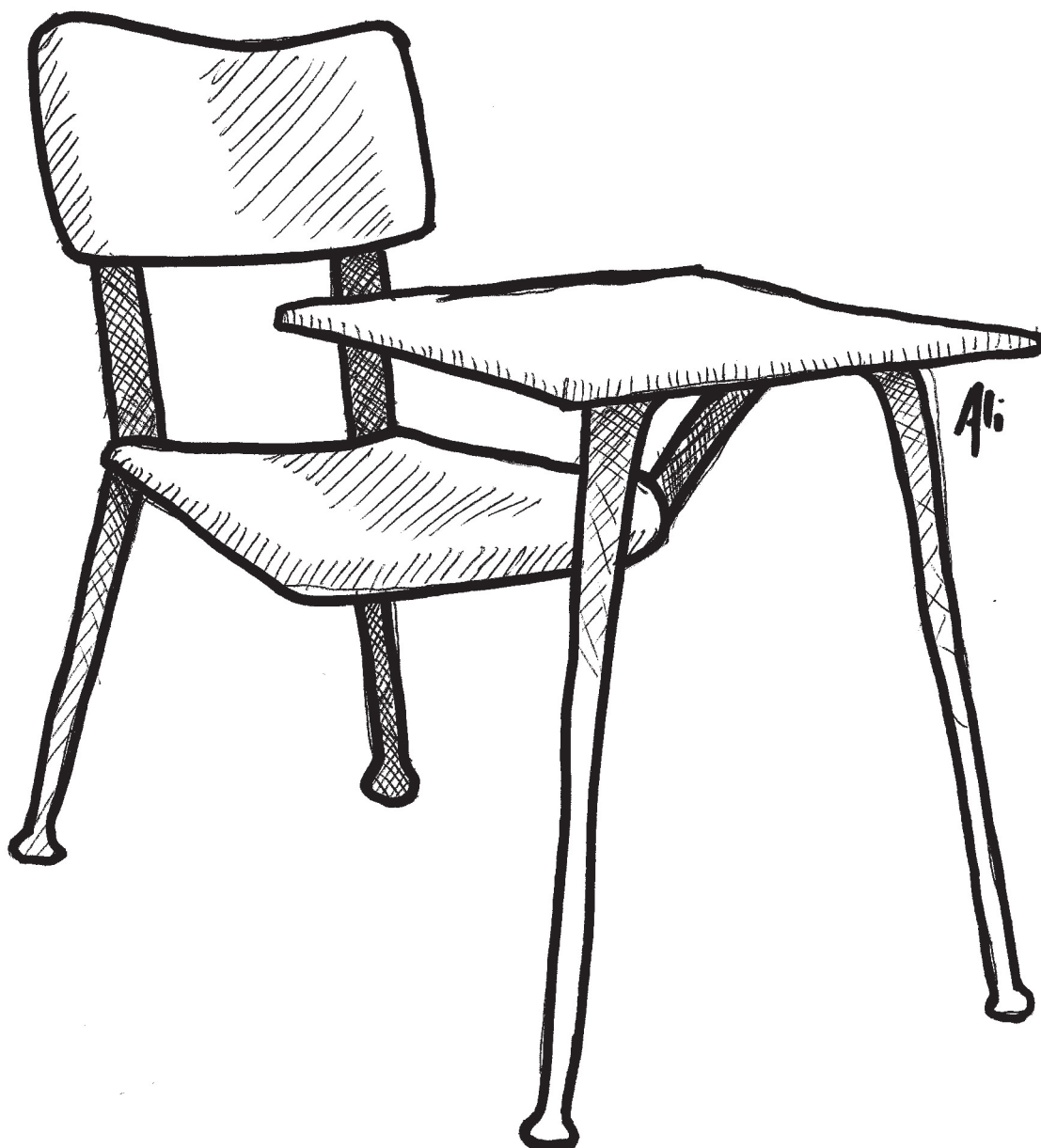


RENEWED
HEART
MINISTRIES



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∴ THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES ∴ AUGUST 2020 ∴



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RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES

P.O. Box 1211, Lewisburg, WV 24901

Phone: 304.520.0030

Email: info@renewedheartministries.com

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@HerbMontgomery



Herb Montgomery



As COVID-19 cases continue to rise and set new records each day, remember that the world that exists post-COVID will be determined by the kind of people we choose to be right now during COVID. Will we be people who sacrifice others, or will we choose a more perfect union, one, this time around, rooted in the golden rule and love of neighbor?

