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WE ARE NOT JUST PASSING THROUGH

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"Our first concern should not be to leave it all behind, but to bring healing to the world around us. Jesus modeled how we can be conduits of healing to this world, and we are to be about setting that healing in motion. We must be about restoration, not relocation; our goal should not be to depart, but to remain, doing as much good as we can in the time we have been given."

We Are Not Just Passing Through

by Herb Montgomery

We at Renewed Heart Ministries are wishing you peace during this critical time.

In Matthew's gospel, we read these words from the sermon on the mount: "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." (Matthew 5:5).

In this verse, Jesus is focusing our attention on earth, not heaven.

Through history, many Christians have emphasized getting to heaven after death as their ultimate goal. The lyrics of the popular hymn *This World Is Not My Home* read, "This world is not my home. I'm just a-passing through. My treasures are laid up. Somewhere beyond the blue."

Yet this focus is a late development in the Christian religion and is tellingly absent from the Jewish teachings of the Jesus described in the synoptic gospels.

This absence in Matthew, Mark, and Luke should challenge or even confront the post-mortem, other-world emphasis in Christianity today.

Consider these two other passages from Matthew:

"You are the salt of THE EARTH. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be

made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot." (Matthew 5:13, emphasis added)

"Your kingdom come, your will be done, ON EARTH as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10, emphasis added)

By much of White Evangelical Christianity's focus one would assume Matthew's gospel instead read, "Blessed are the meek for they shall make it to heaven." This departs from the early Jewish Jesus moment, which focused on healing our world, not escaping it. Jesus and his early followers viewed this world as our home. We were not simply passing through it to someplace better.

With a focus on heaven, we have emphasized the spiritual over the material, and defined the material as less-than or "sinful." This focus has also done immeasurable damage by inspiring complicity with, participation in, or sponsorship of earthly systemic injustice, economic, racial, gendered, sexual, and more. Many Christians also live unmoved by the deep ecological crisis we are now facing as a human race.

What we find instead in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is that Jesus did not focus on getting people out of this place to some far distant heaven. Instead, he focused on bringing justice, liberation, reparation and healing to his fellow earthly inhabitants, in his own Jewish society.

Jesus after all was not a Christian. He was a Jew, and healing our world has a rich Jewish history. Bringing healing and transformation to earthly systems of

injustice was the Jewish prophetic soil in which the roots of the gospels grew. The gospels' earthly focus traces back to the ancient Hebrew Genesis narrative, as well.

"Then God said, 'Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, so that they may have dominion over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'" (Genesis 1:26)

The early Christian community, which also persevered for us the last book of the New Testament, ends the canon not with Earth being forsaken for a heavenly dwelling, but with the earth being repaired, restored, and healed.

"I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God'." (Revelation 21:2-3)

Whatever one makes of the book of Revelation and its many interpretations, its story ends on Earth, not in heaven.

There are some differences of belief in contemporary Christianity on this point. Some believe we go to heaven permanently at death. Some believe instead that heaven is a temporary resting place before Earth is finally restored. Martin Luther and some Anabaptists such as Michael Sattler

believed this in the 16th Century. And still some other Christians don't believe they will ever enter a cosmic heaven, but believe that death is a sort of "sleep" where they wait on a future resurrection here on Earth.

I'm not personally concerned with these minute differences. I'm concerned about what fruit the beliefs we do hold produce in our lives. Is our focus getting a cosmic heaven while we ignore systemic injustice, oppression, or violence in concrete ways here on earth? Does a person's beliefs enable and empower them to engage justice work here in our world, now presently?

I don't believe that as a follower of Jesus, we should be living as if "this world is not our home." Let's no longer say, "We are just passing through."

I remember an advertisement for an interfaith chapel in Atlanta's international airport years ago. The advertisement had clip art of a kneeling person, and under the image it said, "Because we're all just passing through." It was a fitting slogan for an airport where people are literally "passing through" every day.

