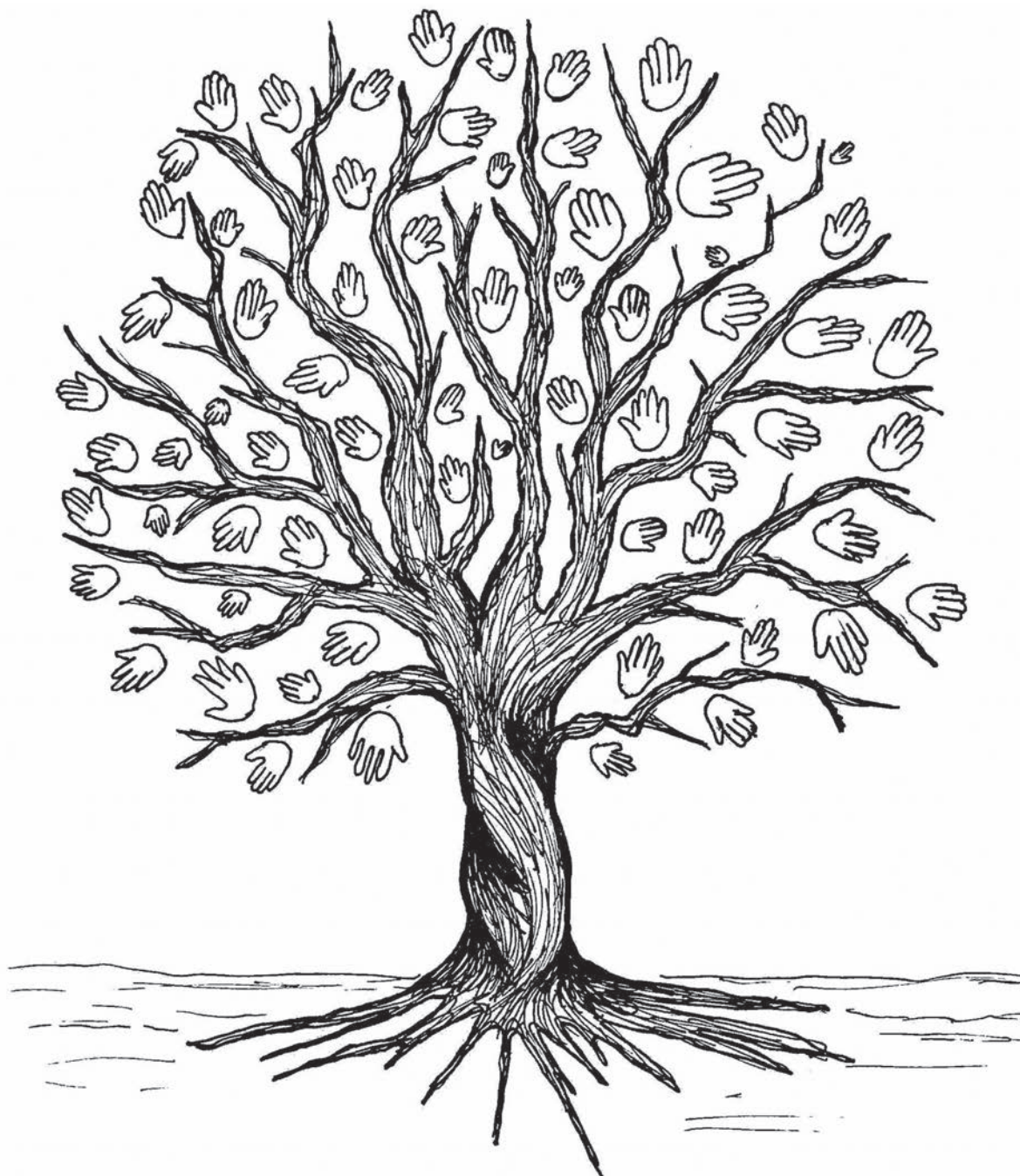




RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES

αwakenings

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



Ali

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Featured Presentation

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Renewed Heart Ministries

Follow Herb!



