



Awakenings

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



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

Phone: 304.520.0030

Email: info@renewedheartministries.com

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Herb Montgomery

Solidarity with the Crucified Community

by Herb Montgomery
June 1, 2018

Quotable Quotes

"It is true, if surprising, that those who accept historical crosses in the most radical way and make the least attempt to glorify them, those who least get used to them and least accept 'cheap' answers to the question of theodicy, are the ones who most seriously commit themselves to suppressing historical crosses."

— Jon Sobrino;
Jesus the Liberator

"When it's safe to stand alongside those being marginalized, to amplify their voices, to hand them the mic, you will no longer be needed."

"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'" Luke 15:1-2

"This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

In recent articles on pyramids, circles, and social structure, I mentioned that the term "sinner" was used in Jesus' society to push people to the edges and lower sections of their community.

Ched Myers uses the debate between Pharisees and Sadducees over whether grain was clean or impure to illustrate how this worked.

"According to Leviticus 11:38 if water is poured upon seed it becomes unclean. The passage, however, does not distinguish between seed planted in the soil and seed detached from the soil...In years of poor harvests, a frequent occurrence owing to poor soil, drought, warfare, locust plagues and poor methods of farming, this text was a source of dispute. Why? During such lean years, grain was imported from Egypt. But the Egyptians irrigated their fields (putting water on seed) so that their grain was suspect, perhaps even unclean. The Sadducees judged that such grain was unclean and anyone consuming it also became unclean. They were quite willing to pay skyrocketing prices commanded by scarce domestic grain because they could afford it...One senses economic advance being sanctioned, since the Sadducees were often the large landowners whose crops increased in value during such times. By contrast the Pharisees argued that the Pentateuchal ordinance applied only to seed detached from the soil; therefore...one could be observant and still purchase Egyptian grain." (in *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's*

Story of Jesus, p. 76)

I've covered this in *The Lost Coin* (<https://renewedheartministries.com/Esights/11-03-2017>) and in the presentation *Jesus' Preferential Option for the Marginalized* (<https://renewedheartministries.com/presentation/Jesus-Preferential-Option-for-the-Marginalized>).

People used the pejorative label of "sinner" to other another human being and to limit their voice in the community. The writers of the Jesus story go to great length to communicate that the ones the religious and political leaders of that time had labelled as "sinners" were the ones Jesus included and also centered as he called for a new social order that favored them. Here are just a few examples:

Matthew 9:13—"But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

[Remember that Jesus is using the labels of "righteous" and "sinner" as they were used in his society, not as many Christians use them today. Those labelled "righteous" by those in power threatened their political and economic structures the least and benefitted from them. The label "sinner" was used to silence the voices of those who would have protested either their own exploitation or another's.]

Matthew 11:19—"The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by her deeds."

Mark 2:15-16—"While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?'"

Luke 5:30—"But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?'"



Photo by David Paschke on Unsplash

Luke 19:7—"All the people saw this and began to mutter, 'He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.'"

The people Jesus ate with weren't sinners ontologically; they were sinners politically, economically, and socially. In this context, therefore, it's not accurate to respond, "Well, we are all sinners." We must recognize how the label of sinner was used against some people. When particular human beings are being targeted and marginalized, it's not enough to call for universal grace. Instead we ought to call for justice. A breach in relationship happens when one person marginalizes another and labels them sinner. A person may be a sinner, but they are labelled that way to religiously legitimate injustice committed against them. Gustavo Gutiérrez reminds us, "All injustice is a breach with God" (in *A Theology of Liberation*, p.139). It's a breach with God because it is a breach with our fellow human beings.

In May's recommended reading book for RHM, Kelly Brown Douglas' *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*, Douglas reminds us:

"In Jesus' first-century world, crucifixion was the brutal tool of social-political power. It was reserved for slaves, enemy soldiers, and those held in the highest contempt and lowest regard in society. To be crucified was, for the most part, an indication of how worthless and devalued an individual was in the eyes of established power. At the same time, it indicated how much of a threat that person was believed to pose.

Crucifixion was reserved for those who threatened the "peace" of the day. It was a torturous death that was also meant to send a message: disrupt the Roman order in any way, this too will happen to you. As there is a lynched class of people, there was, without doubt, a crucified class of people. The crucified class in the first-century Roman world was the same as the lynched class today. It consisted of those who were castigated and demonized as well as those who defied the status quo. Crucifixion was a stand-your-ground type of punishment for the treasonous offense of violating the rule of Roman "law and order.

