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# Salt, Light, and Cautious Optimism

by Herb Montgomery

## The Salt of the Earth

In Matthew's sermon on the mount we read,

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)

Audiences matter. Jesus directed these words to people in his society who faced daily oppression under Rome and marginalization in their own community. Many of them would have been farm workers. In the 1st Century, farmers used salt as fertilizer added to manure to enrich their soil. With this metaphor, Jesus encourages his listeners to more fully engage their world, not to try to escape it. They are to re-enrich the nutrient-depleted soil of this earth, to place their focus on "this world," not on the next. He directs his audience away from escape and he empowers them to make a difference in the world they live in.

Imagine it this way: Compassion and safety for everyone are just two plants that grow in the soil of a healthy society. When certain voices are marginalized or pushed to the fringes, however, their absence depletes the social soil. Jesus

is telling the marginalized and oppressed that they are the salt of the earth. Their inclusion can give back to the soil of a society the nutrients of a wider consciousness and perspective that enables compassion and safety for all to grow again. Including marginalized voices means integrating the many diverse experiences of life into a meaningful and coherent whole: inclusion uproots weeds of fear and insecurity and provides rich soil for a society to produce compassion in the place of those weeds.

We in the U.S. have just gone through more than four years of our society enduring the depletion of compassion and safety for those who share this globe with us but whom our systems force to live on the fringes. Today's passage reminds us that they are the "salt" or fertilizer, and their voices will return to the soil the nutrients that need adding back to our society.

Jesus' shared table is not homogenous. It's at a heterogeneous table that we can share our unique and different life experiences, form a more beautiful and coherent worldview, and, with others, make this world a safer, more compassionate place for us all. Through this teaching, Jesus is saying that it is the subordinated, oppressed, and marginalized who restore the nutrients of society's depleted soil. It is the disinherited who are the "salt of the earth."

But mere diversity is not the goal. A safe and just world for everyone, where everyone can call our world home, is the goal. It will not be enough to see a

more diverse neo-liberalism in response to the last four years of neo-fascism. We will have to see if the inclusion of more diverse voices will allow those included to change the very systems they're joining. I have hope. But we will see.

## The Light of the World

Next in Matthew's passage, we read:

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine. (Matthew 5:14-15)

When we understand Jesus' audience to be disinherited Jews under Rome, those who were pressed down and silenced even among the ones forced to live on Jewish society's fringes, it becomes empowering to hear Jesus affirm that they are the light of the world. Jesus is investing those around him with value and telling them not to hide their light. They are to "let their light shine!"

Over the last four years, some of you who are reading this article (or listening to it) have been told that your voice is not welcome and you've been made to feel you are "other." To you, first and foremost, Jesus would say, "You are the light this society needs."

There is also another truth to what Jesus is saying here. Too often, Christians have taken for granted that they are the light of the world when they have in fact called for the exclusion of those unlike them. Whether it be with the banning of Muslims, the silencing of women's voices, Black voices pushed aside by White supremacy, the poor marginalized by the rich, or those who belong to the LGBTQ community excluded by Christians—yes, there are exceptions, but some Christians have spent the last several years making the loudest calls for certain voices and certain stories to be pushed to the margins.

Again, when anyone's voice, anyone's story is shut out from Jesus' shared table, the absence of those voices will harm us all. The excluded and



marginalized in every situation are Jesus' 'light' that must be brought back. When Christians exclude and marginalize, they cease to be "light." It would be well for those who have historically claimed to be the "light of the world" to listen to Jesus' words here.

The community to which Jesus is speaking is one whose theism, morality, and ethics had been shaped through the interpretations of the Torah and the social elite. To get through to the people, Jesus must first disturb their confidence in these interpretations. Repeatedly in the sermon on the mount Jesus points out the inadequacy of the approved teachings. In verse 17, Jesus says, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have

not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 'Fulfill' in this verse is pleroo, which means to complete or to make more full. In the very next verse Jesus says, "Truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." The word for "accomplished" is ginomai and also means "to complete."

In American civil mythology, we often use the phrase, a "more perfect union." I was struck during the January 21 inauguration by these words in Amanda Gorman's poem: "It's because being American is more than a pride we inherit, it's the past we step into and how we repair it."

We have much to repair, not only from the last four years, but also from the last four hundred years, and reparations is the watch word. From reparations to Earth in the midst of a sixth major extinction event to reparations to the descendants of enslaved people upon whose backs US wealth still grows; reparations to first Americans whose land is still being threatened, and to migrants unjustly treated to preserve a White majority in the U.S.; reparations to poor, rural Americans whose few resources get redistributed, too, to those who already have so much—we have much to repair, and now is the time to begin.

Jesus invites us to step into a way of viewing our own well-being as deeply connected with the well-being of everyone in our society.

If Jesus' disinherited listeners were to experience liberation, it would be because they overcame injustice together. No more exclusion of those marginalized as other. Jesus' new social order, God's just future, or what the text refers to as 'the kingdom', is a world where all oppression, injustice, and violence is put right, internally and externally, privately and publicly, individually and collectively.

So now is a moment for us to begin again. We can exhale deep relief from the political transition we have just witnessed. And we can take up the work once again, of pushing a new, diverse administration toward policies and systemic change that help make our world a safe, compassionate, just home for everyone. We still have work to do, not only to ensure past harms do not repeat, but also to ensure that the future does not return us to the normality of the past.

