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Herb Montgomery



Happy New Year!

2020 was a challenging year for many of us, including non-profits. And we could not have made it through those challenges without you.

Renewed Heart Ministries provides its resources free of charge to assist people in finding their own intersection between their faith and societal justice in its many varied expressions. Because of this, we are solely dependent on the donations of our supporters to continue our work. Because of your help, in 2021 we will continue to develop resources

to challenge and encourage our communities toward change.

We are passionate about engaging the relationship of faith, love, compassion, and justice, as well as working to renew hope and inspire action as we participate together in shaping our world into a compassionate, just, and safe home for everyone.

In the last quarter of 2020, I was able to share presentations on Jesus' teachings, helping folks find the intersections of their faith and social justice, today, in its varied expressions with four congregations:

Edgewood Presbyterian Church
Lewisburg, WV

First Congregational United Church of Christ
Portland, Oregon

Good News Seventh-day Adventist Church
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Spirit Alive Congregation
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Zoom is certainly not the same as being able to spend time with congregations in person, but during this critical time of social distancing within the Covid-19 pandemic, Zoom has been surprisingly effective.

No one could have predicted how this pandemic would affect each of us. Renewed Heart Ministries continues to rely on you to exist and continue being a voice for renewal and change. *Annual receipts for your donations given in 2020 will be sent out this month.* And we can't thank you enough for believing in and supporting our work.



Reimagining Our World in 2021

by Herb Montgomery | January 8, 2021

Mark's stories about Jesus begin:

"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'" (Mark 1:14-15)

If the scholars have rightly determined

when Mark's gospel was written, it was written at a time when many Jewish followers of Jesus were trying to find purpose after the devastation of Jerusalem, the temple, and the temple-state that functioned from there. Political tensions with Rome had escalated to uprising, war, and ruin. With Jerusalem devastated, Mark draws our attention away from a Jerusalem-centered movement and to a Galilean-centered movement rooted in the teachings of the itinerant Jesus.

Mark's gospel also redefines the "kingdom" of the apocalyptic book of

Daniel's "son of man" (see Daniel 7). In Mark's gospel, Jesus is the "messiah" (Mark 1:1). This label had yet not become Christianized or anti-Semitic, and was still associated with many Jewish liberation movements whose anointed ones ("messiahs") promised liberation from Rome. Rome's most recent response to these messiahs had razed Jerusalem to the ground.

The Hebrew prophets called for social justice and liberation of the oppressed, and located restoration on earth, with "Jerusalem" being the center to which the entire world would flock. And now Jerusalem is no more.

Now in 2021, in wake of the present Covid-19 pandemic, so many here in the U.S. have experienced losses of unimaginable magnitude. Does Mark's version of the Jesus story still offer us today any concrete hope and encouragement toward our hopes for a just, safe, compassionate world? How does the gospel of Mark call us to reimagine a just society in 2021? We'll

consider this and more in this short series.

If Mark could offer good news or “gospel” in the midst of such loss for its intended audience, maybe we can find some here, too.

Mark’s Gospel

In this climate, Mark’s gospel reimagines the kingdom of this son of man. Could an end of violence, injustice and oppression rise out of Galilee rather than Judea? If we compared Judea and Galilee in the first century, we’d find ethnic, geographic, political, economic, cultural, linguistic, and religious differences between them. Matthew and Mark emphasize the Galilean context, while Luke’s gospel and Acts centers its story of Jesus in Jerusalem and, from there, grows (through Paul) to the rest of the Gentile world.

