your reach*. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, 'Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, 'Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?' No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart ['within you'] so you may obey it" (Deuteronomy 30:11-14, emphasis added).

RHM's 2017 Annual Reading Course Book for December

We are pleased to end 2017's reading course with this masterpiece of womanist theological classics.

***Sisters in the Wilderness* The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk**

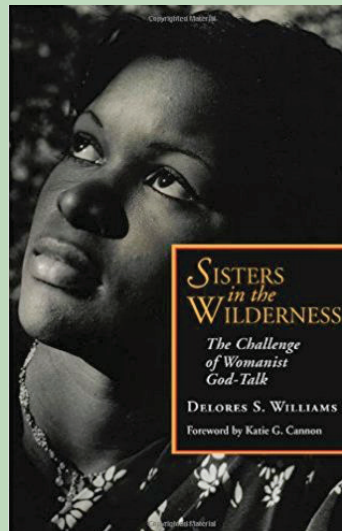
by Delores S. Williams
Foreword by Katie G. Cannon

"Drawing on the biblical figure of Hagar mother of Ishmael, cast into the desert by Abraham and Sarah, but protected by God Williams finds a prototype for the struggle of African-American women. African slave, homeless exile, surrogate mother, Hagar's story provides an image of survival and defiance appropriate to black women today. Exploring the themes implicit in Hagar's story poverty and slavery, ethnicity and sexual exploitation, exile and encounter with God Williams traces parallels in the history of African-American women from slavery to the present day. A new womanist theology emerges from this shared experience, from the interplay of oppressions on account of race, sex

and class. *Sisters in the Wilderness* offers a telling critique of theologies that promote liberation but ignore women of color. This is a book that defined a new theological project and charted a path that others continue to explore."

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**.



Preferential Option for the Last

Today, Jesus's "Kingdom of God," a community that centers and puts first those our present society places as last, is within our ability. We can choose to do life differently. When it comes to the subject of immigration, we can put migrants first. When it comes to indigenous people's rights, we can put Native lives first. When we talk about poverty and creating a new world where poverty is no more, we can put the poor first and center their voices in the discussion. When we speak of what it's like to be a woman in our society, we can put women first. When we consider racial inequalities, we can choose to put people of color first. And in a world still largely shaped by homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia, we can center the discussion in the voices, stories and experiences of those within our community who are LGBTQ.

We can believe, validate, and center each of these experiences. And although we may separate them for the purpose of discussion and understanding, often all of these experiences can be experienced by the same people. For example, a person can be a trans woman of color, and daily bump into multiple ways in which society seeks to place them as last rather than first. To the degree that that person fights

cont'd on page 5

oppressions in our world, a community seeking to follow Jesus's vision for human society according will center their voice at the shared table, making first those the present structures place as last, and making last those the present structure places as first (see Matthew 19:30; 20:16; Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30)

Lastly, as our sayings states, the community of the Kingdom can be manifesting itself among a group of people right in front of us, and we can still miss it like the inquiring Pharisee in the story. The more invested we are in the present structures that marginalize others, the greater the likelihood of our missing it altogether. What are some of the characteristics we should look for? Jesus' kingdom of God was communal rather than individualistic. It addressed the private/personal and also located each person within a larger community. It endeavored to address the injustice, oppression, marginalization and violence faced by those the world of the first century placed as last. And it practiced the one praxis the community of God must possess in every generation to be genuine: a *preferential option* for the last.

It's not too difficult for us. It's within our grasp. It starts with the choice to listen to those who traverse this world as last, and believing in their experiences when they tell you.

"But on being asked when the kingdom of God is coming, he answered them and said: The kingdom of God is not coming visibly. Nor will one say: Look, here! There! For look, the kingdom of God is with-in you!" (Q 17:20-21)

HeartGroup Application

As a group:

1. Think about the various expressions of injustice, oppression and violence certain people face in our society. What worries, if any, come to mind when you consider centering their voices in your own community?
2. Worries tell us a lot about ourselves. They tell us about what we attach importance to and what we are focusing our energies on. What would it look like to attach importance to

3. Schedule a HeartGroup time when anyone who would like to share their story of how they have been made to feel "last" can do so with the group. When these stories are shared, follow up each story with a no-talk-back rule. Spend time listening, believing, and validating one another.

Then see where that leads.

Thanks so much for checking in with us this holiday season.



Every act of generosity counts, and those acts mean even more when we give together.



