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Great Joy for All People (Part 3)

by Herb Montgomery

Happy new year! As we begin 2020, let's take one last look at our series for this recent Advent season and the springboard it provides us for this new year. In Part 1 and 2, we looked at Luke's birth narratives for Jesus in the social contexts of Rome, Judaism under Roman imperialism, and early Christianity. We asked whether the birth-narratives have anything to offer us in our justice work today, politically, economically, socially and theologically. I want to end our holiday consideration with Luke's *magnificat of Mary* (Luke 1).

And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God
my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call
me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great
things for me—holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear
him,
from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with
his arm;
he has scattered those who are
proud in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their
thrones

but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors."
(Luke 1:46-55)

We have seen that Luke's birth narratives about Jesus both converged with the social, political, and economic hopes of their day, and diverged from and sometimes subverted the social, political, and economic practices of Rome. Mary's magnificat matters because of this context.

The first thing to notice about it is that Mary's praise contains absolutely no reference to the afterlife in relation to the one she has conceived and the hopes she believes her child will fulfill.

Some Christians may be surprised that Mary's words of gratitude and praise are not rooted in thankfulness for needed relief from a post-mortem hell and the gift of an eternity in heaven. Line by line, Mary's words instead express gratitude for relief and liberation from the oppressive realities she and her Jewish society experience in *this life*, in the *here and now*.

As Leo Tolstoy wrote in the beginning of his last book, *Path of Life*, "Genuine religion is not about speculating about God or the soul or about what happened in the past or will happen in the future; it cares only about one thing—finding out exactly what should or should not be done in this lifetime" (p. 3).

Christianity today is deeply focused on attaining heaven in an afterlife and avoiding or escaping hell, but that is not the focus of the Jesus narratives. Christianity's focus on the afterlife has too often produced profoundly harmful fruit. To the same degree, where Christianity has focused on liberation, justice, and equity in this life, it has produced profoundly life-giving fruit. Walter Rauschenbusch, a leader in the social gospel movement of the early 20th century, commented on this history:

"The non-ethical practices and beliefs in historical Christianity nearly all centre on the winning of heaven and immortality. On the other hand, the Kingdom of God can be established by nothing except righteous life and action." (Walter Rauschenbusch; *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, p. 15)

Many sectors of Western Christianity still miss this point today. Rita Nakashima Brock & Rebecca Parker give several examples in their beautiful book, *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire*. One such example that explains how Evangelical Christianity today has become such an obstruction to matters of social justice is the history of the First Great Awakening:

"Rather than engage people more deeply in the world, the Great Awakening lifted the soul beyond earthly life, to the 'upper world.' [Jonathan] Edwards's earthly loves had always to point beyond themselves—to primary beauty—and, as he said, even the love of other human beings was 'secondary beauty.' To look through earth into heaven, through death into eternity, through the beloved into God was the spiritual ideal. To love in this way was always to have your heart, mind, and soul turned elsewhere, perpetually departing the present for something better. Edwards's beauty did not draw people into ethical engagement with life in this world, but moved them beyond the spirits in trees and clouds, dirt and rain, fish and deer, and bodies and winds. He asked them to dwell with one foot always in another, better world, not here, not now." (Rita Nakashima Brock & Rebecca Parker, *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire*, p. 371)

History is littered with other examples of how an otherworldly, afterlife focus in Christianity has brought concrete damage to communities on the margins of their society. Christianity may have begun as a community on the edges of its society, but today, from a position of power and privilege, it has a history of becoming complicit with harm and even participating in pushing others to the edges of society instead.

Jesus' story, including his Christmas birth narratives, speak of liberation from oppression in this life, the end of injustice in this life, and the end of violence and marginalization in this life. We can glean much from the Jesus story for our justice work today, and the story's largest focus is economic justice. That foundation allows us to discern applications for the other kinds of distributive, reparative, and restorative justices we have discussed throughout this entire series.

Let's begin with this phrase found above:

"He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty."

This phrase still offends those who have more than they could ever possibly need in a world where others are barely surviving. But before we alleviate the discomfort of Mary's words, let's consider what other types of injustice we could apply them to today.