But the more I pondered it, I don't believe Jesus taught that. This world IS our home and we have a lot of work to do yet. "ON EARTH as it is in heaven" is a prayer not yet answered, and we are the ones that must answer it. We are the ones we've been waiting on, as Alice Walker stated, and Jesus showed us how. We have to first let go of our fixed idea that this world is evil and something we must escape. No. This world has evil in it, but it has beauty, too. It has injustice, but also compassion, justice, charity, and love. As Jesus-followers, we are called to foster justice and compassion and care where they are

thriving. We are called to sow the seeds of life-giving change. We are called to display what our world could look like if it was shaped according the ethics of resource-sharing, mutual aid, distributive justice, the connectedness of people, and the interconnectedness of the communities we belong to.

In Luke's gospel Jesus commissioned his followers "to proclaim the kingdom of God and TO HEAL THE SICK" (Luke 9:2, emphasis added).

There is sickness in our world—physical, economic, political, social, and ecological. Our first concern should not be to leave it all behind, but to bring healing to the world around us. Jesus modeled how we can be conduits of healing to this world, and we are to be about setting that healing in motion. We must be about restoration, not relocation; our goal should not be to depart, but to remain, doing as much good as we can in the time we have been given.

This world IS our home. We are NOT just passing through; we are here to stay. Even if your beliefs state that at some point in the future you will find yourself elsewhere, it will be at that location that you can sing that you are "just passing through." The story of the New Testament ends here, on Earth, and for the sake of those that will come after us, we must take up the work on healing our world here today.

This may take some deep transition in our beliefs. It also must create an even deeper transition in our actions.

We must become more concerned with present systemic injustice.

We must become more concerned with ecological destruction as a result of prioritized capital gain.

We must begin to place people and planet over power, profit, and privilege.

If we are to have a brighter tomorrow, we must lay the foundation for it today.

To follow the Jesus of the synoptic gospels is to deeply, humbly engage our communities and our society. What we'll find when we do is that this kind of work is already being done by many who have been doing it quite a while. We'll find that they have wisdom that they will offer, if we are humble enough to listen and learn. And there is plenty to do. We can come alongside them, put our hand to the plow, and invest our energy into the work as well.

I'm reminded of the words referenced by Rami M. Shapiro in *Wisdom of the Jewish Sages: A Modern Reading of Pirke Avot*:

"Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it." (p. 41)

We are in this together.

Together we can create beautiful communities of love and justice.

Another world is possible if we choose it.

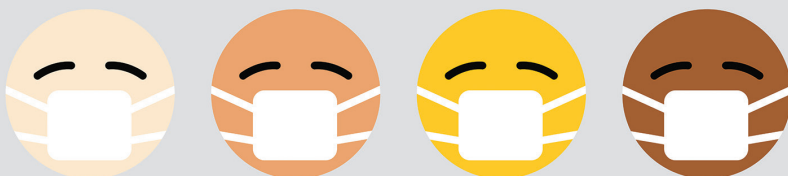
And we can.

I'll close with these words the Jewish Jesus would have grown up hearing read in the synagogues on Sabbaths throughout the year:

"Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, 'Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, 'Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?' No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it." (Deuteronomy 30:11-14)

HeartGroup Application

It has been shown that we have the ability to slow the spread of COVID-19 if we act together. In moments like these, we affirm that all people are made in



COVID-19

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COVID-19 and Renewed Heart Ministries

Community is at the heart of everything we believe and do here at Renewed Heart Ministries. We want our supporters to know we are taking the COVID-19 pandemic seriously. The public's health and safety is our top priority right now. Our operations are continuing with each of our RHM team working from home. For the safety of our community, we have postponed all in-person events.

We want to encourage each of you to listen to what the experts are saying right now. On a deeply personal note, I lost my mother to H1N1. We are closely monitoring the guidance from local and federal authorities, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to safeguard our RHM community and to participate in safeguarding the health of our population at large. We encourage you to do the same and stay informed.

We will continue doing our much-needed work during this time. And we'll use our blog to share key updates and encouragement with you throughout this time, as well. We'll continue to brainstorm how we can best serve the needs of those in our larger society who are the most at risk as our situation continues to evolve. As someone who supports the work of RHM, we want you to be assured

Renewed Heart Ministries is doing its part to help flatten the contagion curve here in the U.S.

We want to encourage each of you to continue to foster connections while practicing social distancing. We are deeply encouraged as we see how communities are coming together during this time. Human connection is essential to daily life. We want to continue to encourage our HeartGroups to find ways to *virtually* gather together while remaining in your homes. Together we can do this. This, too, shall pass. For now, our interconnectedness has never been more apparent. And together we can flatten this curve and keep our most vulnerable safe.

