



RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES

# αwakenings

:::: The Official Newsletter of Renewed Heart Ministries :::: January 2018 ::::



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Herb Montgomery

*"It is these [the marginalized] whom Jesus tells to have hope, that God is not like their oppressors have made them think, that the end of their misfortunes is at hand, that the Kingdom of God is coming and is for them."*

## Featured Text:

"If you have faith like a mustard seed, you might say to this mulberry tree: Be uprooted and planted in the sea! And it would obey you." **Q 17:6**

## Companion Texts:

**Matthew 17:20:** "He replied, 'Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.'"

**Luke 17:6:** "He replied, 'If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, "Be uprooted and planted in the sea," and it will obey you.'"

**Gospel of Thomas 48:** "Jesus says, 'If two make peace with one another in one and the same house, then they will say to the mountain: "Move away," and it will move away.'"

**Mark 11:23:** "Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them."

## The Mountain of the Temple State

We have a lot to unpack in this week's saying. Let's begin with talking about the mountain or mulberry tree. In the book *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, Ched Myers writes about Mark's use of this week's saying under the heading "Faith as Political Imagination." William Telford also saw an economic and political backdrop on which to understand this week's saying:

"In Jewish circles, the correlative mountain and tree uprooting images [were] found in legal, legendary, thaumaturgic and eschatological contexts and employed in connection with the Rabbi, the king, the hero, the thaumaturge or the Messianic

follower. In a legal context, the term 'uprooter of mountains' was found to have a technical meaning. Applied to the king (and to Herod in particular), it could be employed as a double entendre, bolstering a legal argument for the exceptional nature of Herod's pulling down of the Temple... The function of [Mark's] redaction is therefore to announce, we believe, that the 'moving of mountains' expected in the last days was now taking place. Indeed, about to be removed was the mountain par excellence, the Temple Mount. The Temple, known to the Jewish people as the 'mountain of the house' or 'this mountain' was not to be elevated, as expected, but cast down!" (William Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree*, p. 118)

Jesus' narrative contrasts with the narrative of the elites of his day and of future Zealots in Jewish-Roman war, which would take place three decades later. Both of these groups saw the Temple State as enduring. The elites believed that as long as the Empire remained strong and the Temple aristocracy cooperated with Rome's demands, the Temple State centered in Jerusalem could endure. The Zealots, on the other hand, sought to reform the Temple State. They, along with the Jewish poor, revolted against economic exploitation and wrested control of the Temple State from the aristocrats. They then launched a three-and-a-half-year war to liberate Jerusalem from Roman occupation and the poor from the exploitation of the controlling Jewish families of their time.

But both of these narratives involved a Temple State enduring in some form, and Jesus taught that the Temple State could be overturned. I cannot state this strongly enough: Jesus was a Jew, not a Christian. He did not envision a Christian religion replacing Judaism; rather he envisioned a Jewish society without a Temple State. Why? Because in his day the Temple State was at the heart of the exploitation of the poor he had dedicated his life to working in solidarity with. The Jesus of the gospels envisioned a world where the presence of YHWH could be expressed through a community of resource-sharing and redistribution as opposed to a Temple at

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## Faith Like a Mustard Seed

by Herb Montgomery

## Quotable Quotes

*"It's about how we show up in this world in the limited time we have."*

– Michelle Alexander;  
*Spirit of Justice with Michelle Alexander & Angela Davis*

Front cover artwork by Ali Montgomery.



...**Mustard Seed** cont'd from page 2

the heart of the systemic exploitation of the poor.

Consider the following passages:

"But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'" (Matthew 9:13)

"But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. (Mark 12:42, cf. Luke 21:2)

"Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.'" (Mark 12:43-44)

Then immediately following this account of the economic abuse of this poor woman, we read:

"As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, 'Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!' 'Do you see all these great buildings?' replied Jesus. 'Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.'" (Mark 13:1-2)

It was a vision of a different world.

The exploiting Temple State is the mountain that Jesus envisions being cast in the sea in the synoptics.

## Thrown into the Sea

In Mark's gospel, we first encounter the imagery of being thrown into the sea in the story of the exorcism at Gerasenes. Here the demoniac is a symbol of the Jewish

people being occupied by the Roman Empire—the demons' name is "Legion," like the unit of Roman soldiers. When the demons plead not to be driven out of the land, Jesus permits them to inhabit a nearby herd of pigs who hurl themselves (and the empire they symbolize) into the sea.

