

RENEWED
HEART
MINISTRIES



αwakenings

∴ THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES ∴ DECEMBER 2019 ∴



Inside This Issue:

Page 2

*A Christmas Story for
the Marginalized*

Page 4

A Shared Table:
Fundraiser for Renewed
Heart Ministries

Book of the Month
for November

Page 5

Make Your Support of
RHM Go Twice As Far

RHM's Free Resources

Page 6

RHM's
Social Jesus Blog
on Patheos

Page 7

Budget Thermometer

Page 8

Jesus for Everyone
Podcast

RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES

P.O. Box 1211, Lewisburg, WV 24901

Phone: 304.520.0030

Email: info@renewedheartministries.com

Follow RHM!



@RenewedHeartMin



Renewed Heart Ministries

Follow Herb!



@HerbMontgomery



Herb Montgomery



Ethiopian Orthodox Church Nativity Scene painted in traditional style

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”

(Luke 2:8–10)

A Christmas Story for the Marginalized

by Herb Montgomery

We have entered the holiday season and I want to begin by wishing each of you a very happy one. In the Christian calendar, this is the season of Advent. In Luke’s version of the narratives about Jesus’ birth, the author chooses to center an unlikely community to receive the first announcement of “good news to all people.” This was the community of “shepherds living in the fields nearby.”

In Luke’s society, socially, politically and economically, shepherding filled one of the lowest occupational roles and shepherds bore the brunt of their lower social location. Shepherds were considered untrustworthy, and their work—according to some then-popular interpretations of Torah—made them continually unclean.

The most obvious implication is that the “good news” of the Jesus story first came to a community on the edges of Jesus’ society. His story was going to be first for those on society’s edges, not those in positions of privilege and power.

This narrative contradicts the one that modern, Westernized Christianity has so long used to equate Christianity with social respectability. Today, with few exceptions, the church has often

missed out on building relationships and community with people pushed to the fringes of our larger society. I’m being generous when I say it this way: to simply say that Christian communities have “missed out” ignores the reality that the marginalized have been more than simply “missed.” The church has in many cases driven these folks to society’s fringes so that they’re marginalized by the very ones who carry the name of Jesus.

It matters how we understand each version of the stories of Jesus’ birth and what social, economic, political and even religious implications these stories would’ve had for their original listeners and contexts. When we read contextually today, we begin to see a rich field of insights for our work of social justice. Historically, Christians have spent countless hours on apologetics defending certain details in Jesus’ birth narratives but ignored the more socially relevant implications of these stories. One example of a detail we’ve historically focused on is Matthew’s gospel’s virgin birth. This story element would have meant something to those living in Galilee continually bumping up against the Roman myths about the birth of Caesar Augustus. It says little to us today in our scientific age. Yet other elements of Jesus’ birth narratives in both Matthew and Luke still can offer much to us who are working for a world of love and justice today.

How we as Christians hear the Christmas story, read the Christmas story, and interpret the Christmas story

matters! Reclaimed interpretations of the Christmas story emphasize details that we can’t afford to miss. Jesus being born into immense poverty, being announced to the socially outcast, bypassing the politically, economically, socially and religiously of the day, and his parents becoming violence-fleeing refugees for the well-being of their child—there is an entire foundation here on which to build a framework for Christians who are working toward social justice today.

The story whispers to us of the need for communities to prioritize the poor, the insignificant, forgotten, and the marginalized. These are the people who gathered at this lowly manger and dared to believe that the babe who lay there, this good news, really belonged to them.

The message to the shepherds was, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.” (Luke 2:8–10)

The babe in a manger would not affirm the dominant structure of society of inequity, oppression, exploitation (See Luke 4:18–19). Instead, he would grow up to gather the outcast, the socially marginalized, those labelled and treated as less than by the privileged and powerful. He called for a society that did this, too, and it began with his early followers. Early communities of Jesus followers were almost wholly comprised of people from society’s edges.

At the heart of Luke’s retelling of the Jesus story (and I believe it was the reason he—unlike Mark and John—included the details of Jesus’

continued on page 3

birth) is a desire to contrast Jesus' vision for human community of no more oppression, exploitation or marginalization with the much larger Roman society they lived in.