Mark’s gospel, believed to be the earliest written in our Christian scriptures, uses the Greek term for Good News or “Gospel,” *euaggelion*. This originally was neither a religious nor a Christian term but was instead a political term that announced a new status quo. Whenever Rome would conquer a territory, it would send out an “evangelist” who would proclaim to the conquered territory the “gospel” or good news that they were now under the rule of the peace of Rome (*Pax Romana*). The messenger would announce that Caesar was the son of God and Rome was the savior of the world. They would proclaim that Rome’s dominion would give the conquered territory a newfound prosperity and peace (Plutarch, *Agesilaus*, p. 33; Plutarch *Demetrius*, p. 17; Plutarch, *Moralia* [Glory of Athens], p. 347)

The challenge for Mark’s audience would have been that Rome, the supposed savior, and Caesar, this son of God, had just obligated Jerusalem and the Jewish temple. The Roman term gospel communicated the arrival of a new social order, but, for the Jewish people Rome’s order had failed in the most harmful way possible.

The Jesus of Mark’s gospel took this term, and announced the “Kingdom of God” rather than the kingdom of Rome (Mark 1:15). I prefer Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas’ term “God’s just future” rather

than “kingdom,” given the patriarchal and politically problematic nature of kingdoms for us today.

Never once does the Jesus of Mark offer people a way to “get to heaven.” Rather, he travels the Galilean countryside announcing a new social order, here and now, in opposition to Rome’s failed order. The political and economic social order among the elite families of the temple-state of Jerusalem had proven incapable of stemming social unrest and uprising.

Though Jerusalem is no more by the time Mark is written, Jesus teaches in the justice traditions of the Hebrew prophets. Is the just world envisioned by the prophets and Jesus still possible without Jerusalem? Mark’s gospel answers, yes: God’s just future is still possible, if we’ll choose it. Old geographical expectations about the new social order would have to change, but Mark could still envision the hope of a just, safe, compassionate world with a place for us all through his Jesus and his teachings.

Today, we must hold on to the hope that a different iteration of our world is possible, too.

Repent and Believe

Mark’s gospel calls its audience to “repent and believe the good news.” It almost sounds tone deaf in the face of Rome. Yet this language of repentance and belief was not purely religious. For Mark’s audience, the call to “repent and believe” a “gospel” different than Rome’s would have been deeply political.

The Greek word for repent is *metanoeo*. It means to rethink something, to think differently about things, or to reconsider. Mark’s Jesus proclaims a gospel that invited a radical rethinking of how to order society. Jesus was calling his followers to reassess their values and placing the vulnerable at the center of those values, not just the wealthy and elite. This rethinking applied to both those being oppressed by the current social order and to those oppressing them.

Today, too, we can predict that exploitative systems and economic structures must change or humanity will cease to exist. Mark’s audience had seen exploitation’s destructive end. The



ever-burning fire of violence between oppressors and the oppressed had escalated till Jerusalem stood smoldering.

The Greek phrase for “repent and believe” is *metanoesein kai pistos*. This phrase is used in other contexts than in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Josephus’ autobiography, for example, records an event that took place when he tried to end various Galilean seditions “without bloodshed.” Josephus engaged with the “captain” of the brigands “who were in the confines of Ptolemais” and told him that he would forgive “what he had done already, if he would repent of it, and be faithful to me [Josephus] hereafter.” Josephus was requiring this brigand to abandon his violent revolutionary inclinations and trust Josephus for a better way. Josephus uses the same phrase Jesus does: “*metanoesein kai pistos emoi*” (Thackeray, *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, p. 10)

Whereas Josephus blamed brigands and Jewish rebels for the destruction Rome wreaked on Jerusalem, today we’d call that victim-blaming. Rome chose to economically exploit the people in Galilee and Judea through client kings and the temple-state’s high priests. And when the people finally had been bled dry and could not take any more, Rome chose to respond by leveling Jerusalem to the ground.

