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## Thank You

Tax-Receipts to all of our supporters for their donations to RHM during 2019 are going out in the mail this week (February 3, 2020). And as we are finalizing those, I wanted to stop for a moment and say thank you.

As this new year began, I received an email from one of our listeners who wrote, "Thank you for spreading the truth of Jesus' teachings. Your perspectives have changed my world view and I am so grateful."

I often receive notes like this, and I often think of our supporters, like you, who enable us to continue our much-needed work in the hearts and lives of those with whom we come in contact.

A Christianity that teaches love, compassion, inclusion, and justice is needed right now more than ever. Through your support, you're helping to further the work of healing the hurt Christianity has done to so many on the margins of our world, and you're helping followers of Jesus also learn how to be better humans for the future. One reader recently commented, "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."

Without your generous support this past year our work could not continue. Thank you for being part of the RHM family. Our hope, for each of us, for this coming year is to follow Jesus more deeply together. To choose love, compassion and taking action when we see ways for us to shape our world into a just home for everyone. Another world is possible, and each time I receive a note of gratitude for our work, I'm reminded of it.

As director of this ministry, I can't thank you enough for your support. Together we are making a difference.

With much love and gratitude for you,

Herb Montgomery  
Director of Renewed Heart Ministries

## Quotable Quotes

*"We can come to know the world as paradise when our hearts and souls are reborn through the arduous and tender task of living rightly with one another and the earth. Generosity, nonviolence, and care for one another are the pathways into transformed awareness. Knowing that paradise is here and now is a gift that comes to those who practice the ethics of paradise. This way of living is not Utopian. It does not spring simply from the imagination of a better world but from a profound embrace of this world. It does not begin with knowledge or hope. It begins with love."*

— Rita Nakashima Brock &  
Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parkera;  
*Saving Paradise: How Christianity  
Traded Love of This World for  
Crucifixion and Empire*, p. 409

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

**Sign up today so you don't miss a thing! Go to [renewedheartministries.com](http://renewedheartministries.com) and click "Sign Up!"**





***"Some may cry unfair when others receive more, yet if this 'more than' is based on what they need is more than what others may need to thrive, then fairness takes on a more wholistic, less shallow definition."***

***"Looking at his disciples, he said: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.'"***

**(Luke 6:22)**

# When Equality Means Some Are Given More Than Others

## ***Equality, Equity and Jesus' Preferential Option for the Marginalized***

by Herb Montgomery

This passage in Luke's gospel marks the beginning of what many refer to as Jesus' sermon on the plain. When we compare Luke's version of this sermon to Matthew's sermon on the mount, what begins to take shape is that Jesus' gospel was not good news for everyone. In Luke, Jesus uttered blessings on some and woes on others.

Those he spoke blessings to were the marginalized, exploited or oppressed of Jesus' society. Those he spoke woes to were those in his society who were in positions of privilege and power.

The Poor,  
The Hungry,  
The Weepers,  
The Hated, Excluded, and Insulted,

versus

The Rich,  
The Well-Fed,  
The Laughers,  
The Spoken Well Of.

Some in Jesus' own society believed

that the rich, the well-fed, and those whose lives were filled with laughter had been blessed by God, while those who were poor, hungry, and mourning were being punished by God. In that worldview, they were sinners, not less fortunate and in need of compassion and justice, but rather as morally inferior.

Jesus turned that order of economics, politics, society and even religious exclusion on its head! He challenged people's preconceived interpretations of God and what fidelity to God looked like. God was actually on the side of those whom society was pushing to the edges and undersides. God was with those who were poor, hungry, heartbroken, hated, excluded, and insulted, and the "kingdom" belonged to them.

But to those who were privileged in an unjust social and economic structure, Jesus spoke woes.

These woes pronounced future sorrow or distress. Jesus spoke to the people of loss, for equity and equality will always feel like threat, loss, or distress to those who have everything to lose within a more just society. They do not understand change as the good news of liberation but as something being taken away from them. Today, some have more than they could ever possibly need. For the wealthiest among us, being less wealthy won't really affect their daily lives. But someone whose net worth is hundreds of millions of dollars may still feel losing a million of it so that others can eat is still a loss. Is supporting our interconnectedness worth more than our bottom line or net worth?

