

Inside This Issue:

Page 2

*Imagery of a
Good Shepherd*

Page 4

Book of the Month
for May

RHM's Free Resources

Page 5

RHM's *Social Jesus*
Blog on Patheos

Page 6

Jesus for Everyone
Podcast

Weekly Zoom
HeartGroup

Page 7

Budget Thermometer

RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES
P.O. Box 1211, Lewisburg, WV 24901
Phone: 304.520.0030
Email: info@renewedheartministries.com

Follow RHM!



@RenewedHeartMin



Renewed Heart Ministries

Follow Herb!



@HerbMontgomery



Herb Montgomery

RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES

*Working for a World
of Love and Justice*



Renewed Heart Ministries is a nonprofit organization working for a world of love and justice.

We need your support to offer the kind of resources RHM provides. Helping people find the intersection between their faith, compassion, and justice is work that continues to prove deeply needed.

Please consider making a donation to support Renewed Heart Ministries' work, today.

You can donate online by clicking online at **renewedheartministries.com** or you can make a donation by mail at: Renewed Heart Ministries, PO Box 1211, Lewisburg, WV 24901.

And to those of you out there who already are supporting this ministry, we want to say thank you. We could not continue being a voice for change without you.



"This story that so many White Christians hold dear puts God on the side of these lost Black lives. And where we stand, whether in solidarity, neutrality, devil's advocacy, indifference, or even opposition, reveals where we stand in relation to the God of the Jesus story. We are only with this God when we are with them."

Imagery of a Good Shepherd

by Herb Montgomery

Our reading this week is from the gospel of John:

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep

pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father." (John 10:11-18)

Our passage focuses on the image of Jesus as a shepherd. This was a popular image of Jesus before Western Christianity became fixated on crucifixes. Rebecca Ann Parker and Rita Kashima Brock write in the prologue of their ground-breaking book *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire* about how they saw early Christians use this imagery over and over:

"It took Jesus a thousand years to die.

Images of his corpse did not appear in churches until the tenth century. Why not? This question set us off on a five-year pilgrimage that led to this book. Initially, we didn't believe it could be true. Surely the art historians were wrong. The crucified Christ was too important to Western Christianity. How could it be that images of Jesus's suffering and death were absent from early churches? We had to see for ourselves and consider what this might mean. In July 2002, we traveled to the Mediterranean in search of the dead body of Jesus. We began in Rome, descending from the blaze of the summer sun into the catacombs where underground tunnels and tombs are carved into soft tufa rock. The earliest surviving Christian art is painted onto the plaster-lined walls of tombs or carved onto marble sarcophagi as memorials to the interred. In the cool, dimly lit caverns, we saw a variety of biblical images.

Many of them suggested rescue from danger. For example, Abraham and Isaac stood side by side in prayer with a ram bound next to them. Jonah, the recalcitrant prophet who was swallowed and coughed up by a sea monster, reclined peacefully beneath the shade of a vine. Daniel stood alive and well between two pacified lions. Other images suggested baptism and healing, such as the Samaritan woman drawing water from a well, John the Baptist dousing Jesus, depicted as a child, and Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Jesus also *appeared as a shepherd carrying a lamb on his shoulders like Orpheus*. We could not find a dead Jesus, not even one. It was just as the angel had said to the women looking for Jesus at his tomb, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” (Luke 24:5). “He is not here” (Mark 16:6). He most certainly was not.” (Italics added.)

Even today when you do a simple image search for Jesus, you’ll get ten or more images of a Jesus on a cross for every single image of a shepherd. Early Jesus followers had a very different focus: not the cross of Jesus but a living Jesus whose resurrection overcame and reversed everything his death accomplished. (See *The Good News of Forceful Nonviolent Resurrection*)

In this week’s passage from John, the focus isn’t the death of Jesus but Jesus taking life back up after his death. Even the purpose of Jesus ‘laying down of life was that he might take it up again. The focus is not death, but taking hold of life—resurrection.

During this post-Easter season, remember that the cross interrupted Jesus ‘lifegiving ministry and teaching. The powerful, propertied, and privileged intended it to be permanent. The cross was meant to silence his calls for societal change, but the resurrection overturned that silencing. In the story, the resurrection doesn’t conquer death with more death. It answers death with death-reversing life; it answers death-dealing injustice with life-giving justice. I love this statement by Elizabeth Johnston that squarely defines act of Jesus ‘crucifixion as a sin. And if it is a sin, then it is contrary to the will of God:

