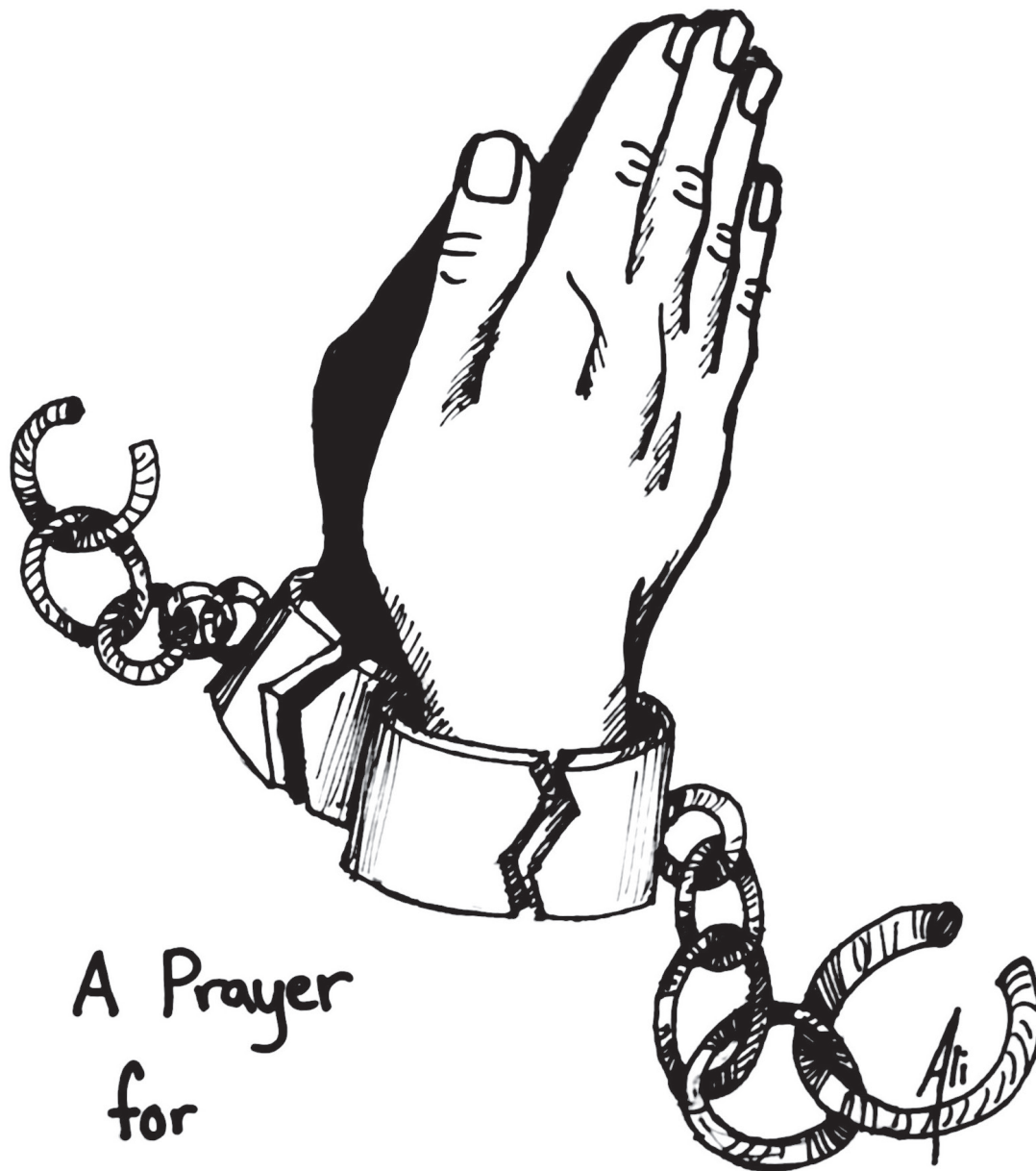




RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES

αwakenings

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



A Prayer
for
Liberation

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Featured Presentation

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Renewed Heart Ministries

Follow Herb!



@HerbMontgomery



Herb Montgomery



“This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’” (Matthew 6:9-13)

This week, we begin a series of articles on Jesus’ revolutionary prayer in Matthew’s gospel, the prayer we label today as “the Lord’s prayer.” This prayer frames an outline we can use to consider the themes in Jesus’ teachings in Matthew’s gospel. There’s much in it that I believe speaks to our work today of survival, resistance, liberation, reparation, and transformation.