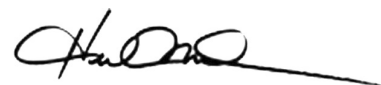
Thank you for showing your love and being a source of compassion and justice during this critical time.

From all of us here at RHM, remember to wash your hands, remain home as much as possible, and if you do need to go out, practice social distancing of at least six feet.

Stay well!

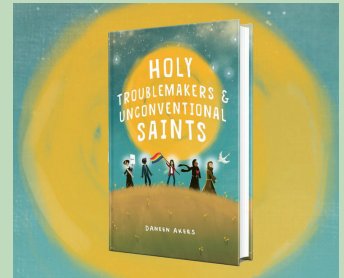
With much love and gratitude for each of you,

We'll get through this together,



Herb Montgomery
Director | Speaker | Author
Renewed Heart Ministries

Book of the Month for April 2020



Holy Troublemakers & Unconventional Saints by Daneen Akers

This is a storybook about people of diverse faiths who rocked the religious boat on behalf of love and justice.

With most of us at home with our kiddos, this is a perfect book for this time!

Holy Troublemakers & Unconventional Saints is an illustrated children's storybook, but we believe it should be read by all ages. This book features the stories of people of diverse faiths who worked for more love and justice in their corner of the world, even when that meant rocking the religious boat. These are people from different religions and time periods who spoke truth to power and did the right thing, even when it was the hard thing. These are not perfect people, but they are people we can glimpse the holy through.

Holy Troublemakers & Unconventional Saints emphasizes the stories of women, LGBTQ people, people of color, Indigenous people, and others too often written out of religious narratives. The book is written for middle grade age children (and their adults) ages 8 and up. But again, we here at RHM believe it's a book of stories that will inspire all ages.

Copies can be purchased at holyytroublemakers.com

SOCIAL JESUS

A Blog Exploring the Intersection of Faith and Societal Justice



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

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/



When Economic Reversal Catches the Elite by Surprise

"This wakefulness means possessing a continuing awareness of issues related to marginalized people and their struggle for justice. It requires an intersectional awareness of racial, gender, economic, LGBT, and other social forms of justice."

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/03/economic-reversal-elite-surprise/



Using Violence to Shape Our World

"It is up to the communities that face oppression to determine what methods they will use to liberate themselves. It must not be determined for them by their oppressors. Jesus stood within his own oppressed community and taught that non-violence was the better way."

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/03/using-violence-to-shape-our-world/



Shaping a New World at the End of Our Present System

"Will we be a source of genuine light in our world's oppression and exploitation, or will we choose a blinding light that actually results in death for us all? James Douglass offers hope: 'How does one live at the [potential] end of the world? By beginning a new one.'"

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/03/shaping-new-world-end-present-system/



A Community of Healing Justice

"At its source, it's not about a lone hero who does something revolutionary on our behalf. It's a call to participate, with others, in a community of healing justice."

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/03/community-healing-justice/



The "Kingdom of God" is within You

"This individualistic interpretation makes the kingdom abstract. It does not address systemic injustice, oppression, or violence in concrete ways. This might explain why this interpretation resonates largely with the elites."

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/03/kingdom-of-god-within-you/



Don't Stop Believing

And even if it doesn't come to full fruition in our lifetimes, the kind of world we want to create cannot receive its finishing touches by future generations if we haven't either laid the groundwork for them or kept building today on the foundations of those that have come before us.

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/03/dont-stop-believing/



When Our Differences Threaten to Make Our Justice Work Fragmented

Ignorance is inevitable: our experiences are not all the same. But division is optional. Each of us can choose repentance. And if repentance is genuinely pre-sent, forgiveness can be chosen as well.

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/03/when-differences-make-justice-work-fragmented/



A Special Message to Our HeartGroups

It has been shown that we have the ability to slow the spread of COVID-19 if we act together. In moments like these, we affirm that all people are made in the image of God to live as part of God's peace, love, and justice. There is nothing more powerful and resilient than when people come together to prioritize "the least of these."