...That Jesus was crucified affirms his absolute identification with the Trayvons, the Jordans, the Renishas, the Jonathans, and all the other victims of the stand-your-ground-culture war. Jesus' identification with the lynched/crucified class is not accidental. It is intentional. It did not begin with his death on the cross. In fact, that Jesus was crucified signals his prior bond with the "crucified class" of his day. (p. 171).

Jesus did not stand in solidarity with the marginalized "crucified class" in secret. He did not do so diplomatically or with an eye toward political expediency. He did so openly, publicly, and transparently. We see this in the following story in Mark's gospel:

Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand,

"Stand up in front of everyone." Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus. (Mark 3:1-5)

Consider that phrase, "Stand up in front of everyone." Jesus knew that what he was teaching and whom he was standing with was going to cost him. He could have met the man at the back of the synagogue, or pulled him into a private room where he could "behind the scenes" engage the work of this liberation. But no, Jesus met and healed him right there, in front of everyone, with intention.

I read this story often when I'm tempted to value protecting my own privilege over the people who today need others to speak alongside them. When it's safe to stand alongside those being marginalized, to amplify their voices, to hand them the mic, I will no longer be needed. To quote the 1980s synth-pop classic "Take On Me" by A-ha, "It's not better to be safe than sorry."

Does open solidarity with those being marginalized come with a cost? You bet it does. According to the story in Mark, the immediate push back for Jesus' public witness to this man's liberation was that the religious and political leaders "went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus." And this is only in Mark's third chapter. The leaders are threatened by Jesus' public and transparent inclusion of those they excluded from the very beginning of Mark's story.

All of this raises the question: who are we known to stand in solidarity with? The status quo? Or those beloved people who daily face oppression, exploitation, or marginalization within our status quo?

"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners

and eats with them.'" (Luke 15:1-2)

HeartGroup Application

In May, on the same day the U.S. moved its embassy to Jerusalem, over 60 nonviolent Palestinian protestors including children in Gaza were murdered by Israeli snipers. (*Gaza begins to bury its dead after deadliest day in years*; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-44116340>)

Here are some things you and your HeartGroup can do:

1. Participate in protests in your area in response to what is taking place in Gaza. Voice your objection publicly.
2. Use your social media platform to bring awareness to what is happening.
3. Contact your federal, state and local representatives. Write a letter, an email, or better yet, call their office.
4. Donate to charities. You will need to do your own due diligence and research finding the right charity. Find a charity that has people with feet on the ground who can evidence that your gift will reach the people who need it. One charity that does meet these criteria is UNWRA.
5. Talk to your family and friends. Talk to your family and friends to raise awareness and have them join you in the above actions.
6. Support peace-building initiatives. Support Muslim and Jewish organizations that are working to bring peace while practicing a preferential option for the vulnerable. Standing against the violence in Gaza is about standing up against oppression, colonization, discrimination, and inequity.

Thanks for checking in with us this month. Wherever you are, keep living in love. Keep living in resistance, survival, liberation, reparation, and transformation.

Another world is possible. I love each you dearly. I'll see you next month. ■

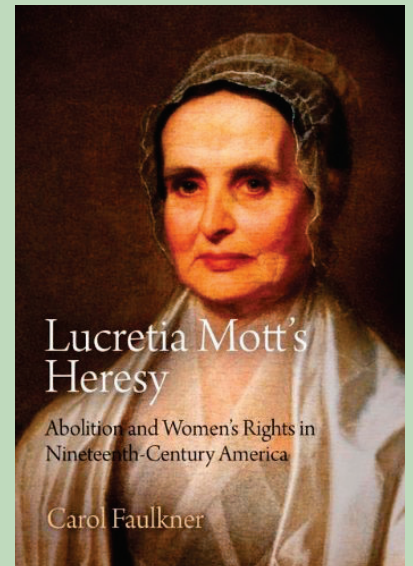
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RHM's 2018 Annual Reading Course Book for July

***Lucretia Mott's Heresy:
Abolition and Women's Rights in
Nineteenth-Century America***

by Carol Faulkner

"Lucretia Coffin Mott was one of the most famous and controversial women in nineteenth-century America. Now overshadowed by abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison and feminists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Mott was viewed in her time as a dominant figure in the dual struggles for racial and sexual equality. History has often depicted her as a gentle Quaker lady and a mother figure, but her outspoken challenges to authority riled ministers, journalists, politicians, urban mobs, and her fellow Quakers. In the first biography of Mott in a generation, historian Carol Faulkner reveals the motivations of this radical egalitarian from Nantucket. Mott's deep faith and ties to the Society of Friends do not fully explain her activism—her roots in post-Revolutionary New England also shaped her views on slavery, patriarchy, and the church, as well as her expansive interests in peace, temperance, prison reform, religious freedom, and Native American rights. While Mott was known as the