The outline of this prayer is:

Our Father in Heaven:

Be hallowed Your Name

Be come Your Kingdom

Be done Your Will

As in Heaven, so on Earth:

Daily Bread

Debt Cancellation

Deliverance from temptation to evil

Those are the themes that we’ll be looking at. Now, let’s dive right in.

Our Father in Heaven

Historically, the exclusive image of God as “Father” has borne bad fruit for those who are neither male nor fathers. Some in the dominant social position have weaponized it against those whose differences are “Othered” and then dominated, exploited, and destroyed them. One example aptly laid out by Grace Ji-Sun Kim is how these images of God have been used against Asian

American women. In her book *Embracing the Other: The Transformative Spirit of Love*, she writes:

“As a poor Jewish peasant teacher from Nazareth, Jesus was marginalized and stood in solidarity with the marginalized throughout the Roman Empire. Jesus’ incarnate life, kingdom teaching, and crucifixion on a Roman cross unveil God as a lover of justice, peace, and liberation.

While Jesus was a revolutionary, when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, Jesus becomes reimagined as a supporter of empire. Classical theism in the West often emphasizes God as an Almighty Father. This patriarchal concept of God has often been wielded in destructive ways throughout the history of Western Christianity. Through European colonization, too often guided by a patriarchal image of God, indigenous cultures have been dominated and destroyed, Africans have been enslaved, Asians exploited, women have been abused, and the poor have been economically exploited. The male God image mediated through the Almighty Father has often had negative conscious and unconscious effects on women, especially women of color. God the Al-mighty Father has often been a theological tool used by white men of

European descent to subjugate woman and people of color.” (p. 116)

This title for God, “Almighty Father,” has proven extremely vulnerable to being coopted by sexism, racism, colonialism, imperialism, and binary heterosexism for the abuse of those who, though not male and not fathers, are nonetheless bearers of the image of the Divine. For many, the phrase “Our Father” in such a transformative prayer as this is not an appropriate place to begin but a trigger of pain and suffering.

But for those also dedicated to contemplating and following the teachings of Jesus, this first portion of this prayer presents no small challenge. After all, Jesus was Jewish, and Jewish tradition encourages practicing care with picturing God in one’s mind’s eye. In the Torah we read, Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” (Exodus 3:13-14)

This cryptic description of the Divine within the Hebrew sacred scriptures provides for a universality in bearing the image of the Divine. “I am who I am” is left cryptically defined. The question could be asked, “Who are you?” We must practice caution against answering the question definitely, for any word that comes next will undoubtedly limit the Divine.

There is a rich diversity within the human race. And to believe that all of humanity, every member of the human family, all of our human siblings, are made in the image of God speaks to the rich complexity of God, too (See Genesis 1:26). Our concept of the Divine must become more expansive and inclusive. It is okay to speak of God as male and as female. It’s okay to speak of God as nonbinary and ungendered, too! God is not just White, but also Black, Asian, and more. God has traditionally been defined within the imagery of heteropatriarchy. We must be careful to allow every person to see themselves reflected in an expansive image of the Divine because “in the image of God has God made humankind.” (Genesis 9:6). And to the degree we exclude anyone from God’s

image today, history shows we will exterminate them tomorrow.

There are many ways to respond to this in prayer. Some of those who understand and practice this way of addressing the Divine in prayer use “Mother-Father God” or “Paternal God.” I’ve prayed, “Dearest Heart at the Center of the Universe.” I’ve also heard “Source of Light and Love,” “God of all nations,” “God of all peoples,” “Faithful One,” “Source of Wisdom,” or “Source of Goodness, Grace, Mercy and Justice.” On June 22, 2017, Rev. Kevin Kitrell Ross, addressed his prayer in the U.S. House of Representatives to the “Loving Presence,” and concluded with “In the name of a love supreme we pray.”

The Jewish tradition seems to encourage not limiting God with our images of Divinity:

“You saw no form of any kind the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman, or like any animal on earth or any bird that flies in the air, or like any creature that moves along the ground or any fish in the waters below.” (Deuteronomy 4:15-18)

I will admit that the authors’ intent in this passage was most likely to discourage people from using creation as any kind of referent at all, but I would also argue that this passage, therefore, leaves our image of the Divine as cryptic which also allows for an expansive and inclusive imaging that embraces the rich diversity of everyone. Jesus’ Jewish tradition would have given him sufficient grounds to have addressed his prayer in much more inclusive ways.

