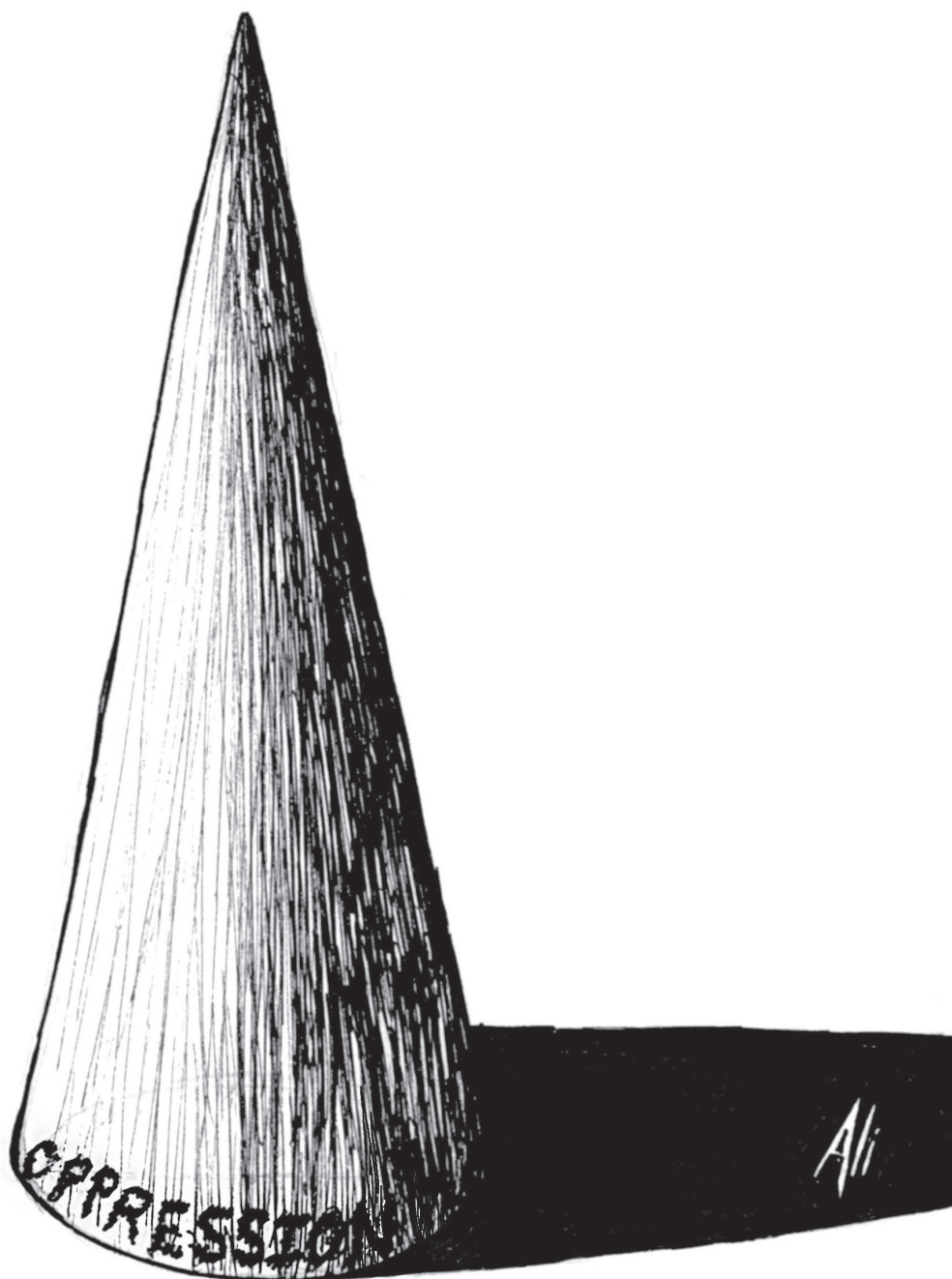




RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES

Awakenings

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



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Herb Montgomery

Pyramids, Circles and a Shared Table: Jesus' Vision for Human Community (Part 1)

by Herb Montgomery
May 3, 2018

Quotable Quotes

"Jesus has revealed that his messiahship means political confrontation with, not rehabilitation of, the imperial state. Those who wish to 'come after him' will have to identify themselves with his subversive program. The stated risk is that the disciple will face the test of loyalty under interrogation by state authorities."