Mark’s gospel lifts this phrase, *metanoesein kai pistos emoi*, (repent and believe in what I’m telling you) to call its audience not to the passive acceptance

continued on page 6

RHM's Recommended Reading for January

The Biblical Vision of Sabbath Economics

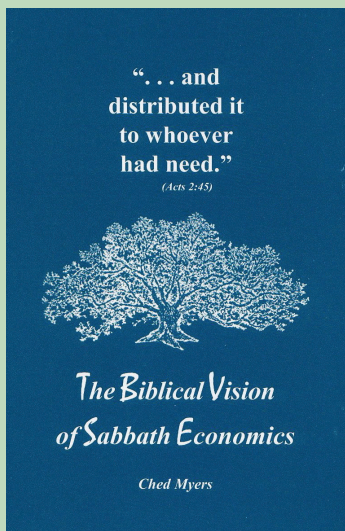
by Ched Myers

From the introduction:

"The topic of economics is exceedingly difficult to talk about in most First World churches, more taboo than politics or even sex. Yet no aspect of our individual lives and corporate lives is more determinative of our welfare. And few subjects are more frequently addressed in our scriptures."

From the back cover:

Ched Myers rescues the Hebrew Bible's tradition of Jubilee and Sabbath from the margins of contemporary



theological discourse concerning economics, and rereads them in a way that places them at the center of a new ethos and cosmology. He traces the witness of "Sabbath economics" through the life and teachings of Jesus and the early church, offering a compelling argument for why the Church today must offer alternatives to the dominant paradigms of economic theory and practice. Ideal for individual or group study, this book offers an

accessible path to understanding the relationship between biblical faith and economics. To take this tradition seriously today will challenge disciples to revise their assumptions about prevailing economic practice and renew their commitment to follow Jesus more faithfully in an increasingly hard-hearted, market-dominated world.

This book is presently awaiting another print run, but we have spoken with the publishers. PDFs of the gallery proofs (pre-print proof versions) can be purchased for just US \$5.00.

To purchase a PDF copy via **Paypal** email Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries at inquiries@bcm-net.org and they will send you a Paypal link.

Please ensure to provide your correct email address if it varies from your PayPal email.

Or to pay by **check**, please make it out in US Funds to:

Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries

And mail to:

PO Box 328 Oak View, CA 93022, USA

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.

Email info@renewedheartministries.com to receive the link for the Zoom meeting.

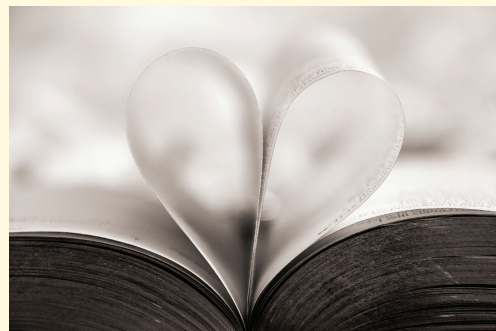


A Special Message to Our HeartGroups

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.



SOCIAL JESUS

A Blog Exploring the Intersection of Faith and Societal Justice



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

To Read the Advent Series below go to patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/



The Concrete Liberation Narratives of Advent (Part 1)

If we are going to wrest these two narratives from centuries of purely religious and otherworldly interpretations, we must discover their historical context. Once we see that context, we cannot unsee it.

The Concrete Liberation Narratives of Advent (Part 2)

If we are to rediscover the original subversive power of the birth narratives of Jesus and rightly apply those stories to our lives today, we must read them in the context of the lives and hopes of people in 1st Century Galilee and Judea who daily faced dehumanizing and economically crushing oppression.

The Concrete Liberation Narratives of Advent (Part 3)

This year, as many of us are facing our own harsh realities, there may have never been a more appropriate time to consider the concrete liberation in the birth narratives of the Advent season.



The Concrete Liberation Narratives of Advent (Part 4)

Including the Magi in his story about had both international political and religious implications. And Matthew's audience would have recognized their presence in the story as signaling.

The Concrete Liberation Narratives of Advent (Part 5)

Originally, Jewish liberation movements used phrases like this. But we must leave these phrases in their own social context if we are to avoid Christianizing them into the harmful anti-Semitic beliefs.

The Concrete Liberation Narratives of Advent (Part 6)

These stories are political. They are rooted in the hunger of an oppressed people for social justice. They are about concrete liberation from injustice, both systemic and private, in the here and now.