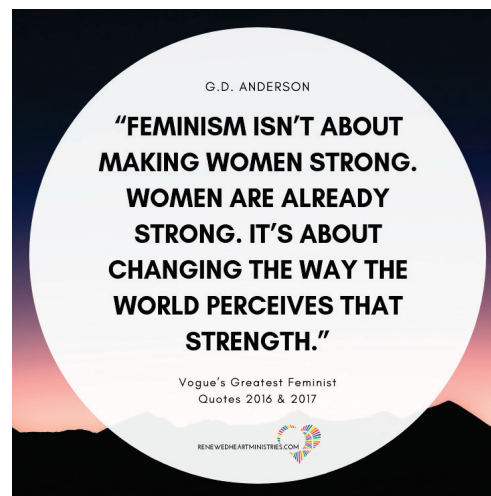
So why does this prayer in Matthew begin with “Father”?

We cannot ignore the reality that, like many of the cultures around it, Jesus’ culture was deeply patriarchal. Householders were almost exclusively men. Householders were “fathers.” In rare exceptions, widowed women might become householders.

But there are some hints of another worldview in the rest of the prayer. It is a deeply economic prayer. Of all the things Jesus could teach his followers to pray for,

he teaches them here to pray for enough bread for today, for all indebtedness to be forgiven in Jubilee fashion, and for liberation from evil as a violation from Israel’s covenant with YHWH. I believe, given the other content of this prayer, that deliverance from temptation to evil could have been a direct reference to the way the rich were exploiting the poor in violation of the economic teachings of the Torah.

“However, there need be no poor people among you, for in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, if only you fully obey the LORD your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today.” (Deuteronomy 15:4-5)



But back to our quest for understanding this prayer’s address, “Our Father.” Given that this prayer is grounded in economic realities, and in the Jewish patriarchal family the father was the householder, the one responsible for ensuring no one in the family had too much while others didn’t have enough, John Dominic Crossan offers this fitting and possible explanation:

“[The prayer’s] vision derives from the common experience of a well-run home, household, or family farm. If you walked into one, how would you judge the householder? Are the fields well tended? Are the animals properly provisioned? Are the buildings adequately maintained? Are the children and dependents well fed, clothed, and sheltered? Are the sick given special care? Are responsibilities and returns apportioned fairly? Do all have enough? Especially that: Do all have enough? Or, to the contrary, do some have far too little while others have far too much?

“It is that vision of the well-run household, of the home fairly, equitably, and justly administered, that the biblical tradition applies to God. God is the Householder of the world house, and all those preceding questions must be repeated on a global and cosmic scale. Do all God’s children have enough? If not—and the biblical answer is “not”—how must things change here below so that all God’s people have a fair, equitable, and just proportion of God’s world? The Lord’s Prayer proclaims that necessary change as both revolutionary manifesto and hymn of hope. Do not, by the way, let anyone tell you that is Liberalism, Socialism, or Communism. It is—if you need an -ism—Godism, Householdism or, best of all, Enoughism. We sometimes name that biblical vision of God’s World-Household as Egalitarianism but, actually, Enoughism would be a more accurate description.” (John Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer: Rediscovering the Revolutionary Message of the Lord’s Prayer*, p. 3).

Given the cultural context as well as the content of the rest of the prayer, it could be synonymous to pray, “Our Householder in Heaven.” And Jesus’ point is that the will of the World Householder is that everyone have enough. Within a Jewish worldview, the responsibility for carrying out that will has been delegated to humans. We have to ask ourselves what kind of world have we made with this responsibility. Jesus is calling for a community of people (the Kingdom) to come into being where the distributively just will of the World Householder is actually carried out. This is a prayer, within the contradiction of a patriarchal culture, that calls for an economic, distributive justice. How this prayer begins may still remain deeply problematic for many. But the prayer still offers us much. There is much to reclaim and to renew our hearts as we continue to work today toward a world that is safe, distributively just, and compassionate for everyone.

The God who Jesus pictured for his listeners was a God who causes the sun and rain to fall on all indiscriminately. So if someone is going without, we have to look for the obstruction. It’s being “sent” to all, so who and what are preventing what we need for thriving from reaching all? As is often been stated, there is

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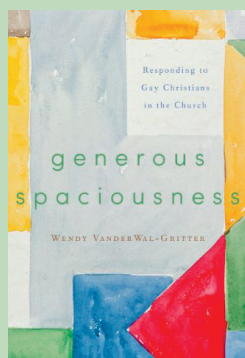
RHM's 2018 Annual Reading Course Book for October

Generous Spaciousness: Responding to Gay Christians in the Church by Wendy VanderWal-Gritter

"Committed Christians may respond differently to gay and lesbian Christians. How can we engage those with whom we might disagree and navigate our journey together in a way that nurtures unity, hospitality, humility, and justice?"