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

"Politics answers the question of who gets what. So Jesus was not a religious figure as much as he was a political one. He did not fundamentally challenge his Jewish religion, at least not much more than his predecessor Hillel did. He did challenge the Jewish elites of his time, much more than Hillel did. As we've discussed before, Hillel made concessions, such as the prozbul, that centered the wealthy while endeavoring to take care of the poor. Jesus' teachings centered the poor and gave them the entire 'kingdom.' Jesus' teachings were political."

Luke 6:20–26: "Looking at his disciples, he said:

'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.

Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets."

The domination structure of Jesus' society was similar to ours today. Its structure was a combination of two two-dimensional shapes, a triangle and a circle.

Let's talk about the circle first.

Circles have an inside and an outside. Societies shaped in the form of a circle can have a strongly defined border that distinguishes between insiders and outsiders. They can also have certain

tests to decide who's in and who's out. Societal circles can also have people whose job it is to patrol the border to make sure no one from the outside is included and everyone knows when someone who was previously an insider no longer should be.

Control for circular social structures rests in the center of the circle. The more one adheres to the rules and identity of the circle, the closer one is to the center. The more someone varies, the more they are pushed to the margins of the circle. Even within the circle, among those who are insiders, some people will find themselves somewhere between the center of the circle and the edges.

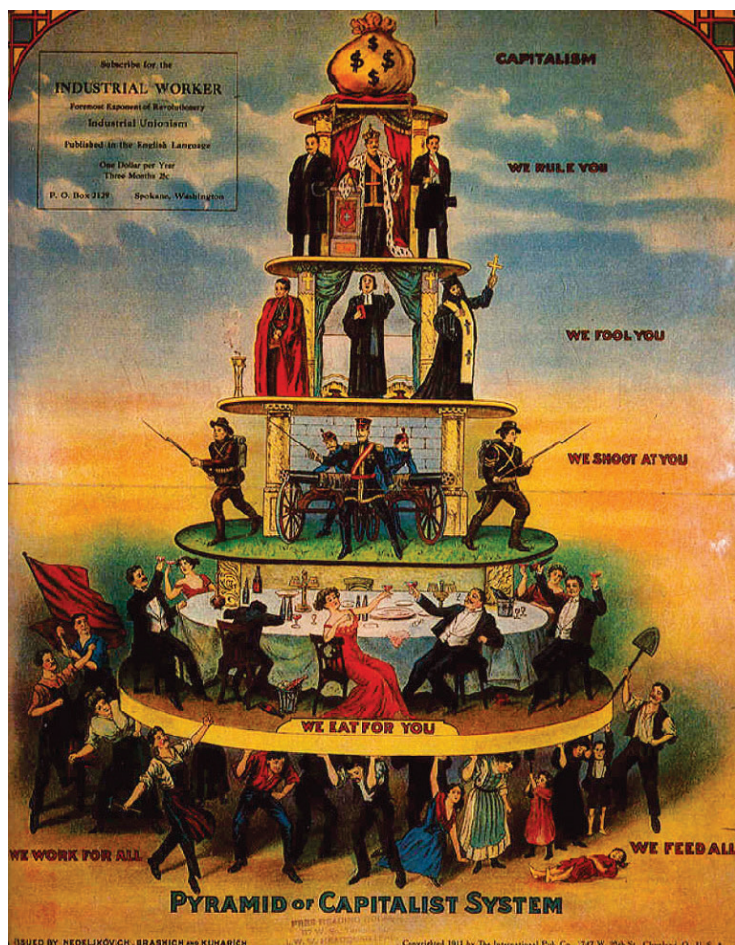
What about the triangle?

The circle and the triangle are both hierarchical structures. Where the hierarchy in the circle is from the center out toward the margins, triangular societies have a top comprised of a few elites and a base composed of the majority. In triangles that practice domination and control, the closer one is to the top, the more power, privilege, control and ability to dominate others one also possesses. Your social location in the triangle determines the level to which you experience these privileges, and you can find yourself closer to the top in some areas of your life but closer to the bottom of the triangle in others. The triangle typically is structured to benefit those at the top at the expense and exploitation of those at the bottom.

What happens when we combine these structures?

The combination of these ways of structuring human society is a cone. Within this cone, the closer one is to the center, the closer one also is to the top. The more one is marginalized, the more one finds themselves at the bottom of their society.