@HerbMontgomery



Herb Montgomery



The Kingdom of God within You

by Herb Montgomery

Quotable Quotes

"When the practice of nonviolence [as Jesus taught it in the Sermon on the Mount] becomes universal, God will reign on earth as God does in heaven."

— Gandhi;
Essential Writings

"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."

Featured Text:

"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 17:20-21**

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 some-thing that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' be-cause 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 replied, 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." (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.)

Front cover artwork by Ali Montgomery.

cont'd on page 3



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

"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)

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 who 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' "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

cont'd on page 4

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 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

RHM's 2018 Annual Reading Course Book for February

Martin Luther King: The Inconvenient Hero

by Vincent Harding

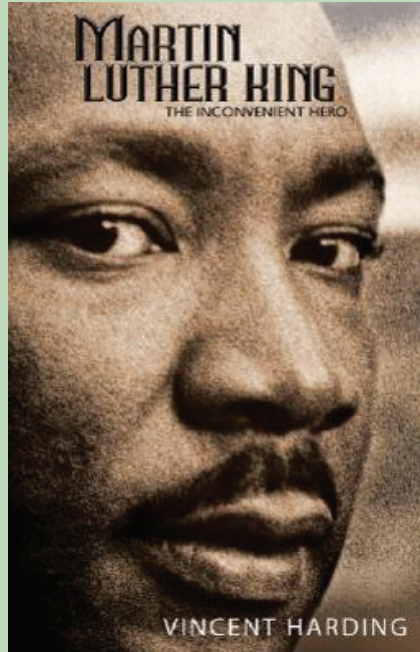
In this collection of essays, noted scholar and activist Vincent Harding reflects on the forgotten legacy of Martin Luther King, and the meaning of his life today.

February is Black History Month. This month, Renewed Heart Ministries will be participating in our local Race Matters event here in Lewisburg. We feel this book is timely and appropriate.

Vincent Harding, who spent some time as a Seventh-day Adventist before becoming a Mennonite for the majority of the rest of his life, is the composer of King's speech *Beyond Vietnam*.

From the Back Cover:

"In these eloquent essays, the noted scholar and activist Vincent Harding reflects on the forgotten legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the meaning of his life today. Many of these reflections are inspired by the ambiguous message surrounding the official celebration of King's birthday. Harding sees a tendency to freeze an image of King from the period of his early leadership of the Civil Rights movement, the period culminating with his famous "I Have a Dream" Speech. Harding writes passionately of King's later years, when his message and witness became more radical and challenging to the status quo at every level. In those final



years before his assassination King took up the struggle against racism in the urban ghettos of the North; he became an eloquent critic of the Vietnam war; he laid the foundations for the Poor People's Campaign. This widening of his message and his tactics entailed controversy even within his own movement. But they point to a consistent expansion of his critique of American injustice and his solidarity with the oppressed. It was this spirit that brought him to Memphis in 1968 to lend his support to striking sanitation workers. It was there that he paid the final price for his prophetic witness."

It's our hope that you will be inspired by this book to take action in your own way as we continue to participate together in the work of "good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, and liberation for the oppressed." (Luke 4.18)

cont'd on page 5

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).

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 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 within 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 "the last" instead, to focus on them, to place them as first?
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.

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.

Another world is possible.