We'll cover these contrasts in Luke in the upcoming weeks leading up to Christmas. I believe they hold wonderful encouragement for those working within or alongside marginalized communities today, especially for Christians who allow Jesus' teachings to speak into their lives.

And lastly, during this holiday season, in the midst of all that is taking place in the news presently, we must not forget what these stories say to those who are marginalized in our society. We'll talk about all of this, too. For now, it is enough to meditate on the fact that in the gospels' birth-narratives about Jesus, it is the marginalized who are centered. It is foreigners, shepherds, the poor, the marginalized, so called "nobodies," and even the animals of a stable that gather round the manger to symbolize, I believe, the human community this new born babe will grow up to speak about. The good news is for them.

People are of infinite value in this story. In these stories, people and communities marginalized by their present society are especially of immeasurable worth. When I was born, my parents printed and sent out baby announcements to all their family and friends. I don't know if many parents still do this, but I still have my birth announcement. To think of Jesus' birth stories in this light, it is the marginalized who are the ones to whom the birth announcements of Jesus' birth are first sent.

In the hustle and bustle of this season's celebrations, traditions, and revelry, Christians who still subscribe to various forms of exclusion (xeno-phobia, racism, homo-, bi-, and transphobias, sexism, etc.) must allow the universal truths this story tells to confront them. If you are a Christian setting out nativity scenes in your home, stop for a moment and look at each of the figurines you're placing. Who do these figures represent to-day? How are they represented in your life? Are you one of them? If not, are you living in solidarity with those represented in this scene?

Your nativity scene hints to us that this babe lying in manger, born into poverty,

and surrounded by those on edges of his society, will grow up to cast before the imagination of his listeners a vision for human society and those society considers less-than. His is a story for the powerless, the oppressed, the poor, the marginalized, the unclean, the judged, and the labelled, and excluded, the insignificant, and forgotten. These are the very ones that can gather around this lowly manger and dare to believe that the babe who lies there really is for them.



Photo by Greyson Joralemon on Unsplash

This last year, one of the RHM recommended reading books was Miguel A. De La Torre's *Reading the Bible from the Margins*. Speaking of our nativity scene reminds me of this passage:

"Jesus's audience was primarily the outcasts of society. This is why it is important to understand the message of Jesus from the perspective of the disenfranchised. The marginalized of Jesus' time occupied the privileged position of being the first to hear and respond to the gospel. By making the disenfranchised recipients of the Good News, Jesus added a political edge to his message." (Kindle Location 629)

Jesus' birth narratives are not calling for societally privileged Christians today to begin including those presently marginalized. On the contrary, the Christmas stories call these specific Christians to recognize that God is already working in the margins of their society. The question for those presently at the center is not whether they will include the presently marginalized at their table, but whether they will participate in the socially transformative work that is *already taking place* on the margins of their society.

The stories of Jesus are not stories of inclusion where those presently centered maintain their positions of privilege. These are stories about a fundamental change in the way we shape our human communities. And it begins with recognizing the universal truths of the manger scene. Change always happens from the grassroots up, from the margins inward. The question for those at the center is whether they will obstruct those working for a safer, just society, or work in harmony with them.

This is what these stories are saying to me this year.

What are they saying to you?

HeartGroup Application

1. Where do you see transformative work being already engaged within communities that are societally marginalized today.
2. Pick one of these communities. Reach out to the community you have chose and find out the needs of those in this community who are doing transformative work.
3. Discuss with your HeartGroup how your group can help to alleviate the needs you discovered. Pick something from your discussion and put it into practice. Note your experiences. Then share with your group what you're learning.

Thanks for checking in with us this month.

Wherever you are, keep choosing love, compassion, action and reparative and distributive justice.

Another world is possible if we choose it.

And don't forget, all donations to Renewed Heart Ministries this month are being matched dollar for dollar. Through this generous offer you can your support go twice as far here at the end of the year. Also, we'd like you to invite you to become one our monthly supporters through our **Shared Table fundraiser** going on right now. You'll receive a special gift from us for doing so. To find out more go to renewedheartministries.com and click on the "Share Table Fundraiser" image.

I love each of you dearly.

Happy holidays to you all. ■



In the gospels, Jesus modeled for us a way of practicing community in the shape of a shared table. With a preferential option for the most vulnerable among us, this way of living is rooted in a posture of caring, loving, sharing and listening. We believe the result will be a world that becomes a safer, just, more compassionate home for everyone.