Jesus began standing in the shadow of the cross as soon as he began to teach this gospel of blessings and woes. Those he blessed were the opposite of those the elites blessed, and those he warned were the opposite of those the powerful thought deserved woes. Jesus called his listeners to look at their society and those within their society in the opposite way they had been taught to.

Nothing destroys one's empathy for others more completely than seeing them as "less than." Jesus challenged his listeners' most cherished assumptions about others. This different lens would cause deep upheaval for people, economically, politically, socially, and even religiously. The vision for human society that Jesus was seeking to inspire would require a paradigm shift after paradigm shift. It would not be a time of blessing for some of them, and they would face deep questioning and change as things turned on their head.

I'm reminded of the words of the late Rev. Peter Gomes:

"It is interesting to note that those who most frequently call for fair play are those who are advantaged by the play as it currently is and that only when that position of privilege is endangered are they likely to benefit from the change required to 'play by the rules.'" What if the "rules" are inherently unfair or simply wrong, or a greater good is to be accomplished by changing them? When the gospel says, "The last will be first, and the first will be last," despite the fact that it is counterintuitive to our

*continued on page 5*





# F.U.E.L.'s Four Year Anniversary

by Herb Montgomery | January 14, 2020

This past weekend, I had the immense pleasure of speaking for a group of LGBTQ Christians in Philadelphia at their weekly gathering. They call themselves F.U.E.L. I've had the privilege of being able to be at the anniversary of their beginning each year, and I just can't say enough good things about this group. (see <https://renewedheartministries.com/news/F-U-E-L-in-Philadelphia>)

What I experienced with this group reminded me of a statement made by Miguel A. De La Torre in his book *Reading the Bible from the Margins*: "In reality, the gospel is thriving in the margins of society. The real question facing the center, accustomed to confusing its interpretations with the biblical text itself, is whether those at the center will also participate in the body of Christ that already exists in the margins of society." (Kindle Location 1072)

The question isn't whether those on the margins will be included in spaces taken up by those at the center of our communities, but whether those at the center, in positions of power and privilege, will choose to participate in the beauty of what's happening already on the margins.

This group, today, deems that to continue arguing over the destructive interpretations of their previous faith communities is a waste of their time and resources. They exist whether those who have excluded them want them to or not. Their existence needs no explanation. It needs no defense. It simply is. They simply are. They exist and they want to get on with the business of living, creating, worshipping, encouraging one another, and making our world a safer, compassionate, just home for everyone alike.

This reminded me of another statement by the late Toni Morrison in speaking about the enormous amount of energy that is stolen from a person's life by having to continually deal with racism.

"The very serious function of racism... is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over

and over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language and so you spend 20 years proving that you do. Somebody says your head isn't shaped properly so you have scientists working on the fact that it is. Somebody says that you have no art so you dredge that up. Somebody says that you have no kingdoms and so you dredge that up. None of that is necessary." (*A Humanist View*, a 1975 speech Morrison gave at Portland State University)

The universal truth in Morrison's words above doesn't just apply to matters solely of race. They can just as easily be applied to the bigotry toward those who also identify as LGBTQ, as well.

I shared a presentation on what the Jesus story says as it speaks into the lives of those who daily face marginalization in both our various faith communities and our larger society. I was overwhelmed with how positively what I shared was received, responded to, and applied in our discussion afterward.

I see beautiful things happening on the margins of our various communities.

I'm grateful today to simply be able to be a part of them.

To those of you who support our work, I'm grateful for you, too! Your generosity enables us to keep working toward a world of love and justice. Your support enables us to undo some of the damage done by Christians toward those on the margins. And you are helping to chart a course whereby Christians can be better humans in the future. I'm grateful for you, too, and I'm glad we are on this journey together.

Here's to a brighter tomorrow.