This hybrid of the circle and triangle shapes, the cone, is the shape of the society Jesus lived in the 1st Century. It's also the shape of many of our religious and civil societies today. In Luke's version of the Jesus story, Jesus states that people his society structure had made poor, hungry, or weep would be specifically "blessed" by his vision



for transforming human society. Jesus wasn't saying it's a blessing to be on the margins or at the bottom of society. He was saying that if you're on the margins, you who his gospel was especially for. As we discussed in *Directed Good News*, those on the margins in Jesus' society heard his gospel as good news.

Matthew's version of the Jesus story backs this up too. As we discussed last month in *A Preferential Option for the Vulnerable*, people the system had left too broken and impoverished in their spirit to keep trying, those whom the system had steam rolled over, those who hungered and thirsted for the world to be put right—these were the ones Jesus' vision for humanity was especially targeted at (see Matthew 5:3; Luke 1:80; Matthew 5:5 and 5:6.[1]) These were the ones who had been labeled as "sinners" by those at the center/top of their society, and who, because of that labelling, had been pushed to the edges and underside of their community. They were drawn to the hope for change in Jesus' gospel: "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law

"All the people saw this and began to mutter, 'He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.' But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.'" (Luke 19:7-8).

Jesus' shared table required those at the top/center of their societal cone to pay reparations to those whom they had exploited and pushed down. Tax collectors were economically part of the elite, but socially and politically within Jewish culture they were pushed to the outside and labeled as sinners because of their occupational cooperation with the Empire subjugating Judea and Galilee. They were privileged in certain areas of their lives but marginalized in others.

Jesus' shared table was also political.

When I use the term "political," I don't mean partisan. Politics means related to the *polis*, the members of a community. Whenever you have two or more people doing life together, you have politics. Politics answers the question of who gets what. So Jesus was not a religious figure

muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'" (Luke 15:1-2) The term "sinners" is not a universal term here. It is used pejoratively to push some to the margins and bottom of the cone. It was a label those in power used to other people.

Jesus' vision for human community, his shared table, specifically included those his cone-shaped society had excluded. It also had an economic component. Consider the reversal of economic exploitation and reparation found in Luke's story of an oppressor who embraced Jesus' teachings.

as much as he was a political one. He did not fundamentally challenge his Jewish religion, at least not much more than his predecessor Hillel did. He did challenge the Jewish elites of his time, much more than Hillel did. As we've discussed before, Hillel made concessions, such as the prozbul, that centered the wealthy while endeavoring to take care of the poor. Jesus' teachings centered the poor and gave them the entire "kingdom." Jesus' teachings were political.

Recently, while chatting with a friend, I bumped into an often repeated misconception of how things worked in Jesus' society. My friend claimed that Jesus never challenged the Roman civil government but only challenged the religious establishment of Judea. My friend went on to state that Jesus' followers should ignore the state and simply focus on bringing about religious reform within their own traditions. This is far from how Jewish society actually functioned in the 1st Century. Today our culture believes that church and state should be separated. But Jesus' society didn't have these distinctions. My friend claimed that Jesus was only focused on impacting the religious views of his community, especially as they related to the temple. But this simply isn't true, historically.

First, the temple was not solely religious, and it was not merely the center of the Jewish "church." The temple was the center of the Jewish state. The priests and the Sanhedrin were civil authorities, not only religious ones. In 1st Century Judea, there was not a separation between "church and state" or religious and civil duty as we understand either today. The Torah governed both, and they were not two distinct areas of life. They were just life.

The temple received taxes that were to be redistributed to the poor. That's why the temple functioned as a centralized banking system through which money lenders lent their monies. When the poor took over the temple in the 60s CE, the very first thing they did was to burn the debt ledgers of the temple, which until then recorded all loans. By storming the temple, they forced political and economic change: a year of Jubilee and the forgiveness of all debts.

Secondly, Jesus was a Jewish laborer, not a Roman citizen. He didn't have access to Rome to protest for change. But he did have access to his own state authority, the temple in Jerusalem. Note that even this distinction between the temple and Rome is not completely accurate either. Rome governed Judea *through* the temple. Rome determined who would be High Priest each year, and it was the temple that funneled collected tribute back to Rome. The Jewish aristocracy gained privilege and power by cooperating with Rome, and Rome received a degree of control over Judea by using the Jewish temple state in Jerusalem.