These bowls are a symbol of Jesus' shared table.

You can use your pottery bowl and be reminded of the shared table as a means of healing the hurts in our world. Or you could simply place it on your side table or work desk as a conversation starter. When asked about it you can share with them Jesus' shared table, and even direct them to RHM to find out more. That way you can partner with us in even more ways to spread the message of love, compassion, justice, sharing and taking care of one another.

When you support RHM's work, you're furthering this work.

It's real lives, real hearts being renewed, encouraged, and healed that you're making possible. **To get your own RHM Shared Table Pottery Bowl** (made by Crystal and myself) become one of our sustaining partners through an *automated, reoccurring* monthly donation on our website **during the month December 2019**.

To do this go to 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 commitments sustain our work throughout the year and allow us to make plans for 2020.

And if you are *already* one of our sustaining partners, making a monthly automated donation each month, you don't have to do a thing. We want to honor your existing support of Renewed



Heart Ministries. You'll get one of these bowls as a thank you, too!

At the end of December, we'll send each of you one of **RHM's Shared Table Pottery Bowls** so you can join in celebrating, commemorating, and sharing Jesus' message of a shared table, too.

Crystal and I are so excited to be offering these bowls again this year as a visual representation of a safer, more compassionate, and just shared-world. We, here at RHM, believe that following Jesus' teachings creates such a world.

Make sure to reserve your **Shared Table Pottery Bowl** during this month and next by going to renewedheartministries.com/donate and becoming one of our monthly supporters.

Thank you in advance for your support.

Here's to a world of healing love and justice, and the steps we are taking toward it.



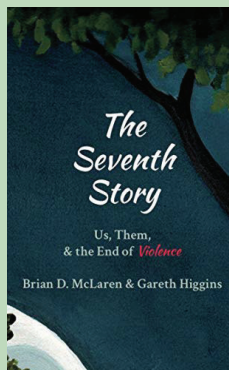
Book of the Month for December 2019

The Seventh Story: Us, Them, and the End of Violence

by Brian McLaren & Gareth Higgins

This little volume is a great way to close 2019.

The story we tell about the world shapes how we live. In a fable for grown-ups, presented alongside essays by Brian McLaren & Gareth Higgins, you'll examine six familiar stories that have repeated through history, which have taught us all how to dominate, fear, or withdraw from



the world and the beautiful people in it. There is a Seventh Story, a path of open-heartedness toward others, and reading this book will inspire you to look anew at the world and your neighbors in creating it. Facing fear, aggression, and violence with the strength to love, change our story

[If you order this book through amazon.com, 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.]

As 2019 Ends, Make Your Support of RHM Go Twice As Far!

In response to an eSight/podcast recently, one reader responded,

"Very thought-provoking! This approach leads us to a different, deeper kind of Christianity. This is the kind of stuff that is allowing me to re-shape my view of GOD, and reclaim it from years of abuse and misunderstanding."

When you support RHM, you're furthering the work of repairing the damage Christianity has done. And you're helping Christians be better humans, too

It's real lives, real hearts being renewed, encouraged, and healed that you're making possible.

This year, a group of our supporters wants to express their gratitude for RHM in a concrete and tangible way.



Photo by Greyson Joralemon on Unsplash

"I believe in the work RHM is doing, and we want to make sure this work continues," said one of our supporters. They have pledged to match every donation during the months of November and December made to Renewed Heart Ministries, dollar-for-dollar, up to \$40,000.

What does all of this mean for you as someone who is *also* a supporter of the work of RHM? It means that for the entire month of December, you can make your support go **twice as far**.

Thanks to this generous offer, every donation you give to Renewed Heart Ministries will be doubled!

Here at the end of 2019, you can make

your support of RHM's work go further than it does at any other time of the year!

Help us reach our budget goals for 2019 and be able to plan for 2020. You can do so by either going to RenewedHeartMinistries.com and clicking "Donate" by December 31, 2019. Or you can mail your tax-deductible donation to:

Renewed Heart Ministries
PO Box 1211
Lewisburg, WV 24901

And make sure it is postmarked by December 31.