Another world is possible. And weekends like this previous one keep me believing it.

## Testimonies

*"Thanks for spreading the truth of Jesus' teachings. Your perspectives have changed my world view and I am so grateful." – SB*

*"I looooooove your ministry and your passion for fairness, equality, and justice!! That's the 'Jesus message'." – RP*

### ...Equality... continued from page 3

cultural presuppositions, it is invariably good news to those who are last, and at least problematic news to those who see themselves as first." (*The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus*, p. 42)

Equity threatens those who spend their energy striving to have more than others. But it is good news to those who work for a just, compassionate, safe world for everyone. A world becoming more equitable will bless some and be felt as a woe by others.

I want to add a word of clarification:

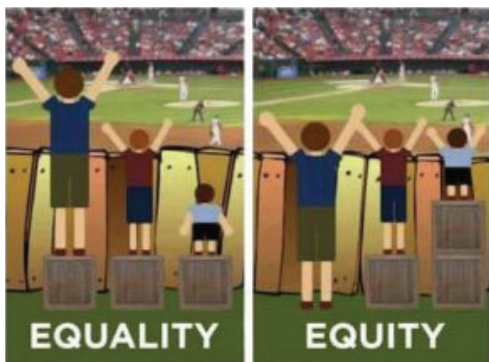
In both Matthew's and Luke's gospels, Jesus speaks these words:

"[God] causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." (Matthew 5:45)

"[God] is kind to the ungrateful and wicked." (Luke 6:35)

In Jesus' theology, God loves all equally and gives to all the things they need to thrive. We as humans have designed ways for more of these resources to get to some people to the detriment of others. So why in Jesus' gospel are some blessed, while others receive woes? Why, unlike the rain and sunshine, is the blessing of kingdom pronounced upon certain ones while woes are the only thing promised to others?

A more current conversation of the differences between equity and equality can help us here. (Everyday Feminism had a good article on these differences back in 2014 at [everydayfeminism.com/2014/09/equality-is-not-enough/](http://everydayfeminism.com/2014/09/equality-is-not-enough/))



Equality is often understood as everyone getting exactly the same. But because everyone has a different social, economic, or political starting point, simply giving

everyone the same thing would not necessarily create the goal of everyone having enough to thrive. Some would still have more than they need, while others would not. When everyone is different, fairness and success also differ. The image to the right illustrates these points. Equity means making sure each person has enough to thrive, and that may look different for different people.

Some may cry unfair when others receive more, yet if this "more than" is based on what they need is more than what others may need to thrive, then fairness takes on a more wholistic, less shallow definition.

In liberation theology, scholars refer to the deference given to those on the margins as a "preferential option for the oppressed." It is a choice to center those who are pushed to the edges and undersides of our society, and to place these people and their communities on equal ground with others. The preferential option is required to bring about equality.

In our small group discussions at Renewed Heart Ministries, we often say that whenever we speak of oppression or marginalization, those who are the most affected or most vulnerable are those who get to share their experiences. To the degree that others are less affected by such personal and systemic injustices, they can listen in solidarity. When it comes to discussions on gender inequity, for example, men, especially cisgender men, take a posture of listening. When it comes to racial inequity, those who are White listen to those who are not White. In discussions on immigration justice here in the U.S., those who are documented citizens listen. In discussions of Indigenous people's lives and equitable treatment, non-Indigenous people listen; and when we speak of LGBTQ justice, those who identify as straight, cisgender, or gender normative listen.

Those most negatively impacted by societal injustice receive the "blessing," while others in our present society, it could be said, "have already received" theirs (see Luke 6:24).

Go back now and reread the entirety of Luke's sermon on the plain by Jesus and see if you don't begin to get a feel for

what Jesus in this story is doing:

"Looking at his disciples, he said: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.'" (Luke 6:20-26)

Equity doesn't have to feel like inequality if we choose to see our differences and how these differences are treated. Equality doesn't have to feel like oppression even if you are used to privilege. We are all in this together. What lessens one, lessens us all. We are connected to one another. As the adage goes, equality doesn't mean less for you: it's not pie. Whether we choose to view it that way or not, is another discussion.