We at RHM are asking all HeartGroups not to meet together physically at this time, and encouraging each of you to stay virtually connected and to practice social distancing. We can still be there for each other to help ease anxiety and fears. We ask that when you do go out, you keep a six feet distance between you and others to stop the spread of the virus.

This is also a time where we can practice the resource-sharing and mutual aid found in the gospels. Make sure the others in your group have what they need. We are more interconnected than we realize, as this has proven. And we need each other during this time.

This is a time to work together and prioritize protecting those most vulnerable among us. We'll get through this. For now, let's figure out new ways to take care of each other while we are physically apart.

As you are able, stay home and stay well!

...Not Just Passing Through cont'd from page 3

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Right where you are, keep living in love, choosing compassion, taking action, working toward justice.

Another world is possible if we choose it.

Stay well!

I love each of you dearly, I'll see you next month. ■



Photo by Simon Mätzinger on Unsplash

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

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



JESUS FOR EVERYONE

Podcast

WWW.RENEWEDHEARTMINISTRIES.COM

The "Jesus For Everyone" podcast

New episodes every Friday!

A weekly podcast where we talk about the intersection of faith and societal justice and what a first-century, Jewish prophet of the poor from Galilee offers us today in our work of compassion, love and justice.

**renewedheartministries.com/
Podcasts**

**2020 Projected Budget
Goal: \$185,000.00**

**2020 Projected Monthly
Budget Goal: \$15,417.00**

**February's Contributions
Received:
\$5,807.89**

**2020 Contributions
Received To Date:
\$13,643.91**

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.***

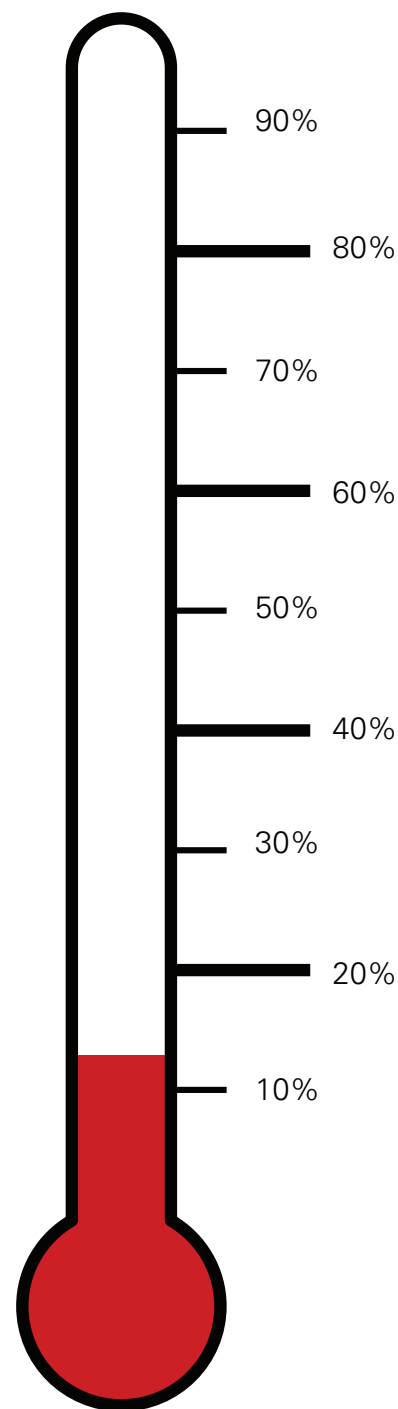
**Please consider making a
tax-deductible donation to
Renewed Heart Ministries, today.**

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

**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.

**RENEWED
HEART
MINISTRIES**



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Handwritten signature: "Ali"



"I KNOW THE BIBLE SAYS THERE'S A RAINBOW AROUND GOD'S THRONE
 BUT THIS IS NOT WHAT I EXPECTED!"

In moments like these, we affirm that all people are made in the image of God to live as part of God's peace, love, and justice. There is nothing more powerful and resilient than when people come together to prioritize "the least of these."

World Health Organization guidelines:

Wash hands frequently

Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth

Cover cough with bend in elbow or tissue

Stay home if feeling unwell

Practice six feet of social distancing and avoid crowded places

For fever, cough, and difficulty breathing, seek medical care early, but call first

#COVID-19

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