We are beyond thankful for all of our supporters who believe in our work and partner with us to continue being a voice for change both within Christianity and in our larger society!

Thank you in advance for taking advantage of this very generous offer for RHM.

Every amount helps.

Together we are making a difference.

Another word is possible if we choose it.

Herb Montgomery
Director of Renewed Heart Ministries

Are you getting RHM's *free* resources in your inbox?

**Sign up today so you
don't miss a thing! Visit
renewedheartministries.com
and click "Sign Up!"**



RHM's "Social Jesus" Blog on Patheos

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/



Inability to Rightly Evaluate What's Happening

Racial tensions have escalated over the past four years. Sexist tensions have escalated. Homophobic and transphobic tensions have escalated. Ecological tensions have escalated. Are we heading swiftly toward our own "Gehenna" for everyone alike?

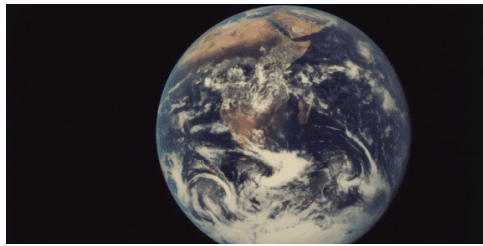
Read more at: patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/12/inability-rightly-evaluate-whats-happening/



Stand Up Anyway

I don't believe that we must pass through fire and sword to get to a world that is safe, just, and compassionate for everyone. But when those threatened by the new world do raise their swords and standing up creates a fire storm, stand up anyway.

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/12/stand-up-anyway/



We Are All In This Together

We are all in this together. The choices we make affect us all. And although they affect us differently, we all have to share this planet we call home. We all inescapably share space with each other. We have the choice to share this space in a way that makes sure everyone is taken care of.

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/11/in-this-together/



Jesus' Call for Wealth Redistribution

Jesus' definition of wealth as the exploitation of the poor and his call for wealth redistribution was viewed as thievery in his day. It's still viewed as theft by many wealthy people today.

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/11/jesus-calls-wealth-redistribution/



Jesus' Enoughism

"Some will say, 'This sounds like socialism!' I'm reminded of the words of historical Jesus scholar John Dominic Crossan, 'Do not, by the way, let anyone tell you that is Liberalism, Socialism, or Communism. It is, if you need an -ism,... Enoughism...Enoughism would be a more accurate description.'"

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/11/jesus-enoughism/



Choosing a World Shaped by Compassion

This world is not based on a win-lose closed system, but a win-win where we learn to be each other's keeper. Our world is what we, collectively, choose to make it. For my part, I'm choosing compassion.

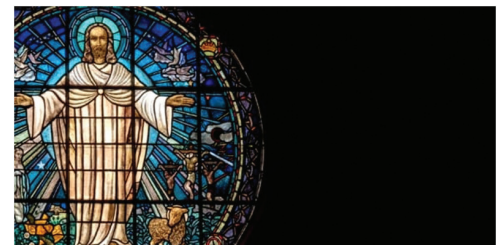
Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/11/choosing-world-compassion/



"On Earth As It Is In Heaven"

It called people to stop solving the challenges of survival for themselves at the expense of others around them. It called them to take responsibility for making sure they all together had what they needed.

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/11/on-earth-as-heaven/



A Gospel About Jesus Versus the Gospel Jesus Taught

One thread in Jewish tradition enlarged this hope and applied it not only to the Jewish people, but also to the rest of humanity with a much more universal end to all oppression, violence, and injustice. It was to this Jewish hope for justice and liberation that the authors of the gospels sought to connect the Jesus story.

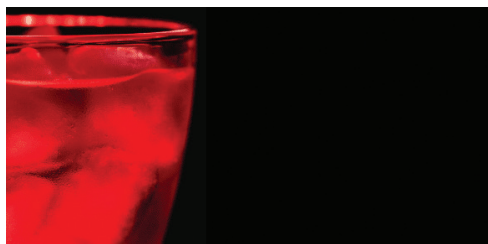
Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/11/gospel-about-jesus-versus-gospel-jesus-taught/



Complicit Christianity

If true, this calls for Christianity to wrest itself free of its historical failures, to make reparations for the damage it has done, and to begin charting a new course where the poor, women, people of color, and those of varied orientations and gender identities are no longer the victims of Christianity.