I love each of you dearly

I'll see you next month. ■

Schedule

FEBRUARY 23 - 24, 2018

Race Matters Symposium
Lewisburg, WV, USA
304.520.0030

MARCH 12-15, 2018

The Jesus Dialogue
Cooranbong NSW, Australia
+61 409.939.202

MARCH 16, 2018

Avondale College Church
Cooranbong NSW, Australia

MARCH 17, 2018

Fox Valley Adventist Church
Cooranbong NSW, Australia
+61 409.939.202

MARCH 17, 2018

Sydney Adventist Forum
Cooranbong NSW, Australia
+61 409.939.202

MARCH 18, 2018

The Shared Table
Brightwaters NSW, Australia
+61 409.939.202

APRIL 27-28, 2018

Chico Adventist Church
Chico, CA, USA
530.342.7777



Epikos in Northwest Arkansas

January 12–14, 2018

by Herb Montgomery | January 22, 2018

I have some good news.

Two weekends ago, I had the pleasure of visiting a new project in Northwest Arkansas called Epikos. Epikos is a new networking organization that will serve to connect people with needs with nonprofit organizations in their area who work to serve those needs. One of the challenges on both ends is connection. Those in need struggle to find the organizations that can be of help to them while at the same time organizations struggle to locate those whom their services would best serve. It is in the hopes of providing a network of connection that Epikos will come along side people in Northwest Arkansas and connect them with the organizations that provide the kind of help they are in need of.

Associated with Epikos is a network of house churches. These groups are separate from, but complimentary to Epikos, as most of the people who are involved with the network also fellowship together in these home churches. It was this network of house churches who invited me to come and share for the weekend.

One of the many things we do here at Renewed Heart Ministries is provide support for those who are engaged in house churches. We believe Jesus's vision for humanity was rooted in community. House churches are just one of the ways Jesus' vision for human

community can be experienced.

What makes these house churches associated with Epikos special is that they also want to be safe spaces for people who either in their religious experience or in their lives within their larger society have experienced some type of discrimination. Whether that discrimination be based on race, gender, education, economic status, sexual orientation or gender identity and expression, or something else, these groups want to engage in the work of making our world a safer, just, compassionate home for all of us.

I shared a total of four presentations over the weekend. In each we considered key characteristics we glean from the gospels that can inform our work today of survival, resistance, liberation, reparations, and transformation. Outside of these four presentations though, what stands out as the highlight of my weekend was what took place Saturday night.

Gathered in a living room, a group of Christians began to ask how they could move out of their socialized, cisgender, heteronormativity and genuinely become a safe space for those whom Christianity typically marginalizes. What drove the discussion was the presence of three individuals in their house churches who self-identify as belonging in some way to the LGBTQ community and who also desire to navigate the intersection of their sexuality and gender expression with their faith. Also present were parents of children who identify as LGBTQ who desire the same. It was a beautiful evening as we leaned into what it means to genuinely believe that people's stories, voices, and experiences really do matter, especially when we choose to listen

to those who experience life differently than ourselves.

This is the beginning of the journey for this group. We at RHM have agreed to walk with this community as they choose to, rather than living guarded lives in fear, where our insecurities are triggered by anyone who is different, they choose the discipline of listening to one another, integrating all the many diverse experiences of life within their group into a meaningful, diverse, heterogeneous, and yet coherent whole. Our differences don't have to divide us. Our diversity can be embraced, respected, affirmed and celebrated. As the Jewish proverb states, "Before every person there walks an angel proclaiming, 'Behold the image of God.'" If humanity teaches us anything it is that we are different and yet connected. We are part of one another. Varied is the image of God.

This was my first trip for 2018 and I can't think of a better way to kick off this new year.

To each of you who support our work, thank you! Without you we could not exist. Together we are making a difference, YOU are making a difference. And I want to say thank you.

If you'd like to support our work, you can do so online through our website by clicking donate, or by mailing your contribution to:

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

It's my hope that the spirit I encountered this weekend at Epikos will continue to grow and spread within other Christian organizations, too. Groups like this one give me hope for our future.

Another world is possible.





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Daily Quotations in your email inbox, weekly articles, podcasts, and ministry updates, monthly newsletters, and more.

Sign up now so you don't miss a thing!