## 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



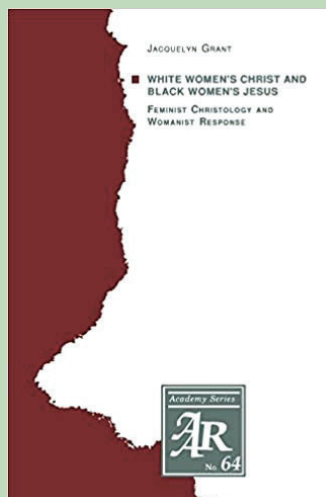
*continued on page 6*

# RHM's Recommended Reading for March

## *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*

by Jacquelyn Grant

Christology is especially problematic for feminists. Because Jesus was undeniably male and because the Christian church claims him as the unique God-bearer, feminist christology confronts the dual tasks of explaining the significance of a male God-bearer for women and creating a christological model adequate to feminist experience. Jacquelyn Grant rehearses the development and challenges of feminist christology and argues that, because it has reflected the experience of White women predominantly, it fails to speak to



the concerns of non-white and non-western women. In response to this failure, Grant proposes a womanist theology and christology that emerge from and are adequate to the reality of contemporary Black women.

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! Go to [renewedheartministries.com](http://renewedheartministries.com) and click "Sign Up!"



## Check Out RHM's Audio Presentations

Herb's presentations have been recorded at various speaking engagements over the years and are available to stream on our website or download. Visit [renewedheartministries.com/Audio-Presentations](http://renewedheartministries.com/Audio-Presentations)





## SOCIAL JESUS

*A Blog Exploring the Intersection of Faith and Societal Justice*



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



### ***Learning to Listen, Part 1***

"This passage may be speaking about ways that oppressed and disinherited people can allow the sacred and valuable space inside them to be used by their oppressors."

Full article at [patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/02/learning-listen-part-1/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/02/learning-listen-part-1/)

### ***Learning to Listen, Part 2***

"What we are encountering in this gospel story today would today be called intersectionality."

Full article at [patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/02/learning-listen-part2/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/02/learning-listen-part2/)

### ***Learning to Listen, Part 3***

"Jesus modeled listening to those who belong to oppressed communities, and going deeper through that listening. I believe those who follow Jesus today can and must do the same."

Full article at [patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/02/learning-listen-part3/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/02/learning-listen-part3/)



### ***The Falling and Rising of Many (Part 1)***

"This is the intrinsic reason why our collective thriving depends on raising up some in society while those who have gained too much power, privilege, property, or profit must fall back down."

Full article at [patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/01/falling-rising-many/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/01/falling-rising-many/)

### ***The Falling and Rising of Many (Part 2)***

"A return to social equity always feels like "loss" for those who are privileged and powerful."

Full article at [patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/01/falling-rising-many-part2/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/01/falling-rising-many-part2/)

### ***The Falling and Rising of Many (Part 3)***

"These are questions worth wrestling with as we enter this new year."

Full article at [patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/01/falling-rising-many-part3/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/01/falling-rising-many-part3/)

***Find many more articles at [patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/)***

## 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 p.m. Pacific/10 p.m. Eastern.

Email [info@renewedheartministries.com](mailto:info@renewedheartministries.com) to receive the link for the Zoom meeting.



Photo by Darold Pinnock on unsplash.com

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. How would you like to see society change over the next four years? What can you do in your sphere of influence to help.
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, today.

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

## 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.

### EPISODE 359: SALT, LIGHT, & CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM

"But mere diversity is not the goal. A safe and just world for everyone, where everyone can call our world home, is the goal. It will not be enough to see a more diverse neoliberalism in response to the last four years of neo-facism. We will have to see if the inclusion of more diverse voices will allow those included to change the very systems they're joining. I have hope. But we will see."





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](https://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.**

**2021's Projected Budget**

**Goal: \$185,000.00**

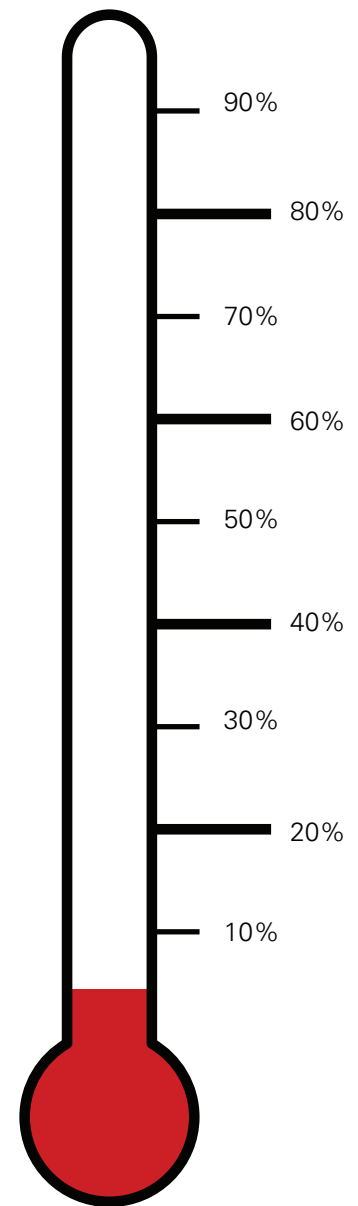
**January's Budget Goal:**

**\$15,416.67**

**January's Contributions**

**Received:**

**\$6,430.57**



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](http://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



Front cover artwork by Ali Montgomery.

**"One who  
professes to be  
Christian is  
challenged to  
treat the  
oppressed the  
way Jesus  
treated them."**

Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas  
The Black Christ, p. 52

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Handwritten signature of Ali Montgomery.