## HeartGroup Application

1. Thoughtfully read through Matthew 5:1-11 and Luke 6:17-26. Share with your group anything that engages your attention.
2. Discuss whom these words would be directed toward in our social context today.
3. Share at least one community you would like your group to focus on working alongside with for greater system equity in our larger society.

Thanks for checking in with us.

Right where you are, choose love, compassion, take action.

I love each of you dearly. ■



# Recent Posts from RHM's "Social Jesus" Blog on Patheos

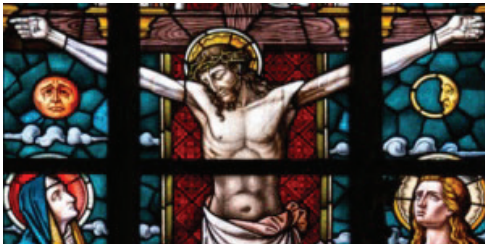
[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/)



## ***The Kind of Resurrection I Want No Part Of***

"A resurrection that doesn't follow standing with those on the undersides and edges of society isn't authentic resurrection as defined by the Jesus story. If Christianity does not discover how to stand with women, people of color, immigrants, and gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and gender-nonconforming people, it's not a Christianity I want to be a part of."

Read more at: [patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/01/resurrection-i-want-no-part-of/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/01/resurrection-i-want-no-part-of/)



## ***Taking Up One's Cross and the Myth of Redemptive Suffering***

"When those in power choose to threaten crosses for those standing up to systemic injustice, don't let go. Keep holding on to hope even in the face of impossible odds. Keep holding on to life—resist."

Read more at [patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/01/taking-ones-cross-myth-redemptive-suffering/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/01/taking-ones-cross-myth-redemptive-suffering/)



## ***Being Rejected By Family***

"I don't believe that this suffering is good and 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. I do believe that when those threatened by a just world do raise their swords or threaten us with a cross, we should stand up anyway, even if those opposing us are relatives."

Read more at [patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/01/being-rejected-by-family/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/01/being-rejected-by-family/)



## ***We're In This Together***

"Today we have to ask which voices are we refusing to listen to? Which voices are we not heeding? Who are we in our stubbornness ignoring...Whether we acknowledge the truth of our reality or not, we are already, all of us, in this together."

Read more at [patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/01/were-in-this-together/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/01/were-in-this-together/)



## ***When Pride Isn't "Sinful" But About Equality***

"If a person is already being shamed and humiliated, they are already experiencing humiliation from those who endeavor to marginalize them and their voices. Those who really need to humble themselves in that situation are those who think that just because someone is different they are broken or less than."

Read more at [patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/01/pride-sin-equality/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/01/pride-sin-equality/)



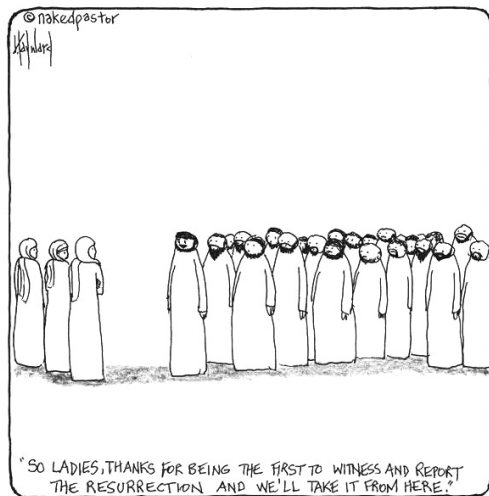
## ***Embracing Societal Justice Even When It's Scary***

"What can we learn from the passages above? It's a lamentation that applies to all communities when justice-rooted social change is seen as a threat and those with the power to make a change would rather silence the voices calling for it."