"A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, 'Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.' He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, hurled themselves down the steep bank into the sea and were drowned." (Mark 5:11-13)

Now Jesus is using this same image for his listeners, calling them to imagine a world where the exploitative Temple State (Mark and Matthew's Mountain and Luke's Mulberry Tree), too, could be thrown into the sea.

The message was that the world can be remade, without exploitation.

This is the part of the message that received the greatest push back. It threatened not only the aristocratic Temple elites who finally had Jesus executed, but also those who saw the Temple as the manifestation of YHWH's presence among them as a chosen people. Throughout history, religious worship of a God has often been tied to the oppression of vulnerable people, and the liberation of the oppressed has often involved throwing out God too. It's no wonder. It makes perfect sense.

Jesus was calling the people to imagine that a different God, too, was possible: they could imagine a world without a

Temple without having to embrace a world without their God. God's presence, instead of in an apartment in the Temple, would show up in the midst of their community, a community that Jesus called "the kingdom." That terminology is problematic for those of us who live in republics today but simply it meant a community that endeavored to practice God's vision for human society according to Jesus. This was a world rooted in distributive justice where no one had too much while others didn't have enough. This was a community where we took responsibility for taking care of one another. Our interconnectedness was understood, embraced, and experienced. We have been robbed of so much in our capitalist society today by individualism and competition. Jesus taught that a very different world was possible.

## Today

Today in the U.S., we don't have a religious state with a temple at its heart. Our society is a secular pluralist society with a large sector of citizens claiming the Christian religion. We do have folks who feel that to abandon the religion they were raised in, the religion of their oppressors, they must also abandon their faith in their God. I believe there's much to learn from Jesus's distinction between faith in God and faith in a religious institution.

Let me be frank. Faith traditions and institutions have used their sacred texts and religions to oppress women, to hold on to and practice racism, to legitimize classism, and to condone and even prescribe their own homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia.

Just a couple of weeks ago, a letter was sent to all the pastors of a conference in the tradition I was raised in from their conference president, warning, "We do not receive into membership anyone who is in a practicing homosexual relationship." Last weekend I had a very different experience hosting as guests in my home two very dear friends of mine, women who are married and raising two beautiful daughters. This couple still very much identifies as being a part of the same denomination that wrote that letter excluding them. They are raising their kids in the denomination and one of their families goes back generations in this

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...*Mustard Seed* cont'd from page 3

tradition. But the denomination's letter singles out people like my friends, who are already marginalized.

Shame! Shame on those of us who use our religion as a tool of oppression and dehumanization rather than liberation.

And for those who find themselves on the

receiving end of discrimination both in the world outside their religion and also within their religious tradition as well, actions like the denomination's bring them the extra struggle of having to parse their faith in a God whom they believe loves them and a religious tradition where they first encountered God but that rejects them.

I love how Jon Sobrino sums up Jesus'

message to those who find themselves in this place:

"It is these [the marginalized] whom Jesus tells to have hope, that God is not like their oppressors have made them think, that the end of their misfortunes is at hand, that the Kingdom of God is coming and is for them." (Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, p. 82)

Jesus stood in solidarity with people the religious, socioeconomic, and political powers of his day pushed to the margins. He called them to envision a different world without the oppressing Temple State. And he was crucified by the Temple State for doing so.

There's an interesting detail in the story, though. At the moment Jesus died, each of the synoptic gospels includes this note:

"At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." (Matthew 27.51)

"The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." (Mark 15.38)

"For the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two." (Luke 23.45)

This curtain separated the innermost Holy Place in the temple from the rest of the structure. The Holy Place was the room where YHWH's very presence was believed to dwell. But in the story when the curtain is torn in two, what is revealed? What do the people see beyond the veil?

The room is empty.

The God of the poor, the God of the Oppressed, the God of those pushed to the edges of society, the God of the marginalized is not there. The room is empty. The God who stands with society's vulnerable is actually present in the one suspended between heaven and earth, between two rebels, the one who lived his life in solidarity with them and died as a result of it. That God is not at the heart of the system exploiting or marginalizing them.

God is with them, the crucified community.

The resurrection undoes, overturns, and overcomes all that was accomplished by Jesus' execution in the story. But before the resurrection, the first post-execution event is the rending of the temple's veil.