So when Jesus overturned tables in the temple-state, this was not only a religious protest; it was political protest as well. Jesus staged his demonstration in the temple with the money changers in

solidarity with and on behalf of the poor who were being economically exploited by the Temple-state. Jesus was indicting both Rome and his own state. This is why his execution in response to the temple demonstration was at the hand of Rome, on a Roman cross.

Ched Myers confirms this in his commentary on the book of Mark, and notes the deep implications for all who should choose to follow this political Jesus.

"Jesus has revealed that his messiahship means political confrontation with, not rehabilitation of, the imperial state. Those who wish to 'come after him' will have to identify themselves with his subversive program. The stated risk is that the disciple will face the test of loyalty under interrogation by state authorities." (*Binding the Strong Man: a political reading of Mark's story of Jesus*, p. 247)

When answering the question of who

should get what, Jesus stated his political views:

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and *give to the poor*. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is [in people not profit], there your heart will be also." (Luke 12:32-34)

The poor, the marginalized, the pushed down, these were those to whom Jesus' political views were good news. What he taught them was the gospel of hope. Gustavo Gutierrez accurately reminded us that this hope is more than a forward expectation of charity. This hope is for the creation of an entirely different social order:

"Love of neighbor is an essential component of Christian life. But as long as I apply that term only to the people who cross my path and come asking me for help, my world will remain pretty much the same. Individual almsgiving and social reformism is a type of love that never leaves its own front porch...On the other hand my world will change greatly if I go out to meet other people on their path and consider them as my neighbor, as the good Samaritan did...The gospel tells us that the poor are the supreme embodiment of our neighbor. It is this option that serves as the focus for a new way of being human and Christian in today's Latin America. But the existence of the poor...is not neutral on the political level or innocent of ethical implications. Poor people are by-products of the system under which we live and for which we are responsible... That is why the poverty of the poor is not a summons to alleviate their plight with acts of generosity, but rather a compelling obligation to fashion an entirely different social order." (Gustavo Gutiérrez; *Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith*, p. 14)

When we follow Jesus, we don't build a pyramid, a circle, or a cone. We build a shared table.

**"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.
Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh." (Luke 6:20-22)**

RHM's 2018 Annual Reading Course Book for June

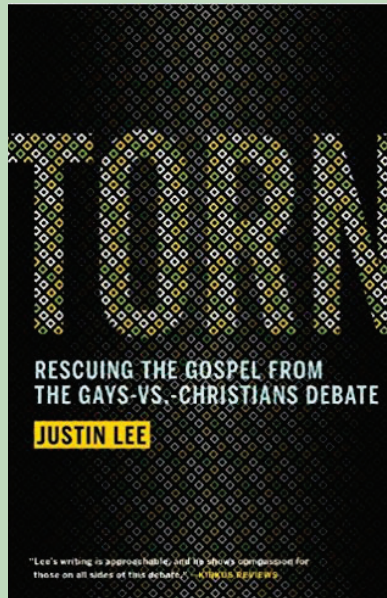
TORN: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate

by Justin Lee

I met Justin Lee last summer. I read his book back in 2016. It was a pivotal book for me at that place in my journey of being able to explain what I intuitively knew was the right thing to do. It's with great pleasure that we add Justin's book to RHM's 2018 reading course. It's our hope that it will be as impacting for you as it has been for many of us here at RHM.

From the publisher:

"As a teenager and young man, Justin Lee felt deeply torn. Nicknamed 'God Boy' by his peers, he knew that he was called to a life in the evangelical Christian ministry. But Lee harbored a secret: He also knew that he was gay. In this ground-breaking book, Lee recalls the events--his coming out to his parents, his experiences with the 'ex-gay' movement, and his in-depth study of the Bible--that led him, eventually, to self-acceptance.



But more than just a memoir, TORN provides insightful, practical guidance for all committed Christians who wonder how to relate to gay friends or family members—or who struggle with their own sexuality. Convinced that 'in a culture that sees gays and Christians as enemies, gay Christians are in a unique position to bring peace,' Lee demonstrates that people of faith on both sides of the debate can respect, learn from, and love one another."

Happy Reading!

HeartGroup Application

1. Go through the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and find five of Jesus' political views.
2. What difference does it make to see Jesus not simply as a religious figure but as a political figure as well? What difference does it make to see Jesus' temple protest not only as a religious protest but also as a political protest of those in power in response to their economic exploitation of the poor?
3. Is there a difference between working toward a politic of distributive justice where everyone is safe and has enough, and there is equity, protection and compassion, and Christians wanting to co-opt political power in the spirit of domination and subjugation to legislate their moral views? Discuss this with your HeartGroup.