Systems of Sacrifice

by Herb Montgomery

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus says,

“If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice, ‘you would not have condemned the innocent.” (Matthew 12:7, emphasis added)

And in John’s gospel, we read,

“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be healed through him.” (John 3:17, emphasis added) The word John uses here, often translated as “saved” in this gospel rather as “healed,” is *sozo*. In other gospels, translators more often emphasize healing: She said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed [*sozo*].” Jesus turned and saw her. “Take heart, daughter,” he said, “your faith has healed [*sozo*] you.” And the woman was healed [*sozo*] at that moment. (Matthew 9:21-22)

He pleaded earnestly with him, “My little daughter is dying. Please come and put

your hands on her so that she will be healed [*sozo*] and live.” (Mark 5:23)

And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed [*sozo*]. (Mark 6:56)

These aren’t just texts where scholars can argue the meaning of a word. This word, *sozo*, represents the entire story. The story in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is the story of a Jesus who went about “doing good and healing all...” (Acts 10:38, emphasis added).

In these gospels, salvation is not about Jesus making a sacrifice that allows a cosmic Being to let us off the hook. Rather, it’s about healing. The Jesus of the canonical gospels brought personal healing, and he also called for societal and systemic healing: a society that included and prioritized the excluded and marginalized.

Jesus ‘political and economic protest in the temple courtyard was standing up to systems that sacrifice the vulnerable: the poor widows and fatherless. “They devour widows ‘houses.” (Mark 12:40)

But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.” (Mark 12:42-43)

Religion that God accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress. (James 1:27)

I also want to note, because some people repeatedly bring Jesus ‘temple protest to my attention in an attempt to ignore Jesus ‘nonviolent teachings, that Jesus ‘actions in the Temple were not because of a violent fit of rage or Jesus losing his temper. His protest was premeditated, intentional, and purposeful (Mark 11:11), and it is in perfect harmony

with his teachings on nonviolent resistance, even given the property damage involved.

Jesus valued people over profit and the property of the privileged and powerful. His protest shut down the economic activities of the temple that day, making it impossible for things to continue on as normal.

It reminds me of Sam Wells’ introduction to *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus* by Ched Myers:

“The one thing everyone seems to agree on today is that there’s plenty wrong with the world. There are only two responses to this—either go and put it right yourself, or, if you can’t, make life pretty uncomfortable for those who can until they do. When we take stock of our relationship with the powerful, we ask ourselves, ‘Does the shape of my life reflect my longing to see God set people free, and do I challenge those who keep others in slavery?’”

“The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: Stand in the gate of the LORD’S house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah, you that enter these gates to worship the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and let me dwell with you in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD. ‘For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one

with another, if you do not oppress the foreigner, the orphan,, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, THEN I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are safe!'—only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your sight?" (Jeremiah 7:9-11, emphasis added.)

Both Jeremiah's and Jesus 'society had grown into a system of oppression where those who were vulnerable—the foreigner, the orphan, the widow, the innocent—were sacrificed for the benefit of those in power. This also brings to mind how our working population is being sacrificed today in the name of the economy during this COVID-19 pandemic.

The Jesus story calls us away from a way of life that sacrifices foreigners, orphans, widows, and innocent victims. The gospel story ties social healing to our choice to end systems that sacrifice people and to start a different way of doing life. Economic and political systems of sacrifice that demand the death of innocent victims for the benefit of the masses were the focus of Jesus 'protest that day.