#GivingTuesday 2017

Last month was #GivingTuesday and I want to thank all of you who contributed to our work and for making this the best #GivingTuesday yet.

My favorite slogan this year for #GivingTuesday was, "Every act of generosity counts, and those acts mean even more when we give together." I love it because it's true. It grounds us in community. It reminds us of our connectedness to one another. And it focuses our attention on our immense power to collectively take care of one another.

That's what you did last month on November 28th! You showed up and showed once again how together we can and do make a difference.

It's donors like you the keep us

going, and I want you to know how deeply we appreciate you. All of us here at Renewed Heart Ministries are grateful, but especially me. Thank you for your support this year. If it weren't for faithful supporters like you, quite frankly, we wouldn't exist. Thank you for being one of those who are supplying the funding that we need to make a difference in the lives RHM comes in con-tact with. Thank you for believing in this ministry. Thank you for partnering with us in what we do.

With much love and deep gratitude,

Herb Montgomery
Director | Renewed Heart Ministries

Wherever this finds you, keep living in love, engaging the work of survival, resistance, liberation, reparation, and transformation. And remember, the Kingdom of God is within your midst, it's within your grasp. It's not too difficult for you.

I love each of you dearly.

I'll see you next week. ■



RHM and the Philippines

Northern Luzon Adventist Schools Alumni Association of America Redlands, CA, USA October 27-28, 2017

I'm sitting in Denver's airport, heading home from an wonderful experience with the Northern Luzon Adventist Schools Alumni Association of America (NLASAAA). NLASAAA is the alumni association of what used to be Northern Luzon Adventist Academy but is today Northern Luzon Adventist College. Many of the Academy students went on to Philippine Union College which in 1996 achieved university status and became Adventist University of the Philippines (AUP). Today AUP ranks fourth out of 27 for universities in the Philippines.

This past weekend was NLASAAA's annual convocation and celebration. I shared three presentations this weekend focusing our attention on the gospel Jesus announced, gospel of the kingdom:

Mark 1:14-15—Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near."

Matthew 4:23—Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom...

Luke 4:43—But he said, "I must proclaim the gospel of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent."

In its most basic form, Jesus's "kingdom of God" can be defined as a community of people who allow God's will of distributive justice to reign through their

lives; it's a community where those our present social, economic and political structures make first are prioritized as last, and there is a concrete practice of making a preferential option for those our present structures place as last.

Jesus's kingdom vision for humanity has significant implications for our global community today. Our's is a world where developing countries are still living with the results of colonial exploitation while facing the evolved ongoing struggle of obtaining independence and self determination in response to post-colonial development strategies that ultimately benefited the so called First and Second world countries who designed those strategies. These structures today have left developing counties economically dependent on and inextricably bound to those countries to whom they are now hopelessly in debt. This dependence is manifest both politically and economically in these countries.

The inequity of our present global structure is immense. The majority of the world's population is forced to live in unjust situations of material poverty. Many in these countries face starvation or the damaging health effects of malnutrition while many living on this side of the globe are suffering the deleterious health effects of obesity. This gross level of poverty and inequity is dehumanizing. It is an attack on their basic human dignity. Poverty does not just happen. It's the result of violating the principles of distributive justice. The continued exploitation of these countries leaves them with less education, less wealth, poorer health, and shorter life spans—"death before their time." This is

what leads us to name material poverty as immoral. These countries are at the bottom of our global economic structure. They are the "last" Jesus called us to make "first."

The Philippines has experienced it's own struggle in the wake of colonialism; first from Spain and then later the United States. The challenges of poverty today in the Philippines are complex and overwhelming. These challenges provide yet another call for what the Hebrew prophets names as justice. The NLASAAA, though officially located here in the U.S. in Loma Linda, CA, is dedicated to this work in their beloved Philippine Islands. Those who attended the convocation this weekend numbered a little over two hundred. Yet this relatively small group, despite its size, has, among other accomplishments, even successfully established their own hospital in North Luzon to meet the health needs of those in that area. Today their hospital is growing in size and they are now considering branching out with smaller clinics being placed in north Luzon's more remote areas, too. They provide free health care days. And make sure that a certain portion of their facility is always available for the indigenous population of the island. They are making concrete differences in the lives of those who are suffering while at the same time looking for ways to respond to the structural causes of that suffering, too.