It can be very painful to sever or tear the

## RHM's 2018 Annual Reading Course Book for January

Happy 2018!

With this new year we begin another twelve month reading course. We are excited about the list of books we will be reading in 2018. To kick off this new list, our book for January is:

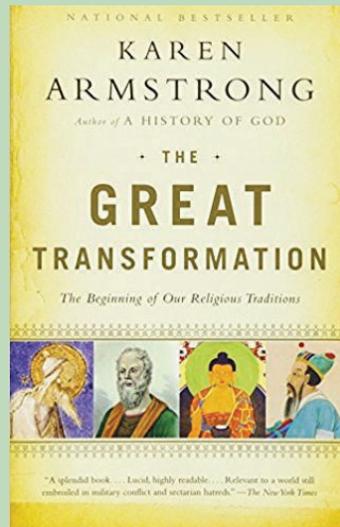
***The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions***

by Karen Armstrong

"From one of the world's leading writers on religion and the highly acclaimed author of the bestselling *A History of God*, *The Battle for God* and *The Spiral Staircase*, comes a major new work: a chronicle of one of the most important intellectual revolutions in world history and its relevance to our own time.

In one astonishing, short period—the ninth century BCE—the peoples of four distinct regions of the civilized world created the religious and philosophical traditions that have continued to nourish humanity into the present day: Confucianism and Daoism in China; Hinduism and Buddhism in India; monotheism in Israel; and philosophical rationalism in Greece. Historians call this the Axial Age because of its central importance to humanity's spiritual development. Now, Karen Armstrong traces the rise and development of this transformative moment in history, examining the brilliant contributions to these traditions made by such figures as the Buddha, Socrates, Confucius and Ezekiel.

Armstrong makes clear that despite some differences of emphasis, there



was remarkable consensus among these religions and philosophies: each insisted on the primacy of compassion over hatred and violence. She illuminates what this "family" resemblance reveals about the religious impulse and quest of humankind. And she goes beyond spiritual archaeology, delving into the ways in which these Axial Age beliefs can present an instructive and thought-provoking challenge to the ways we think about and practice religion today.

A revelation of humankind's early shared imperatives, yearnings and inspired solutions—as salutary as it is fascinating."

Our hope is that as you read this thought provoking volume, your heart will be inspired and your heart renewed to choose compassion as we follow Jesus' example in healing our world.

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](https://smile.amazon.com/ch/20-8663541).

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association of your religious institution with your God. But I believe that disillusionment must come. Deconstruction must be embraced. And as painful as it is, we must lean into that deconstruction and come out on the other side to reconstruct a beautiful revolution. And this is where we come full circle back to this week's saying about faith.

## Faith

Angela Davis describes activism as a matter of faith. She states, "We always have to act as if revolution were possible. We have to act as if it were possible to change the world. And if we do that work, the world is gonna change. Even if it doesn't change the way we need it to change right now, it will change." (*Spirit of Justice* with Michelle Alexander & Angela Davis).

In the Jesus stories, faith always makes the difference:

"Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." (Mark 5:34)

"'Go,' said Jesus, 'your faith has healed you.'" (Mark 10:52)

"According to your faith let it be done to you." (Matthew 9:29)

"Rise and go; your faith has made you well." (Luke 17:19)

"Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, 'Don't be afraid; just believe.'" (Mark 5:36)

"When Jesus saw their faith..." (Mark 2:5)

"Then Jesus said to the centurion, 'Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would.'" (Matthew 8:13)

"Then Jesus said to her, 'Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.'" (Matthew 15:28)

"He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith." (Mark 6:5-6)

"Jesus said, 'Everything is possible for one who believes.'" (Mark 9:23)

The text of Mark's gospel suggests that it was written when people were struggling to continue believing—but

believing in what?

It wasn't the existence of God that they were struggling to believe. A person could opt out of the Jesus movement and still believe in the existence of God.

In Mark, faith is not defined in terms of accepting doctrinal truths of a religious organization or tradition.

It's not even defined as confessing Jesus as the Christ or as Divine.

Jesus did not preach himself in the stories. Let me repeat that. Jesus did not preach himself. So what did Jesus preach? What did Jesus call his listeners to believe?

"After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'" (Mark 1:14-15, emphasis added.)