Read more at [patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/01/embracing-societal-justice-even-when-scary/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/01/embracing-societal-justice-even-when-scary/)



Photo by Jordan McDonald on Unsplash



## The “Jesus For Everyone” podcast

**New episodes every Friday!**

A weekly podcast where we discuss where faith in Jesus and social justice work for the vulnerable today intersect and what a first-century, Jewish, Galilean prophet of the poor might offer us today in our work of survival, resistance, liberation, restoration, and transformation.

**renewedheartministries.com/  
Podcasts**

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

**Jan.-Dec. Budget Goal:  
\$185,000.00**

**Jan.-Dec.  
Contributions Received:  
\$145,603.55**

**Dec. & Year-End  
Contributions Received:  
\$55,929.08**

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.***

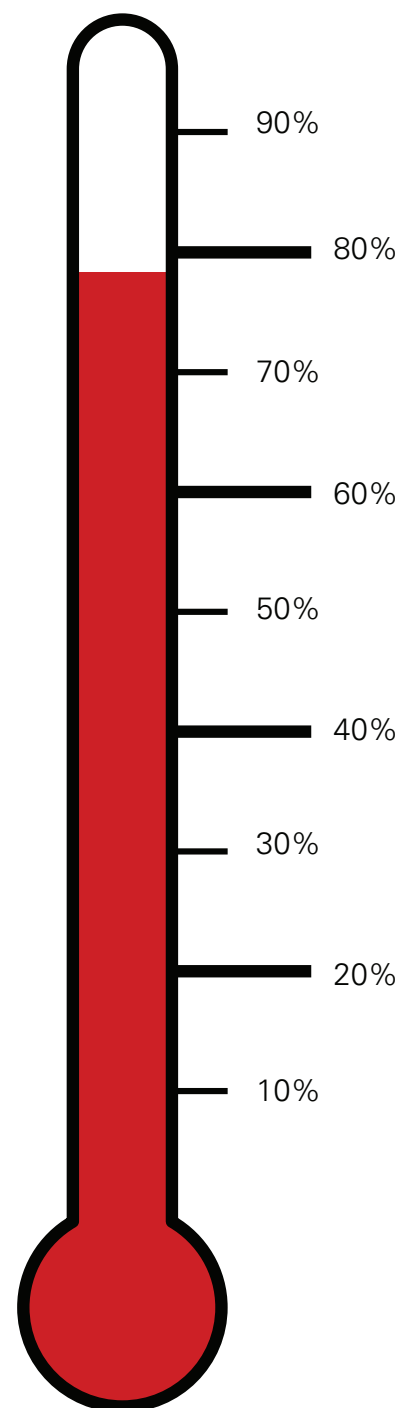
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Lewisburg, WV 24901

**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.

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





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.

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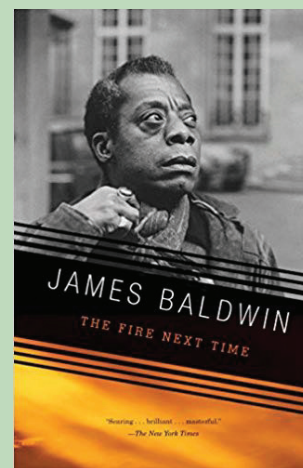
## Book of the Month for February 2020

### *The Fire Next Time*

by James Baldwin

In honor of Black History Month, February's recommending reading is James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*.

This volume was a national best-seller when it first appeared in 1963. It galvanized the nation and gave passionate voice to the emerging civil rights movement. At once a powerful evocation of James Baldwin's early life in Harlem and a disturbing examination of the consequences of racial injustice, the book is an intensely personal and provocative document. It consists of two "letters," written on the occasion of the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation, that exhorts Americans, both black and white, to attack the terrible legacy of racism. Described



by *The New York Times Book Review* as "sermon, ultimatum, confession, deposition, testament, and chronicle... all presented in searing, brilliant prose," *The Fire Next Time* stands as a classic of Black literature.

Also, remember, you don't have to order this book through [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), but if you do, please consider using Amazon Smile ([smile.amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com/smile)) 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.

"I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: 'I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action'; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a 'more convenient season.' Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection."

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. | Letter from a Birmingham Jail

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