"moving spirit" of the first women's rights convention at Seneca Falls, her commitment to women's rights never trumped her support for abolition or racial equality. She envisioned women's rights not as a new and separate movement but rather as an extension of the universal principles of liberty and equality. Mott was among the first white Americans to call for an immediate end to slavery. Her long-term collaboration with white and black women in the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society was remarkable by any standards. Lucretia Mott's Heresy reintroduces readers to an amazing woman whose work and ideas inspired the transformation of American society."



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Dear friends,

I wanted to share a new children's book project that we at RHM are very excited about. It's called *Holy Troublemakers & Unconventional Saints*, an illustrated storybook with profiles and portraits of 50 people of diverse faiths who have worked for more love and justice in their corner of the world.



The book is being written by Daneen Akers, one of the producers and directors of the *Seventh-Gay Adventists* (sgamovie.com), *Enough Room at the Table* (sgamovie.com/enough-room/), and *Outspoken* (sgamovie.com/outspoken) documentary films. She says she's been complaining for years about the lack of good faith-based books for children.

"Most faith-based children's books come from a very fundamentalist or morally simplistic perspective. I just can't read those books to my children. I've decided to write a book about faith heroes I want my children to grow up inspired by. I want my children to know that faith isn't all bad, and religious people can and do choose to do good, often motivated by a vision of a loving, just, and compassionate Divine."

Daneen is passionate about her girls learning about people of diverse

faith backgrounds who have been troublemakers for the higher good, people like the ones Bayard Rustin called for when he said: "We need, in every community, a group of angelic troublemakers." These are the stories she believes we need more than ever right now inspiring our kids, inspiring us all.

The book will emphasize the stories of women, LGBTQ people, people of color, indigenous people, and others too often excluded from religious narratives. It will be illustrated by a variety of artists with profiles that are 3-6 pages long and is aimed at the 8-12 age group.

Holy Troublemakers & Unconventional Saints will feature past and present people of faith like Bayard Rustin, the lifelong Quaker and Civil Rights hero we all should know about but often don't because he was also gay at a time when that was considered a major liability, so he had to stay in the background.



Molkara, a devout Muslim from Iran who was a transgender woman and literally walked into Ayatollah Khomeini's office one day in 1987 to ask for permission to live openly



Others include Rabbi Regina Jonas, the first woman ordained as a rabbi anywhere in the world in 1935 in Berlin, Germany, and Maryam



as a trans woman. She got permission after sharing her story (and after his guards beat her up on her way in). To this day Iran has more rights for transgender people than other similar countries thanks to Maryam's pioneering work.

Present day holy troublemakers and unconventional saints include people like Cindy Wang Brandt, a gentle parenting advocate who helps formerly



fundamentalist parents know there are other ways to parent well. She also just got fired from her job at an evangelical college in Taiwan for her outspoken advocacy

for LGBT rights. The final list of holy troublemakers to feature will be decided on with the input of project backers.

The book's vision has resonated so far and just hit 50% of funding in the first 10 days. You can learn more about the book, see the incredible portraits that have already been completed, and back the project at holyytroublemakers.com/kickstarter.

This is something I can get behind. And you can, too!

Holy Troublemakers & Unconventional Saints is exactly the kind of book I wish Crystal and I would have been able to read to our children from day one. Helping children understand how to channel progressive faiths into the work of making our world a safe, compassionate, just home for us all; celebrating our differences as the varied, diverse and beautiful image of God that all of us are; inspiring them to become holy troublemakers themselves as they encounter injustice in our world, that is what these stories awaken. I can think of no other children's book I have ever enjoyed sharing with my own children so much. The stories resonate so deeply. And the discussions we have after each person featured (so far) have been of immeasurable worth. I cannot say enough good things about this children's book. In fact, it's a book for everyone regardless of the reader's age. I give *Holy Troublemakers & Unconventional Saints* my highest praise and recommendation. It is a book for every child's night stand. Another world is possible and this book will hold a definite place in the memory of our children in moving us closer toward it.

This is the storybook we've needed.