I was blown away with all that this little group is doing. This is an organization of folks who, although they have migrated here from the Philippines, raised their children here in the U.S., they are choosing still to make a preferential option in their own lives alongside those back on their native islands who are on the receiving end of such blunt inequity. I cannot affirm this group enough. I want to thank the NLASAAA for inviting me to share in your celebration this year. I was deeply honored to participate in your convocation. You're doing an amazing work.

NLASAAA and Renewed Heart Ministries are presently looking at possible dates in 2018 and 2019 where we can accompany them in their work in the Philippines, supportively participating with them in the work they are already doing there. I'll be sure to keep you posted on how this develops.



Special Year End Giving

To each of you who are supporting the work of Renewed Heart Ministries, I just can't thank you enough. You are the ones who make our existence and our work possible. Together we are engaging the work found in Luke 4:18-19: "proclaiming good news to the poor, proclaiming freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, setting the oppressed free, proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor."

We are closing in on the end of 2017 and we need your support. Please consider making special year end contributions to our work by going to renewedheartministries.com/donate.

Or by mailing a special year end contribution to:

Renewed Heart Ministries
PO Box 1211
Lewisburg, WV 24901

Make sure your gift is postmarked by December 31st to receive a tax receipt for your contribution for 2017.

Over and over this year, I have witnessed marked evidence that we are making a difference. There is a stark need in our world today for the work we engage. In a world that sometimes feels like we are moving backwards, we are called to hold on to hope, keep our hand on the plow, and keep pushing forward. Help us reach our year end goal so we continue our work in the year to come.

Just this last month, at two separate speaking events, I watched the impact of the material I shared on the hearts of those who attended, and it drove home to me how vital the work we are engaging in is right now. Someone once said that whatever we possess becomes of double value when we share it with others. When I look at the work we are doing right

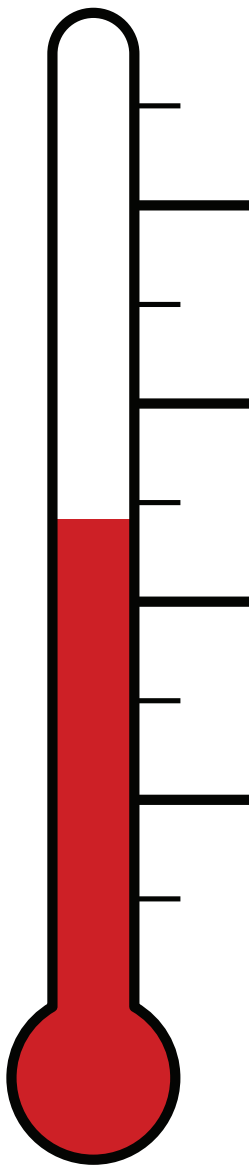
now, yours is more than doubling, it's multiplying exponentially in the hearts and lives for whom our ministry is a Godsend.

I want you to know the difference your financial support has made to our organization. I wish there were a million synonyms for thank you. I'd use them all.

As I begin to look back on 2017, I'm filled with so many fond memories. I have so many of your faces in my mind's eye as I write this. It's been a great year! I dearly love so many of you. We've been through a lot together over the years, and you've hung in there with us, shaping this ministry into what it is today. We've come a long way! I'm excited as I look to see what lies on our horizon for 2018!

With humble gratitude for your support,
Herb Montgomery

The RHM team on any given month consists of a small team of ten to twelve people working either full-time, part time or as a volunteer dedicating hundreds of hours to make what we do possible. If you find blessing, encouragement and renewal here, 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

October's Contributions:
\$10,527.99

January–October Budget:
\$158,340.00

January–October Received:
\$94,798.42

Schedule

JANUARY 12 - 13, 2018

Epikos Center
Bentonville, AR, USA
304.520.0030

FEBRUARY 23 - 24, 2018

Race Matters Symposium
Lewisburg, WV, USA
304.520.0030

MARCH 11-18, 2018

Australian Speaking Tour
Locations to be Announced
304.520.0030

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:
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 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 our second presentation in our new series, *Nonviolence and the Cross*. In this second presentation Herb considers what Feminist liberation theologians as Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker refer to as The Myth of Redemptive Suffering. We look at 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. Learning to listen to the experiences of those for whom certain theologies have been damaging is an integral part of working toward a world that is safe and compassionate for all. Herb doesn't offer alternatives until the fourth presentation in this series, yet this second presentation lays the groundwork and begins the process of listening. It's our hope that your hope will be renewed and that you will be inspired to action as we listen together to this month's featured presentation.

What If Jesus Had Been A Woman by Herb Montgomery.