It also does not matter whether the sacrificial system depends on the death of political enemies or patriotic, a religion of war that sacrifices the present generation and assumes that citizens are worthy of their sacrifices. It doesn't matter whether the sacrificial system is religious, rooted in fear of the Divine, or based on the shunning, marginalization, and scapegoating of those deemed "less than" or "other" to maintain the favor of a god or gods. It doesn't matter if the sacrificial system is economic, driven by greed, and sacrificing essential workers to maintain the lifestyle of those at the top of the social pyramid.

The Jesus story does not affirm those political, patriotic, religious, or economic "holy places" of sacrifice, those "dirty

rotten systems" as Dorothy Day called them. In the Jesus narrative, our future hope is not found in sacrifice but in a more distributively just future where everyone has what they need to thrive. This story calls for a new beginning of a world where we bend our societies 'moral arc toward justice, compassion, inclusion, and equity.

Jesus 'last supper with his disciples invites us to be the kind of people who work toward that world while we continue an ongoing critique of the way our world is sacrificially shaped.

"It is in food and drink offered equally to everyone that the presence of God and Jesus is found. But food and drink are the material bases of life, so the Lord's Supper is political criticism and economic challenge as well as sacred rite and liturgical worship." (Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Parker, *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of the World for Crucifixion and Empire*, p. 31)

The Jesus story calls us first to recognize systems maintained by the sacrifice of others, and then to live our lives in opposition to them. Ultimately systems of sacrifice are not sustainable. As our original passage reminds us, the Jesus story is about healing the brokenness of our world, and that healing begins with saying no to systems of sacrifice.

Earlier this year, many were willing to sacrifice elderly people for the economy. I was deeply alarmed by that rhetoric. Then when Black communities and communities of color were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, their deaths were also a sacrifice many were willing to make. Then came a willingness to sacrifice "essential workers," but making them more expendable than essential. And people's obstinate refusal to wear a mask in the name of individual freedom expresses willingness to sacrifice someone else. Most recently, the system is proving

continued on page 6



A Special Message to Our HeartGroups

We at RHM are continuing to ask all HeartGroups not to meet together physically at this time. Please stay virtually connected and to practice physical distancing. You can still be there for each other to help ease anxiety and fears. When you do go out, please keep a six-foot 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. How many ways can you take care of others while we are physically apart?

Quotable Quotes

"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

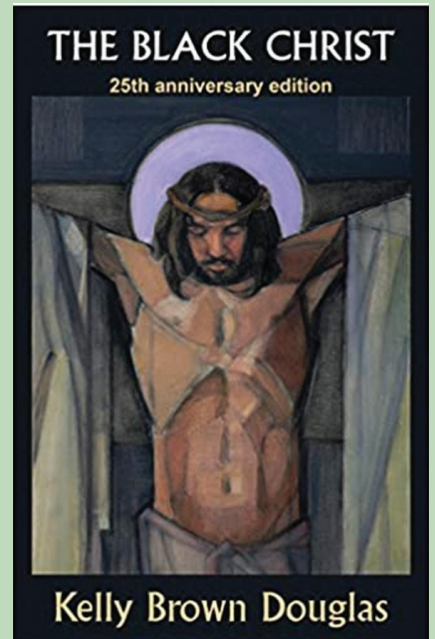
— Jesus;
Matthew 7.12-14

Book of the Month for August 2020

The Black Christ, 25th Anniversary Edition
by Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas

In *The Black Christ*, first published in 1994, Kelly Brown Douglas offers a compelling portrait of who Jesus is for the Black community. She identifies the Black Christ not strictly in terms of race or theological constructs. The "Blackness" of Christ has more to do with commitment to Black freedom than appearance.

Beginning with the early testimonies of the enslaved, through the writings and thought of religious and literary figures, voices from the Civil Rights and Black Power era, through the contemporary work of Black and Womanist theologians, Douglas presents a living tradition that speaks powerfully to the message of our day: Black Lives Matter. In a new



introduction, she offers a moving account of the questions that motivated her work, and an overview of where those questions have since led her.

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.