Jesus called his listeners to believe the good news that the kingdom, the reign of God, or God's vision for human society, had come. Belief was tied to embracing the kingdom, to "imagining another way of being another way of existing in the world" (Angela Davis, *ibid.*). The good news of God calls us to imagine a new world and believe it's possible. This kind of faith is what made all the difference in the stories of the gospels: the belief that things could actually be different, that we can choose a different world. It was a message of hope. And even if it doesn't come to full fruition in our lifetimes, the kind of world we want to create cannot receive its finishing touches by future generations if we haven't either laid the ground work for them or kept building today on the foundations of those that have come before us.

**"It's about how we show up in this world in the limited time we have."**  
—Michelle Alexander

**"If you have faith like a mustard seed, you might say to this mulberry tree: Be uprooted and planted in the sea! And it would obey you."** Q 17:6

## HeartGroup Application

1. This week I want you to work toward putting that kind of faith into action. As a group, make a list of all the things everyone enjoys doing in their free time. Go around the room and have

the group share the best qualities about each person present. What kind of skills are in the room? What kinds of things are the people in the room typically asked to help out with?

2. Everyone has something special to contribute. With this list in hand, brainstorm ways your HeartGroup can volunteer in your community to help shape the world into what we believe our world can be. How can your group work as if revolution were possible?

3. Pick an action and, as a group, do it.

I love each of you dearly. I'll see you next week. ■

## Schedule

**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



## Quotable Quotes

*And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may."*

— Luke the Physician;  
Acts 8:37



## Cruise with a Mission December 10-17, 2017

Early last year I was contacted by an organization named Cruise with a Mission asking if I would be willing to be their guest speaker for a mission cruise happening in December. "Mission cruise," I asked, "What's that?" In short, it's a service project in a certain region that needs help where the mode of transportation to get there is by cruise ship. I'd never heard of such a thing.

At first I had some reservation. "A cruise ship?" I thought. Both my racial and economic justice consciousness was activated. Cruises are notorious for both their racial and economic exploitation. So I called a couple people who sit on Renewed Heart Ministries' advisory council to get their advice. The ones I chose to contact were those whose social location specifically could speak to this out of their own experience.

After much consideration, we decided that since I was being asked to be their guest and to go and share the perspectives we teach here at RHM, this could turn out to be a positive opportunity to speak into lives who are open to listening. So I went.

We were to visit three islands in the Caribbean: Grand Turk, Puerto Rico and St. Thomas. Little did any of us know when we were planning this trip that devastating hurricanes would rip through this area in 2017 and that these places would be in desperate need of help.



The trip comprised three days at sea and three days in various ports where we participated along side both hurricane relief and recovery work taking place there. The day that moved me most, though, was the day we spent in Puerto Rico. The area we chose to work in was La Perla in San Juan. Tourists are typically advised to avoid La Perla as it is one of San Juan's and possibly even the entire island of Puerto Rico's most dangerous places. "The Pearl" district in Old San Juan is referred to as the "slums."

"La Perla is a historical shanty town astride the northern historic city wall of Old San Juan...established in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Initially, the area was the site of a slaughterhouse because the law required them and homes of former slaves and homeless non-white servants – as well as cemeteries – to be established away from the main community center; in this case, outside the city walls. Sometime after, some of the farmers and workers started living around the slaughterhouse and shortly established their houses there. Only three access points exist, one through the 'Santa Maria Magdalena Cemetery', one on the east side and one through a walkway right in the center of the northern wall." (La Perla, San Juan, Puerto Rico. 2017, Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=La\\_Perla,\\_San\\_Juan,\\_Puerto\\_Rico&oldid=815454674](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=La_Perla,_San_Juan,_Puerto_Rico&oldid=815454674))

We entered La Perla through the entrance in the center of the northern wall.

Hurricane relief was not allowed to enter this area, primarily because capitalist investors want the inhabitants to give up and move out so that this area can be taken over to build high-rises and resorts on.

This is the area we chose to help assist.

We split into three teams and put three roofs back on three houses, cleaned up flood damage and hurricane debris and got three families back into their homes. The team I was part of worked to repair this dear woman's home (see top of page 7).





It was an amazing experience for everyone involved. At the end of the day there were tears shed and hearts were full.