The Concrete Liberation Narratives of Advent (Part 7)

Luke's birth narratives are centered in the social location of the common people rather than that of the elite of the day.

The Concrete Liberation Narratives of Advent (Part 8)

Luke's songs of social, political, and economic deliverance for the poor, marginalized, peasants announce that a new social order of justice and abundance as well as surviving and thriving is possible.

The Concrete Liberation Narratives of Advent (Part 9)

Lifting up the poor and pulling down the elite is a direct call to reducing societal, political and economic inequities.

***Find many more articles at
patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/***



Photo by Stephen Ellis on Unsplash.com

What is Mark's Jesus saying to us today?

This vision is of a world of social structures rooted in love for all. As Dr. Emilie Townes states, and as we at RHM are fond of often quoting, "If we begin with the belief that God loves everyone, justice isn't very far behind." In the words of Mark's gospel, when we start with love, a just future "has come near" (Mark 1:15).

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.

1. Share something that spoke to you from this week's eSight/Podcast episode with your HeartGroup.
2. Justice is what love looks like in public. Take a moment to reimagine how you'd like to see our world reshaped this week. Discuss some of your reimagining 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 everyone?

Thanks for checking in with us.

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

I love each of you dearly,

I'll see you next month. ■



Photo by Priscilla Du Preez on Unsplash.com

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

"When days grow dark and nights grow dreary, we can be thankful that our God combines in his nature a creative synthesis of love and justice which will lead us through life's dark valleys and into sunlit pathways of hope and fulfillment."

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr;
A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart

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

**November's & December's
Year End Contributions:
\$64,129.41**

**2020's Total Contributions
Received for the Year:
\$126,580.38**

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.***

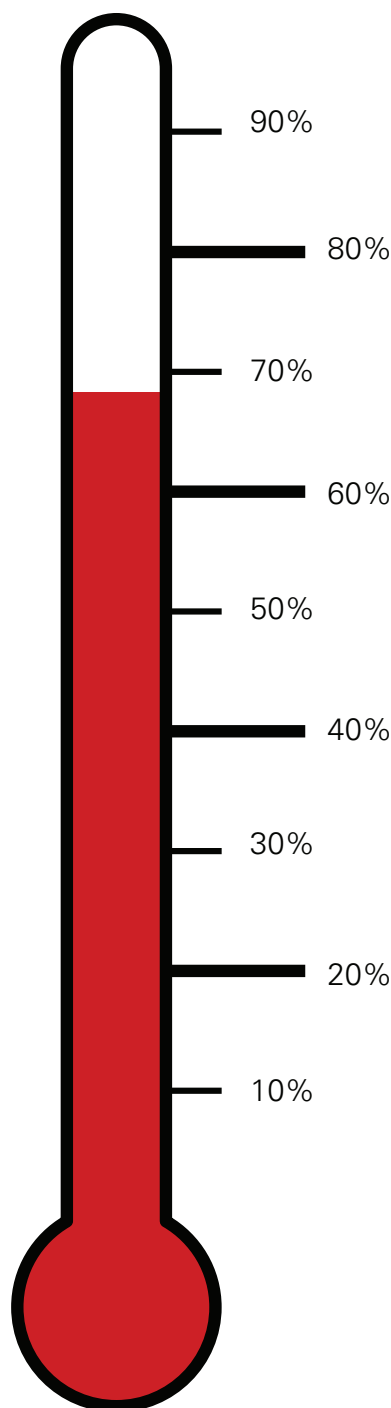
**Please consider making a
tax-deductible donation to
Renewed Heart Ministries today.**

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.**



Quotable Quotes

"These three views of life are as follows: First, embracing the individual, or the animal view of life; second, embracing the society, or the pagan view of life; third, embracing the whole world, or the divine view of life."

— Leo Tolstoy;
The Kingdom of God Is Within You



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

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



"I imagine one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with pain."

James Baldwin
The Fire Next Time

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