In matters of racial justice, these words today could read:

"He has filled people of color with good things
but has sent White people away empty."

In matters of immigrant justice, these words could read:

"He has filled those fleeing violence in their homelands with good things
but has sent privileged citizens away empty."

In matters of gender inequity, these words could read:

"He has filled cis and trans women with good things
but has sent men away empty."

In matters of LGBTQIA justice, it could read:

"He has filled Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgender, Asexual, Intersex, Queer, and Questioning people with good things
but has sent straight, heterosexual folks away empty."

In matters of Indigenous justice, it could read:

"He has filled the First Nations with good things
but has sent the colonialists away empty."

Like many of Jesus' words, these words can be perceived as good news by some in society and as problematic by others. The first shall be last and the last shall be first. It's great news for those ranked last in the present system. It's at least problematic for those who have worked their entire lives to be privileged as first.

Statements like these from Mary and Jesus help us understand why the elites, privileged, and powerful of Jesus' concluded that Jesus, his influence, and his teachings must be silenced and removed.

Luke's narratives about Jesus, beginning with the Christmas narratives, ultimately offer hope for those society deems less than, and they are still problematic to those in positions of power and privilege. I believe they offer much to those who are working toward a world a love and justice today.

One example is in Jesus' teachings on the tradition of nonviolence. This month, RHM's featured book of the month is Marshall Rosenberg's *Nonviolent Communication*. Nonviolent methods are beneficial to those working for interpersonal and social change, and in 2020, we will focus on these teachings of Jesus to discover:

How Christians can be better humans

How Christians can engage the work of reparations for the harm they have been both complicit in and committed themselves to marginalized groups.

How we can work toward a world of love and justice in life-giving ways.

The Jesus story doesn't end with his teachings being problematic for the powerful and privileged, with his execution for the social problems he was creating/solving, or even Jesus' murder and resurrection. The story reaches its climax with the early followers of Jesus learning to follow his example and seeing the universal truths they had encountered in Jesus working through themselves.

"The disciples also saw that the spirit that had worked within Jesus continued to work in and through them. In their preaching they extended his critique of domination. They



Bowls Are Being Mailed!

We are sending out our **Shared Table** pottery bowls to all who signed up to be a sustaining supporter of our work during our **Shared Table** fundraising. Be looking for them in your mailboxes soon!

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Book of the Month for January 2020

Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life: Life-Changing Tools for Healthy Relationships (Nonviolent Communication Guides)

by Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D.

Marshall Rosenberg, Ph.D. has initiated peace programs in war-torn areas throughout the world including Rwanda, Burundi, Nigeria, Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, the Middle East, Serbia, Croatia, and Ireland. He is the founder and director of educational services for the Center for Nonviolent Communication (CNVC), an international nonprofit organization that offers workshops and training in 30 countries.

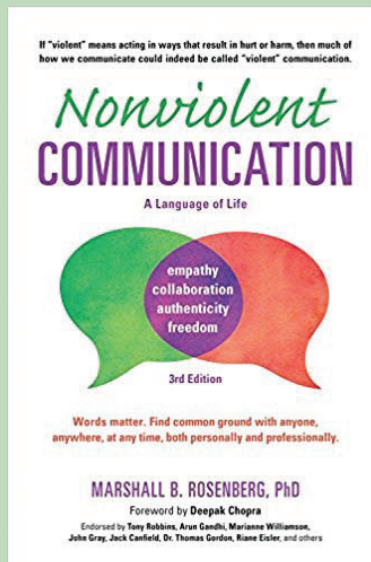
What is Violent Communication?

If “violent” means acting in ways that result in hurt or harm, then much of how we communicate—judging others, bullying, having racial bias, blaming, finger pointing, discriminating, speaking without listening, criticizing others or ourselves, name-calling, reacting when angry, using political rhetoric, being defensive or judging who’s “good/bad” or what’s “right/wrong” with people—could indeed be called “violent communication.”

What is Nonviolent Communication?