I'm so glad you checked in with us this month.

Wherever you are, keep living in love, in survival, resistance, liberation, reparation, and transformation.

I love each you dearly.

Another world is possible. ■



Photo by Jon Tyson on Unsplash

Testimonies

You bring a unique and wonderful perspective to understanding Jesus in our world today. – **KP**

Thank you, Herb, for your messages on peace and justice. I cheer you on! Bless you for all you do. – **LG**

So grateful someone is verbalizing these things. Thanks for the teachings Herb. – **CD**

Schedule

JULY 11 - 14, 2018

Kinship Kampmeeting
Baltimore, MD, USA
304.520.0030



Jesus' Preferential Option for the Marginalized: LGBTQIA Identities and the Image of God

Asheville Adventist Forum
Asheville, NC, USA

by Herb Montgomery | May 19, 2018

Two weekends ago I had the privilege of revisiting Asheville, N.C. and sharing with the Adventist Forum there. The title of the presentation I gave was *Jesus' Preferential Option for the Marginalized: LGBTQIA Identities and the Image of God*.

We had a good turn out for the afternoon and the response was overwhelmingly positive. I always walk away from the Forum there in Asheville thankful for groups like this. We need more groups that are open, inclusive, and unthreatened by questions. The questions I choose to elicit in our afternoon session were questions relating to how cis-hetero, patriarchally defined normativity simply doesn't line up with what we experience as reality in our world. Once my presentation was finished, I turned off my recording device in respect for the kind of safe space we were seeking to create for people to able ask questions. The discussion which ensued was rich. This is one of the things I appreciate most about the Forum group in Asheville. This is a place where it is safe to ask questions that you might be afraid to ask in other environments.

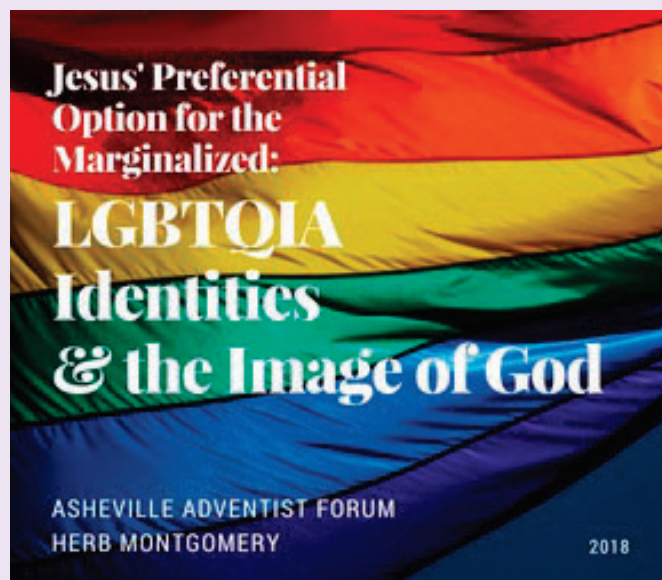
You can listen to the presentation portion of our time together at:

renewedheartministries.com/news/Jesus-Preferential-Option-for-the-Marginalized-LGBTQIA-Identities-and-the-Image-of-God

The morning before our afternoon session together, I had the privilege of baptizing a dear sister who also belongs to the LGBTQ community, raising a daughter with her wife, and because of which has been denied baptism by the pastors of her own faith tradition. These moments are deeply precious to me. I refuse to allow faith, faith traditions and religious rituals to be surrendered to religiously legitimized cis-heterosexism. Whomever it is being religiously labelled as "sinner" or "other" in order to justify their marginalization and/or exclusion by bigotry thinly veiled by a form of religiosity, these are those Jesus would have practiced a preferential option for. Though writing of the Black community in a culture of White exceptionalism, Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas' words also richly apply to LGBTQIA Identities in a culture steeped in cis-heterosexism:

"One of the fundamental tasks of the church is to bear the memory of Jesus. This means being in the world as he was. To do this requires entering into solidarity with the crucified class in any given context." (*Stand Your Ground; Black Bodies and the Justice of God*, p. 198).