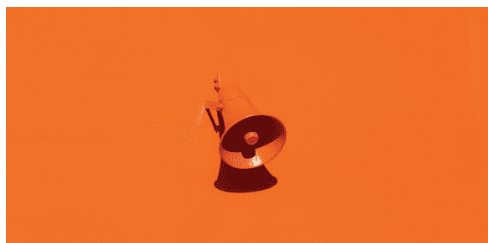
Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/11/complicit-christianity/



Stop Drinking The Kool-Aid

"For those at the top of an exploitative social pyramid who are privileged, advantaged, and benefited by the status quo, freedom and liberty mean something fundamentally different than it does for those at the bottom."

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/11/stop-drinking-kool-aid/



Learning to Speak Out

The subject of politics is the discussion of how power is distributed and who gets access to resources. The gospels speak of distributive justice and an order where power and resources are distributed in a way that ensures a world that is safe, compassionate and just for all.

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/11/learning-to-speak-out/

**2019 Full Year Budget Goal:
\$185,000.00**

**Jan.-Oct. Budget Goal:
\$154,170.00**

**Jan.-Oct.
Contributions Received:
\$79,303.93**

**Oct. Contributions Goal:
\$15,417.00**

**Oct. Contributions Received:
\$16,095.04**

Renewed Heart Ministries is a nonprofit organization working for a world of love and justice. We need your support to impact lives and provide the kind of resources and analysis RHM offers.

Intersections between faith, love, compassion, and justice are needed now more than ever.

***Help Christians be
better humans.***

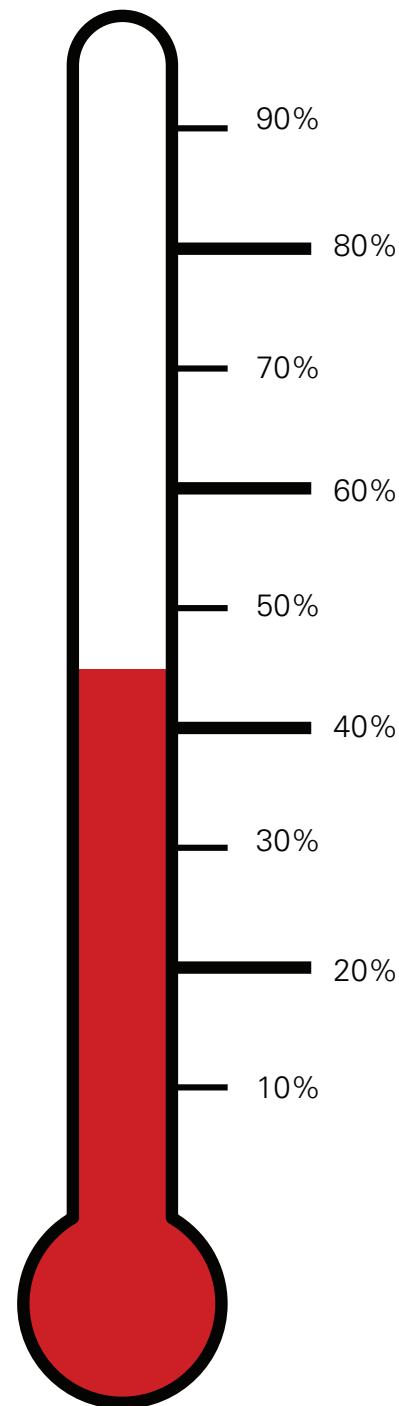
Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to Renewed Heart Ministries today.

To do so online go to renewedheartministries.com and click "Donate." Or if you prefer to make a donation by mail, our address is:

Renewed Heart Ministries
PO Box 1211
Lewisburg, WV 24901

**Whether you give
\$5 or \$5,000,
every amount helps us
continue our work.**

And to those of you out there who are already supporting this ministry, I want to say thank you. We could not continue being a voice for change without your support.



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



Front cover artwork by Ali Montgomery.



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

**"I want a change, and
a radical change. I
want a change from
an acquisitive society
to a functional
society, from a
society of go-getters
to a society of
go-givers."**

Peter Maurin
The Catholic Worker
August 1936

RENEWEDHEARTMINISTRIES.COM