Through her extensive experience in ministering to gay and lesbian Christians, Wendy VanderWal-Gritter has come to believe we need a new paradigm for how the church engages those in the sexual minority. She encourages generous spaciousness, a hope-filled, relational way forward for those in turmoil regarding a response to gay and lesbian Christians. This book offers a framework for discussing diversity in a gracious way, showing that the church can be a place that welcomes a variety of perspectives on the complex matter of human sexuality. It also offers practical advice for implementing generous spaciousness in churches and organizations."

(You don't have to order this book through amazon.com, but if you do, please consider using Amazon Smile (smile.amazon.com) and selecting Renewed Heart Ministries as your designated charity for a portion of your purchase to be donated to RHM at no additional cost to you.)



God the Father... cont'd from page 3

enough each day for every person's need, but not for every person's greed. In teaching this, Jesus was accessing his Jewish tradition:

"The poor and the oppressor have this in common: The LORD gives sight to the eyes of both." (Proverbs 29:13)

"Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread." (Proverbs 30:8)

This distributive justice spoken of by Jesus also has its roots in the way the Hebrew prophets spoke truth to power.

"I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Amos 5:21-24)

Crossan again notes, "the primary meaning of 'justice' is not retributive, but distributive. To be just means to distribute everything fairly. The primary meaning of

'justice' is equitable distribution" (Ibid., p. 2). This was the great Hebrew hope of a distributive justice whose fruit would be peace.

"Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.

He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice [distributive] and righteousness." (Isaiah 9:7)

"The fruit of that righteousness [distributive] will be peace; its effect will be quietness and confidence forever." (Isaiah 32:17)

Amos names the error of prioritizing religious ritual over concern for justice, especially justice for the vulnerable. Two weeks ago now, the same group of evangelicals that produced *The Nashville Statement* last year put out another ugly statement entitled *The Statement on Social Justice and the Gospel*. I'm not going to link to it. It reveals the drafters' and signers' gross ignorance of both the gospel and social justice. How many times do we see Christians practicing extreme care for their religiosity, while either being totally ignorant of or even opposing

people's cry for justice? Gustavo Gutiérrez reminds us, "The kingdom and social injustice are incompatible" (*A Theology of Liberation, 15th Anniversary Edition*, p. 97). And if Amos were alive this week, he might have said, "I hate, I despise your endless religious statements that make you feel pious, protecting your phobias about those whose experiences in life are so different than your own. Away with your worthless statement and drafted expressions of bigotry. Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!"

Jesus begins his prayer in a way that would have been heard and understood by his original audience. He paints a picture of the human family where everyone has enough to not only survive, but also thrive.

I believe prayer, meditation, contemplation, and practices like these shape those who practice them. Over the next few weeks as we continue to contemplate this famous prayer, my hope is that it will shape us, too, into people who work to transform our world into a safe, compassionate home for all, regardless of race, gender, religion, culture, ethnicity, education, economic status, sexuality, gender identity and expression, ability, or whatever—a safe home for all, where everyone has enough.

"This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'" (Matthew 6:9-13)

To read all the entries for this series go to: renewedheartministries.com/Esights/09-21-2018

Excerpt:

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First Fridays

Kingsway House
Philadelphia, PA, USA
September 7, 2018

This past weekend I had the pleasure of speaking at the inauguration vespers of a new faith community in the Chestnut Hill area in Philadelphia. As their name states, this community will be gathering together on the first Friday of every month.

What made this group so special for me is the need that was behind the creation of this community. Those who are pioneering this group are a group of LGBTQ Christians and straight, cisgender allies who have recently been shut out of their previous faith communities because of either their own identity or their solidarity with those being marginalized in response to their identity. These are beautiful people who deeply desire to follow Jesus even in spite of how they have been treated by their previous churches.

One of the attendees shared with me an experience of their interaction with the leadership of their previous church, "It's as if they [the leadership of the congregation they were previously a part of] don't even care about how their choices and their actions are affecting those who are being hurt by all of this. It's as if they want to purify their ranks, according to their own interpretation of what purity is, and they don't care if their numbers shrink or who gets hurt in the process."