Let me share a word about baptism. Baptism should not separate us from the rest of our human siblings. We are all connected. We are part of one another. We are each other's fate. In my opinion, Baptism simply expresses that a certain someone has seen intrinsic value in the teachings of the historical Jesus of Nazareth. Teachings they believe can still speak into our work



today of survival, resistance, liberation, reparation and transformation of our world into a safer, just, compassionate home for everyone. If someone wants to follow Jesus and they find meaning in the ritual of Baptism, it is my pleasure to assist them. I believe there isn't a contradiction between someone's LGBTQIA identity and their desire to be a follower of Jesus. Matter of fact, to date, I have yet to experience Jesus the way I do when I am among my LGBTQIA Christian friends.

Lastly, I want to say thank you to each of you who are supporting the work of RHM and helping us grow right now. It is not hyperbole to state how difficult it is to minister in opposition to religious bigotry and continue to refuse to surrender the Jesus story to those who would use the Christian faith to do damage to another person or community. Thank you for supporting us. We could not exist without. We are committed to being a source of love, light, liberation and healing in our world today. Thanks for partnering with us in this. Our work, as well as the work others who are engaging in similar endeavors, is so deeply needed right now.

Thank you.

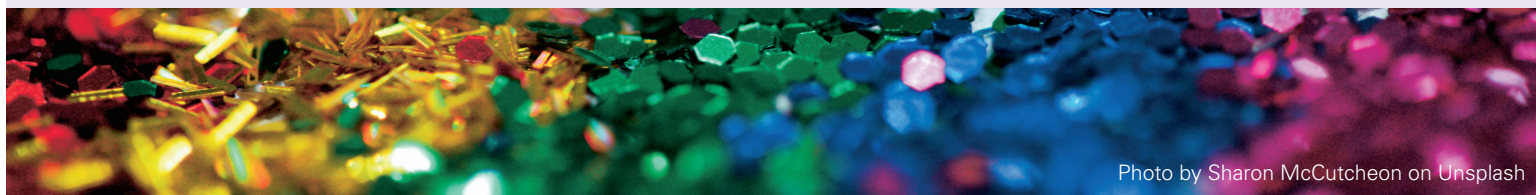


Photo by Sharon McCutcheon on Unsplash



The *Jesus For Everyone* podcast. New episodes every Friday!

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.

renewedheartministries.com/Podcasts



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The RHM team, in any given month, consists of a small team of 10–12 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 here, please consider becoming one of our Monthly Partners with a reoccurring donation or by making a one time gift.

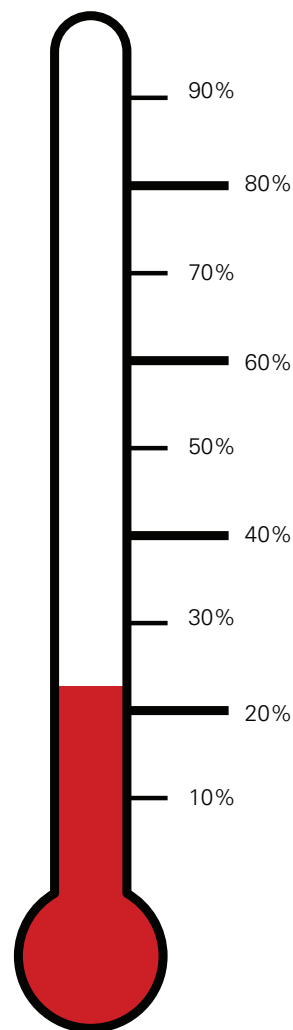
2018 Annual Budget Goal:
\$183,206.00

Monthly Budget Goal:
15,267.00

April's Contributions:
\$9,454.98

**January–April's
Budget Goal: \$61,068.00**

January–April's Contributions:
\$39,664.70



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

This month's featured presentation is from Herb's recent Australia Tour. Much misunderstanding, we believe, surrounds Jesus' teachings on nonviolent resistance. It was not a message of self sacrifice, but of self-affirming resistance for those whose self was already being sacrificed. It stood both in opposition to injustice and a refusal to let go of the humanity of those who were responsible for injustice. It

was not another historic promotion of the myth of redemptive suffering. It was a method of change—lasting change. Audre Lorde reminds us, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change." (*Sister Outsider*, p. 112). It's our hope that your heart will be renewed and your feet set to action as you listen to this month's featured presentation:

Self Affirming Nonviolence by Herb Montgomery.



"All injustice is a breach
with God."

Gustavo Gutiérrez
A Theology of Liberation
(P. 139)



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