Testimony

I can't believe how hard it was to summarize how valuable RHM has been to me over the years! We have traveled quite a road together in that time. But, I think I'm satisfied that the following statements capture much of the essence of RHM's worth to me:

RHM has taught me it is more than okay to question everything I "knew" about God and that truth can not only hold up under scrutiny but even be more richly revealed by the process.

RHM has introduced me to many great teachers and fellow Jesus followers and made me realize that although I've been shedding my old religious skin, I'm not alone in who I am becoming by following the teachings of Jesus.

RHM simultaneously distills such depth and breadth of information from contemporary and first-century Christians and challenges me to dig deep into that material to come to my own conclusions that I feel as if I've been enrolled in Seminary!

RHM showed me God's love for ALL as I had never understood it, which allowed me to finally forgive a family member for a 30-year hurt, bringing peace, healing, reconciliation and a witness to the true power of love to my entire extended family.

RHM in general, and Herb Montgomery specifically, has been a sounding board, confidante, mentor, cheerleader, role model, ally, and friend to me for six years. I'm so thankful!

Or, to boil it down; What has RHM meant to me? EVERYTHING! – CW



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

“When phobia starts to build up in the psyche of thinking humanity against a part of its own kind, there is nothing more primordial and gruesome than that, especially when we are talking about a species that is supposedly the most intelligent one on Earth. Phobias recorded in DSM do not make a person lesser human, but Islamophobia does indeed define whether a person is really a thinking and sentient sapiens or an ignorant caveman.”

Abhijit Naskar
The Islamophobic
Civilization:
Voyage of Acceptance

#Islamophobia

RENEWEDHEARTMINISTRIES.COM

Schedule

JULY 11 - 14, 2018

Kinship Kampmeeting
Baltimore, MD, USA
304.520.0030



Quotable Quotes

"We seem to have picked up the idea that holiness is a trance-like sense of peace and well-being in relation to those all around, an experience of floating on a magic carpet of tranquility. Wherever that picture of holiness came from, it certainly wasn't Mark's Gospel. Jesus is constantly having heated debates with everyone who held Israel in check. The one thing everyone seems to agree on today is that there's plenty wrong with the world. There are only two responses to this—either go and put it right yourself, or, if you can't, make life pretty uncomfortable for those who can until they do. When we take stock of our relationship with the powerful, we ask ourselves, 'Does the shape of my life reflect my longing to see God set people free, and do I challenge those who keep others in slavery?'"

— Sam Wells;

Introduction to *Binding the Strong Man: a political reading of Mark's story of Jesus* by Ched Myers

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.

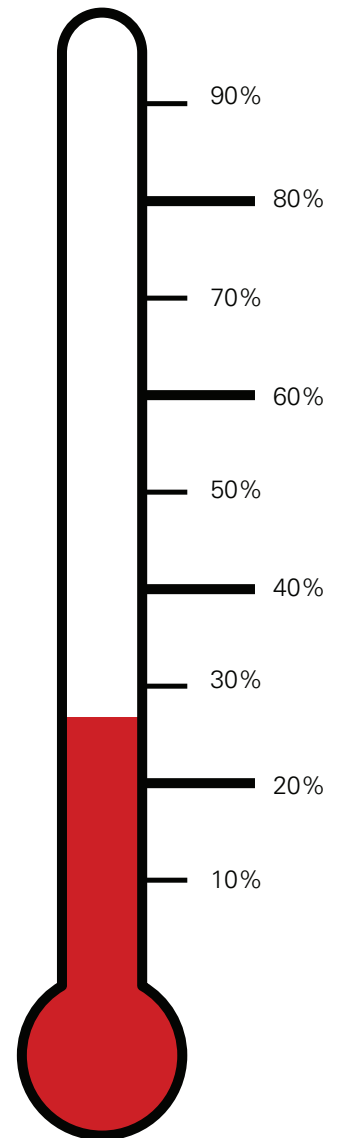
2018 Annual Budget Goal:
\$183,206.00

**January–April's
Budget Goal:**
\$76,335.00

**January–April's
Contributions Received:**
\$48,826.48

Monthly Budget Goal:
15,267.00

April's Contributions:
\$9,161.78



To support the work of RHM and help us grow, go to renewedheartministries.com and click "donate."



Photo by Mohamed Nohassi on Unsplash

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

July's featured presentation considers the various elements of Jesus' teachings that cast a vision for the world Jesus taught us was possible. Jesus' teachings can still speak great wisdom into our work today of making our world a safer, just, compassionate home for all. These teachings lift up the values of survival, resistance, liberation, reparation and transformation. 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:



Where Do We Go From Here? by Herb Montgomery.