<http://bit.ly/RHMSignUp>

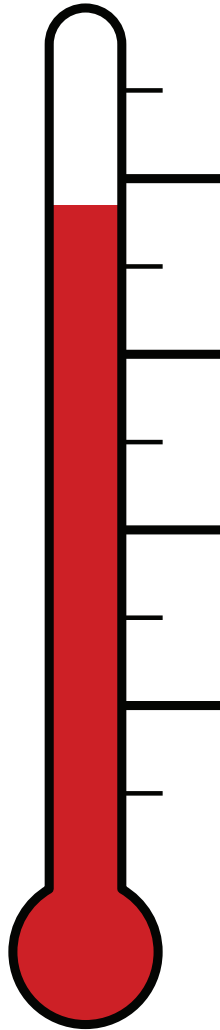


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The *Jesus For Everyone* podcast.

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.

www.renewedheartministries.com/Podcasts



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.

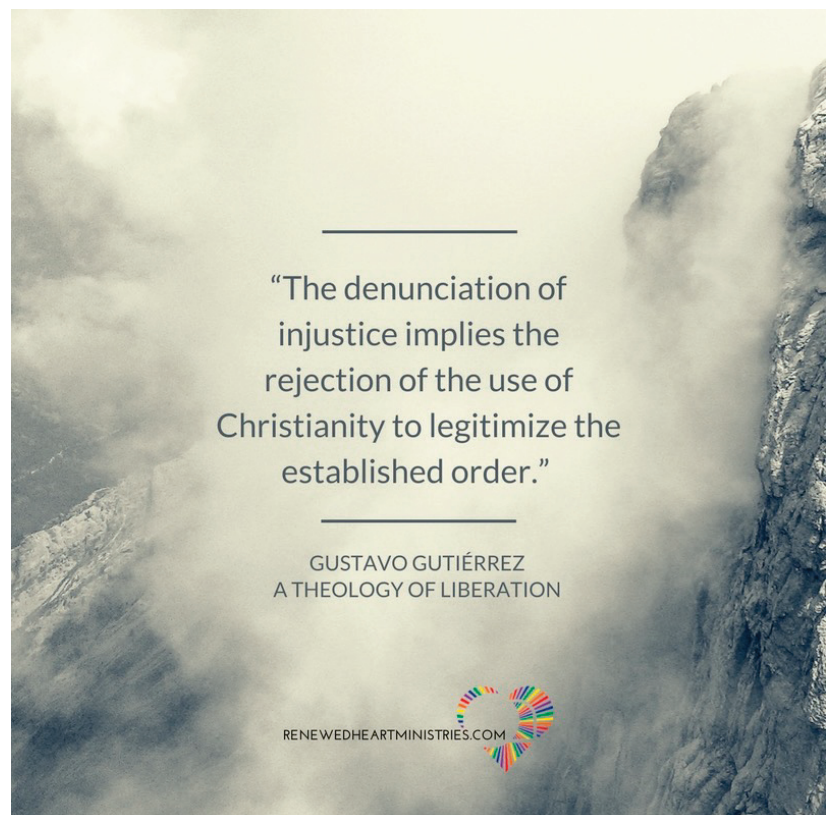
**2017 Annual Budget Goal:
\$190,000.00**

Monthly Budget Goal: \$15,834.00

**December's Contributions:
\$38,027.06**

**January–December Budget:
\$190,000.00**

**January–December Received:
\$154,025.02**



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 people who are 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

Womanist theology has much to offer Christianity today. Womanist perspectives are required if we are to answer Jesus' call to stand and work in solidarity alongside people who daily face intersecting oppressions. Womanist's critiques of the historical interpretations of Jesus' cross also have much to offer us today. The title for this month's featured presentation is ***Substitution and Divine Surrogacy*** by Herb Montgomery.

It is in the spirit of continuing the work of Luke 4:18-19 that this month we feature the third presentation from our series *Nonviolence and the Cross: Jesus' Execution from Four Liberation Perspectives*.