Nonviolent Communication is the integration of four things:

- **Consciousness:** a set of principles that support living a life of compassion, collaboration, courage, and authenticity
- **Language:** understanding how words contribute to connection or distance



- **Communication:** knowing how to ask for what we want, how to hear others even in disagreement, and how to move toward solutions that work for all
- **Means of influence:** sharing “power with others” rather than using “power over others”

Nonviolent Communication serves our desire to do three things:

- Increase our ability to live with choice, meaning, and connection
- Connect empathically with self and others to have more satisfying relationships
- Sharing of resources so everyone is able to benefit

If you’re are looking for a book to begin your new year with, we recommend this month’s book highly.

Also, remember, 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.

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!”



Quotable Quotes

“[Nonviolence is] the constant awareness of the dignity and humanity of oneself and others. It seeks truth and justice; it renounces violence both in method and attitude. It is a courageous acceptance of active love and goodwill as the instrument with which to overcome evil and transform both oneself and others.”

— Presentation at the Catholic Worker, New York City, Spring 1986 ; Wally Nelson

continued his life by advancing his mission. They persisted in proclaiming the domination-free order of God inaugurated by Jesus." (Walter Wink, *The Human Being: Jesus and the Enigma of the Son of the Man*, p. 153)

That's the order we proclaim too. Another world is possible if we choose it, and this new year, this new decade will offer us many opportunities to make it if we wish.

HeartGroup Application

1. What goals or actions would you like to see your HeartGroup focus on within the group this new year? Discuss with your group and pick something to put into practice.
2. What goals or actions would you like to see your HeartGroup focus on within your larger faith community this new year? Discuss with your group and pick something to put into practice.
3. What goals or actions would you like to see your HeartGroup focus on within your larger society this new year? Discuss with your group and pick something to put into practice.

Here's to a world of love and justice and the work required by each of us to create it.

Thanks for checking in with us.

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

Happy New Year to all of you.

I love each of you dearly. ■



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**

Quotable Quotes

"The prophets have dirty hands (and mouths too sometimes), because you'll find them wading without apology through the mess of life. Their target audience begins with the church and its religious leaders but extends to nations and heads of state and to corporations with their economic power brokers. They have unabashed social agendas and are not afraid of being perceived as political. Their concern is for the oppressed, the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the enslaved. The mature prophets call for both personal righteousness and social justice. They retreat inward in contemplation then explode onto the public scene as spokespersons for God's heart and as advocates for the downtrodden."

— Brad Jersak;
Can You Hear Me? Tuning in to the God who Speaks

RHM's "Social Jesus" Blog on Patheos

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/



The Last Will Be First

"What would it look like for us to work toward a world shaped by equity, compassion, supplying needs, and thriving, even for the least of these?"

Read more at: patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/01/the-last-first/



Being Left Out of a World Shaped by Inclusion

"In the new world that we are shaping, if any are left in "outer darkness," it won't be those you believe don't measure up to your standards of respectability or virtue. It will be you! You cannot accept the welcome, affirmation, and inclusion of those you feel should be excluded. You will be excluded because you cannot accept those who are being included."

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/12/being-left-out-world-shaped-inclusion/



Economic Justice and Jesus' Straight and Narrow

"Aristotle also saw this same truth: 'Poverty is the cause of the defects of democracy. That is the reason why measures should be taken to ensure a permanent level of prosperity. This is in the interest of all classes...'"

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/12/economic-justice-jesus-straight-narrow/



LGBTQ Affirmation and the Parable of the Mustard Seed

"Reparative therapy, however, is an attempt to weed out a certain type of person—an LGBTQ person—from existence. Ultimately, it's a form of genocide."

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/12/lgbtq-affirmation-parable-mustard-seed/



Societal Change and the Parable of Leaven

"Was Jesus' leaven good or evil for his time and culture? The answer to that question might have depended on which "side of the tracks" you asked."

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/12/societal-change-parable-leaven/



Social Location Matters

"Social location matters. Listening to how certain theologies impact those on the undersides or edges of our society matters. These are perspectives and concerns that must be heard."

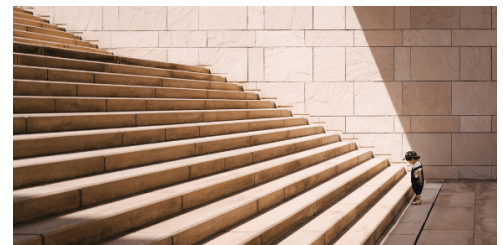
Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/12/social-location-matters/



Biblical Inclusion Versus Biblical Exclusion

"What is our relation, as followers of Jesus, to the marginalized of our day? To what degree are we marginalized in our own lives? Are we standing in solidarity with others who are marginalized or are we participating in their continued marginalization?"