Weekly Zoom HeartGroup on Wednesday Nights

Each Wednesday evening, Glendale City Church will be hosting a Zoom-HeartGroup led by Herb Montgomery. Our discussion each week will focus on the content in Renewed Heart Ministries weekly eSight articles and the Jesus For Everyone podcast published each Friday. The time of each Zoom session will be on Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m. Pacific/10:00 p.m. Eastern.

For more information and for the link to participate each week, follow Pastor Todd Leonard's Facebook page at facebook.com/toddjleonard

#heartgroup #dojustice #citychurchonline

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/



More Effective Ways To Care (Parts 1–3)

What does it look like for Jesus followers to create ways of organizing communities that display a way of human organizing where we don't seek to dominate but do protect and care for one another? What Jesus was doing for his early Jewish followers was commissioning them to display what a community could look like if full of humble egalitarian relationships rather than hierarchical ones.

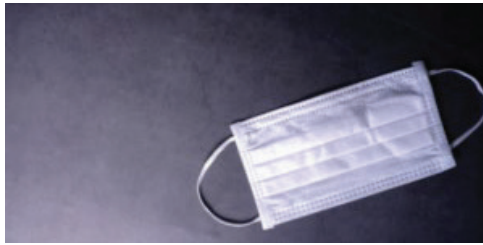
Begin reading this series at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/07/more-effective-ways-care-part1/



Mislabelling Social Justice as Foolishness (Parts 1–3)

So the passage in Matthew isn't about using the term "fool," but about mislabelling as fools those who call for justice, inclusion, and systemic change as Jesus and Jesus' followers did within their own society.

Begin reading this series at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/07/mislabelling-social-justice-foolishness-part1/



Systems of Sacrifice (Parts 1–3)

In these gospels, salvation is not about Jesus making a sacrifice that allows a cosmic Being to let us off the hook. Rather, it's about healing. The Jesus of the canonical gospels brought personal healing, and he also called for societal and systemic healing: a society that included and prioritized the excluded and marginalized.

Begin reading this series at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/07/systems-sacrifice-part1/



Choosing Peace through Militarized Policing or Distributive Justice (Parts 1–3)

"What we have here is two paths toward peace. One was enforced by militarized power and the other addressed the root causes of injustice that lead to the lack of peace."

Begin reading this series at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/06/choosing-peace-through-militarized-policing-part1/



A Path Toward Societal Equity (Parts 1–3)

"Today's climate for those deemed essential workers during our present pandemic is similar. As the Swiss author, Max Frisch, wrote, "We asked for workers; we got people instead." Any society produces tension when the value of societal equity is violated, by design, to benefit a few at the top of society at the expense of the masses on the margins and undersides."

Begin reading this series at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/06/path-toward-societal-equity-part1/



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](https://renewedheartministries.com/Podcasts)**

Systems of Sacrifice cont'd from page 3

willing to sacrifice our children to force local governments to re-open schools. There will be a housing and food crisis if we do not find another way.

All of this doesn't have to be the case. We can allow COVID to inspire us to create a more life-giving society where the most vulnerable people are prioritized and cared for. If we don't, this crisis will only deepen our willingness to sacrifice people's lives and the status quo will remain unchanged.

As COVID-19 cases continue to rise and set new records each day, remember that the world that exists post-COVID will be determined by the kind of people we choose to be right now during COVID. Will we be people who sacrifice others, or will we choose a more perfect union, one, this time around, rooted in the golden rule and love of neighbor?

"If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice, 'you would not have condemned the innocent.'"—Matthew's Jesus

HeartGroup Application

We at RHM are continuing to ask all HeartGroups not to meet together physically at this time. Please stay virtually connected and practice physical distancing. When you do go out, please keep a six-foot distance between you and others, wear a mask, and continue to wash your hands 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. This is a time to work together and prioritize protecting those most vulnerable among us. How many ways can you take care of each other while we are physically apart?

1. Share something that spoke to you from this week's eSight/Podcast episode with your HeartGroup.
2. What are some ways can you imagine our society in the U.S. responding to COVID-19 that does not sacrifice the vulnerable, those disproportionately impacted, or deem any human life as expendable?