This sadly happens all too often. Compassion is sacrificed. Listening to the experiences of the vulnerable takes a back seat to fidelity to a community's definition of purity. Over the weekend I was repeatedly reminded of the following statements by the late Marcus Borg in his exceptional volume, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*: "The challenge is singled at the outset by the imitatio dei [imitation of God] of which Jesus speaks. It is striking that 'Be compassionate as God is compassionate' so closely echoes 'Be holy as God is holy,' even as it makes a radical substitution. The



close parallel suggests that Jesus deliberately replaced the core value of purity with compassion. Compassion, not holiness, is the dominant quality of God, and is therefore to be the ethos of the community that mirrors God... There is something boundary shattering about the imitatio dei that stood at the center of Jesus' message and activity. 'Be compassionate as God is compassionate.' Whereas purity divides and excludes, compassion unites and includes. For Jesus, compassion had a radical sociopolitical meaning. In his teaching and table fellowship, and in the shape of his movement, the purity system was subverted and an alternative social vision affirmed. The politics of purity was replaced by a politics of compassion." (Marcus J. Borg; *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*. p. 56-58)

We need more communities like the one I just witnessed in Philadelphia. We need communities that practice a preferential option for the vulnerable that are rooted in compassion and born out of experiences that inform and shape the kind of people who create safe, inclusive communities.

I want to thank First Fridays for inviting me to share this first evening alongside them. The title of the presentation I gave was Another World is Possible. In this presentation I focused on Jesus' vision for human community. We specifically looked at what communities that are shaped by Jesus' teachings will be characterized by. The three areas we chose to look at were spiritually, relationally, and the concrete, material ways we can take care of and empower each other to thrive collectively as

we do life together. I believe that it is out of the soil of communities like these that we can grow a world that, on a larger scale, becomes a safer, more compassionate, and just home for everyone. I look forward to what lies ahead for this group named First Fridays. I'm honored and humbled to have been able to participate in its beginning.

And to each of you who support our work here at RHM, thank you. Supporting and helping communities who are rediscovering and desiring to follow Jesus' inclusive shared table more deeply are the type of communities we are proud to be a part of birthing. Our work simply could not continue without your generous partnership and support, and so I want to thank you, too!

As I shared in last week's eSight/podcast, this is the time of year when Renewed Heart Ministries needs your support the most in order to meet our modest yearly budget. If you have been blessed by our work, please consider making a one time gift or becoming one of our monthly contributors. Any amount is deeply appreciated.

You can make a contribution to RHM online at: renewedheartministries.com and click "donate."

Or you can mail your support to:
Renewed Heart Ministries
PO Box 1211
Lewisburg, WV 24901

Thank you so much for your support.

A Shared Table: A Fundraiser for RHM

A few years ago now, Crystal and I took up pottery as a way to spend time together in the midst of a lot of traveling that I was doing at the time. As time went on, a United Way branch here in Lewisburg put out a call to all potters in our area to donate bowls for a local fundraiser event they were hosting for one evening in the fall that they called *Empty Bowls*. Crystal and I made fifty bowls that year for them and have continued to do so each year.

Last year, when we were posting some pictures of these bowls on social media, a friend of Renewed Heart Ministries chimed in, "That would be a great idea for Renewed Heart Ministries, too! It's a perfect representation of Jesus' shared table philosophy of doing life together." And I thought, yes! It actually is! And it's versatile. If someone wanted to actually use it, they by all means could. Each time you eat from this bowl or use it as a serving dish, you can be reminded of Jesus' shared table, mutual aid, and philosophy of resource sharing as a means of restructuring our communities and healing the hurts in our world. You can also place it on your coffee table or desk at work as a conversation starter. When asked about it you can share with them about the Shared Table philosophy, and even direct them to Renewed Heart Ministries to find out more. That way you can partner with us in even more ways to get the message of – love, compassion, justice, sharing and taking care of one another – out.



So this year, along with the usual bowls that we are throwing for the United Way, we are also throwing bowls for what we are calling **A Shared Table: A Fundraiser for Renewed Heart Ministries**. To participate, all you have to do is become one of our monthly automated reoccurring donors during the months of October or November by subscribing at: renewedheartministries.com/donate. There's no minimum amount. And of course, you can pledge as much as you'd like, as well. Just make sure you select "Check this box to make it a monthly recurring donation", or if you are using Paypal, check "Make this a monthly donation." These types of subscriptions allow non-profits to plan for their coming year.