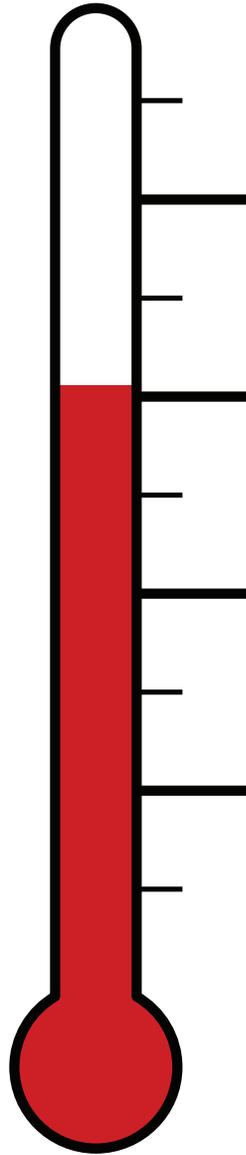
Each evening when we got back on the boat, I shared a presentation with the entire group on Jesus' Kingdom and specifically his preferential option for the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized; those this world places as last, that in Jesus vision for structuring human community would be made first.

It was a week I will always remember. I'm so glad I went. I still have not reconciled myself with the exploitation many of the crew, especially the service section who are almost exclusively hired from economically oppressed countries. But I also do not want to be reconciled to that, either. As King rightly stated, "There are certain things in our nation and in the world which I am proud to be maladjusted and which I hope all men of goodwill will be maladjusted until the good societies realize. I say very honestly that I never intend to become adjusted to segregation and discrimination. I never intend to become adjusted to religious bigotry. I never intend to adjust myself to economic conditions that will take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few." (Dr. Martin Luther King; speech at Western Michigan University; December 18th, 1963.)



But despite my opposition to our means of transportation, on the islands we visited, much good was done. Just like most things in life, this engagement was complex and complicated for me depending on which way I consider it. And that's okay. Life isn't simple. Nor is it black and white. We do the best we can in the situations we find ourselves. And I'll never forget my day in La Perla.

To each of you who support our work here at Renewed Heart Ministries, thank you!



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**

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**Monthly Budget Goal: \$15,834.00**

**November's Contributions:**  
**\$28,598.99**

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**January–November Budget:**  
**\$158,340.00**

**January–November Received:**  
**\$123,397.41**

We could not exist with your partnership. Together we are making a difference, participating in the work of survival, resistance, liberation, reparation and transformation in the spirit of Luke 4:18-19. This is the very concrete and world-shaping work the gospels call us to engage.

If you'd like to support Renewed Heart Ministries you can do so by going to [RenewedHeartMinistries.com](http://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

Remember, everything we do here at RHM is for free and every amount of support helps. Anything we receive over and above our annual budget we happily pass on to other not-for-profits, who we have vetted, who are making personal, systemic and structural differences in the lives of people

who are also less privileged.  
Thank you!



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](http://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.



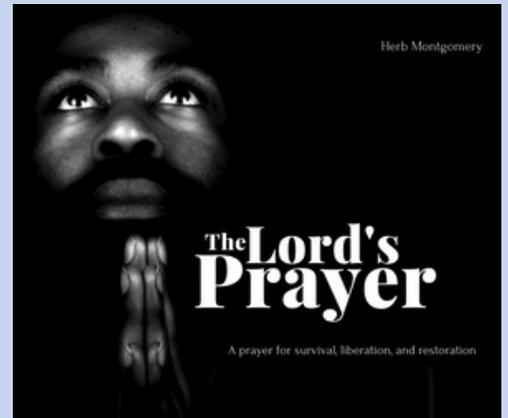
RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES

## Featured Presentation

This month our featured presentation is the third from our series *The Lord's Prayer: A Prayer for Survival, Liberation and Transformation* entitled *A Path Toward Compassion and Justice*. As we seek to follow Jesus' example in being a source of healing in our world, what is the "temptation" Jesus prayed that we would not be led into on our path toward liberation from evil? It's our hope that your heart will be inspired to action as you listen and

as we, together, continue to engage our work of survival, liberation, resistance, reparation, and transformation in this new year.

***A Path Toward Compassion and Justice*** by Herb Montgomery.



"It's about perception. Either you identify with others or you don't. Either you see yourself in the eyes of others or you don't."

Carol Off  
*All We Leave Behind*



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