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/11/biblical-inclusion-versus-biblical-exclusion/



The Worth of Those on the Margins

And remember to stop to consider how valuable you are. In a world that may be denying your humanity, your worth, and even your existent, you are worth standing up for. You are valuable.

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/10/worth-those-margins/

Testimonies

"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 reshape my view of GOD, and reclaim it from years of abuse and misunderstanding." **- KD**

"You started opening my eyes to a beautiful 'Love Family' in which we are all included." **- SF**

"Over 11 years ago, you presented at a series of meetings in our area. That was what pulled us (my wife and I) through to continue on a journey of following Jesus rather than a religion. We were at a pivotal place of deep personal crisis, ready to throw our towel in on God and religion. Inadvertently you gave us a third choice." **- CH**

"You are an inspiration of challenging the status quo and not being afraid..." **- MP**

"RHM is a ministry that facilitates change. From all the way back to when RHM first started to these most recent publications, we have been so truly blessed by the journey on which both this ministry and ourselves have been. Thank you for all you do." **- KF**

"Wow, this is revolutionary and absolutely thrilling! Oh, if only people can grasp this and actually put it into practice." **- WK**

"I love listening to your presentations online. They truly bless me. They are unlike any other that I have ever heard... Your words have given me light. Enough to believe that there is possibly more." **- JB**

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

**Jan.-Nov. Budget Goal:
\$169,587.00**

**Jan.-Nov.
Contributions Received:
\$129,674.47**

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

**Nov. Contributions Received:
\$10,370.54**

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.**

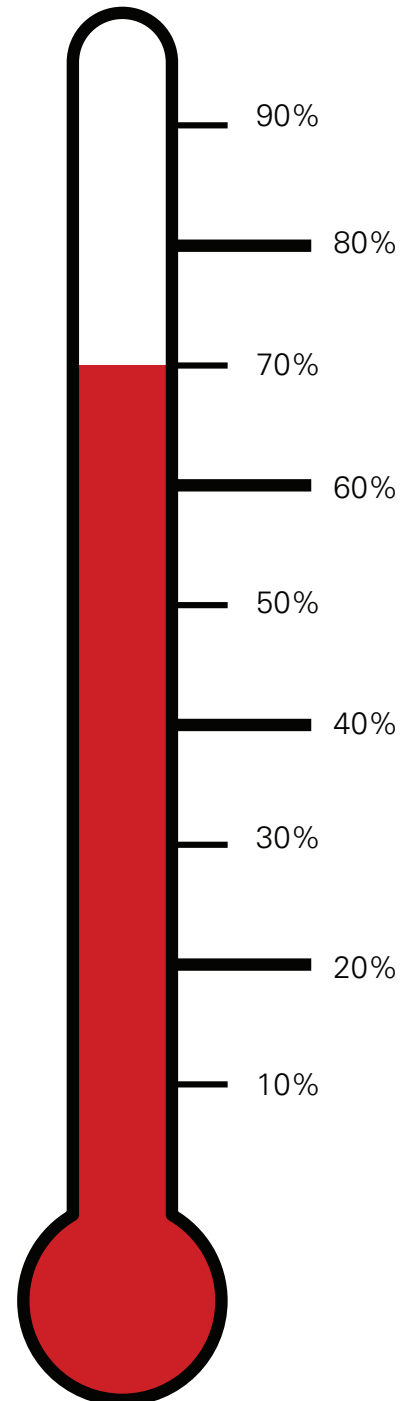
**Please consider making a tax-
deductible donation to Renewed
Heart Ministries today.**

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



"The narrow-mindedness that leads one to see whatever is outside the bounds of one's own people...as ugly and defiled is a terrible darkness that causes general destruction to the entire edifice of spiritual good, the light of which every refined soul hopes for."

Abraham Isaac Kook
The World of Rav Kook's Thought, p. 212.