How has politicizing our present pandemic placed vulnerable groups in the path of sacrifice? Discuss with your group.

3. What can you do this week, big or small, to continue setting in motion the work of shaping our world into a safe, compassionate, just home for all? Discuss with your group and pick something from the discussion to put into practice this upcoming week.

Thanks for checking in with us this month.

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

I love each of you dearly. ■

Quotable Quotes

"...there are certain things in our nation and in the world which I am proud to be maladjusted and which I hope all men of good-will will be maladjusted until the good societies realize. I say very honestly that I never intend to become adjusted to segregation and discrimination. I never intend to become adjusted to religious bigotry. I never intend to adjust myself to economic conditions that will take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few. I never intend to adjust myself to the madness of militarism, to self-defeating effects of physical violence."

— Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.;
18 December 1963;
Western Michigan University



Photo by Jon Tyson on Unsplash

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

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

**2020's Projected Budget
January-June:
\$92,502.00**

**2020's Contributions
Received Through June:
\$36,490.89**

**June's Contributions
Received:
\$5,254.04**

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.

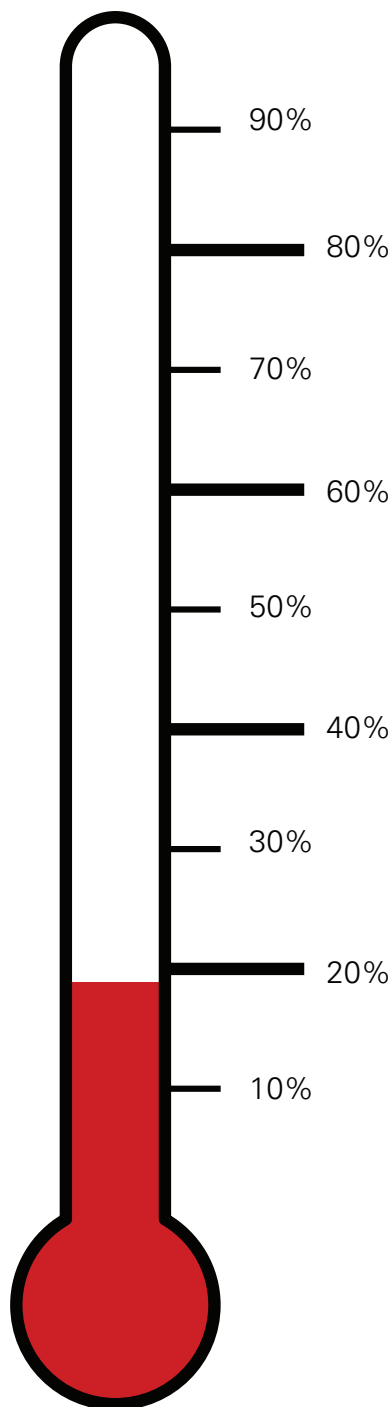
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better humans.***

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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.**

**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!"**



Quotable Quotes

"Our great honor lies in being just what Jesus was and is. To be accepted by those who accept Him, rejected by all who reject Him, loved by those who love Him and hated by everyone who hates Him. What greater glory could come to any man?"

— A.W. Tozee;
Born After Midnight

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.



Front cover artwork by Ali Montgomery.

**"Entering paradise in this life
is not an individual
achievement but is the gift of
communities that train
perception and teach ethical
grace. Paradise provides deep
reservoirs for resistance and
joy. It calls us to embrace
life's aching tragedies and
persistent beauties, to labor
for justice and peace, to honor
one another's dignity, and to
root our lives in the soil of
this good and difficult earth."**

WITNESS
RITA NAKASHIMA BROCK & REV. DR. REBECCA PARKER A SAVING
PARADISE: HOW CHRISTIANITY TRADED LOVE OF THIS WORLD
FOR CRUCIFIXION AND EMPIRE, P. 410 P. 171

RENEWEDHEARTMINISTRIES.COM

@nakedpastor.com

Kali Ward