And if you are *already* one of our monthly automated donors, you don't have to do a thing. We want to honor your existing continual support of Renewed Heart Ministries. At the end of November we'll

also send you one of RHM's Shared Table Pottery Bowls so you can join in sharing the message of a shared table, too. You've been partnering with us already in so many ways, and we thank you. Now you'll be able to help us even more by putting your Shared Table Pottery Bowl on display and when the conversation comes up, tell folks all about Jesus' vision for a world shaped in the form of a shared table and send them our direction to find out more.

Crystal and I are so excited to be offering these bowls as a visual representation of a safer, more compassionate, and just world that we here at RHM, following Jesus along with you, are working to create.

Get your Shared Table Pottery Bowl today by going to:
renewedheartministries.com/donate.





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Daily email Quotations, weekly email articles, podcasts, and ministry updates, monthly newsletters, and more!

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

<http://bit.ly/RHMSignUp>

Quotable Quotes

"You have been waiting for God, he said, while God has been waiting for you. No wonder nothing is happening. You want God's intervention, he said, while God wants your collaboration. God's kingdom is here, but only insofar as you accept it, enter it, live it, and thereby establish it."

— John Dominic Crossan;
The Greatest Prayer: Rediscovering the Revolutionary Message of the Lord's Prayer

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.

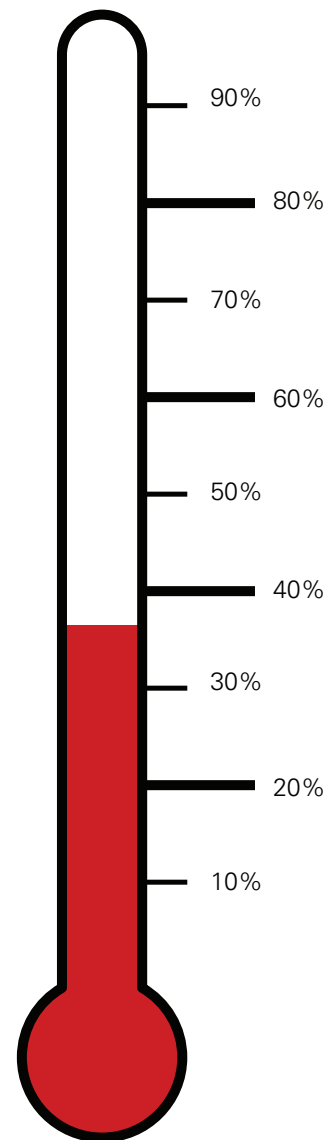
2018 Annual Budget Goal:
\$183,206.00

January–August's Budget Goal:
\$122,136.00

January–August's Contributions Received:
\$68,393.56

August's Budget Goal:
15,267.00

August's Contributions Received:
\$5,364.04



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



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

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."

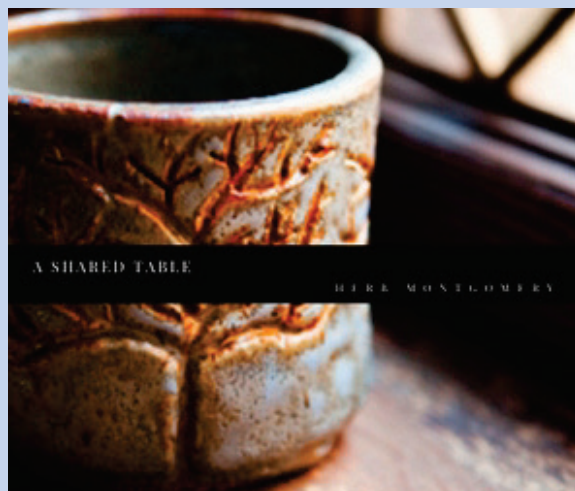
Together we are making a difference, till the only world that remains is a world where only Love reigns.



RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES

Featured Presentation

This month at RHM, we are all about the **Shared Table**. To accompany our two month long Shared Table fundraiser, we thought we would also feature a presentation by Herb on Jesus' Shared Table. We believe our hope as humans lies in discovering more effective ways of taking care of one another. Jesus' vision for human community was one of sharing, mutual aid, distributive justice and compassion. It's in the hope that your heart will be renewed and your feet motivated to action in the work of transforming our world that we are happy to feature this month's presentation:



A Shared Table by Herb Montgomery