“Along with other forms of political and

liberation theology, feminist theology repudiates an interpretation of the death of Jesus as required by God in repayment for sin...Jesus ‘death was an act of violence brought about by threatened human men, as sin, and therefore against the will of a gracious God...What comes clear in the event, however, is not Jesus ‘necessary passive victimization divinely decreed as a penalty for sin, but rather a dialectic of disaster and powerful human love through which the gracious God of Jesus enters into solidarity with all those who suffer...The victory of love, both human and divine, that spins new life out of this disaster is expressed in belief in the risen Christ.” (Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is*, Kindle Location 4183)

The resurrection overturns the unjust state-sanctioned violence, and places Divine solidarity on the side of Jesus and all others who have unjustly suffered violence at the hands of the state. Today, that Divine solidarity includes Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Stephon Clark, Breonna Taylor, Atatiana Jefferson, Pamela Turner, Korryn Gaines, Yvette Smith, Miriam Carey, Shelley Frey, Darnisha Harris, Malissa Williams, Shantel Davis, Rekia Boyd, Aiyana Stanley-Jones, Tarika Wilson, Kathryn Johnston, Kendra James, Tyisha Miller, George Floyd, Daunte Wright, and many, many more. This story that so many White Christians hold dear puts God on the side of these lost Black lives. And where we stand, whether in solidarity, neutrality, devil’s advocacy, indifference, or even opposition, reveals where we stand in relation to the God of the Jesus story. We are only with this God when we are with them.

The resurrection places the God of the Jesus story squarely on the side of justice and in the midst of the state-murdered community. The symbol of resurrection sends a message of justice overcoming injustice, love conquering hate, life overcoming death, and an unjust tomb not being able to hold justice back.

Today we need a new story of justice overcoming in the end. I don’t believe justice inevitably overcomes injustice on its own. If the moral arc of the universe is to bend toward justice, we must choose to bend it that way.

In the wake of the outcome of the trial of

Derek Chauvin for George Floyd’s murder, I have to question if we will bend that arc systemically toward justice? As we daily witness Black lives cut down by police, we have a lot of work still to do. If things are going to change, we are going to have to choose to change them.

Before we close, I will offer one word of caution concerning our reading this week. I see the image of the Shepherd in this passage held in contrast with the myth of redemptive suffering. The myth of the redemptive suffering teaches those who are abused and oppressed to be willing to suffer in order to change the heart or “redeem” their oppressors. As Brown and Parker rightly state, “The problem with this theology is that it asks people to suffer for the sake of helping evildoers see their evil ways. It puts concern for the evildoer ahead of concern for the victim of evil. It makes victims the servants of the evildoers ‘salvation.” (Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, *For God So Loved The World?* p. 16)

There is a difference between the self-sacrifice of disempowered people and the self-sacrifice of empowered people for those they love. John’s gospel is believed to be the latest written in our cannon. In John, Jesus has evolved in the story telling into an incarnate, cosmic figure, an empowered figure. The phrase, “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord,” indicates that John is placing Jesus in a position of empowerment not disempowerment.

In the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, the story is different. Jesus belongs to the community of the disempowered. His death is an act of sanctioned, state violence. His life is taken from him and then his death is powerfully overturned in the symbol of the resurrection. It would be irresponsible and dangerous to hold up the self-sacrifice of Jesus in John’s version of the Jesus story as an example to be followed by the community Jesus belongs to Matthew, Mark and Luke. In synoptic gospels, Jesus is a disempowered person. Jesus, unlike Paul, is not even a Roman citizen. As Howard Thurman so eloquently writes, “Jesus was not a Roman citizen. He was not protected by the normal guarantees of citizenship—that quiet sense of security which comes

continued on page 4

RHM's Recommended Reading for May

Decolonizing Christianity: Becoming Badass Believers

by Miguel A. De La Torre

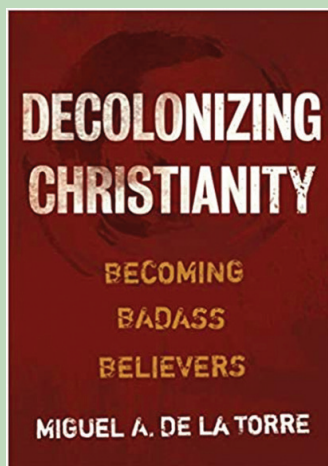
"How curiously different is this white God from the one preached by Jesus who understood faithfulness by how we treat the hungry and thirsty, the naked and alien, the incarcerated and infirm. This white God of empire may be appropriate for global conquerors who benefit from all that has been stolen and through the labor of all those defined as inferior; but such a deity can never be the God of the conquered."

Echoing James Cone's 1970 assertion that white Christianity is a satanic heresy, Miguel De La Torre argues that whiteness has desecrated the message of Jesus.

In a scathing indictment, he describes how white American Christians have aligned themselves with the oppressors who subjugate the "least of these"—those who have been systemically marginalized because of their race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status—and, in overwhelming numbers, elected and supported an antichrist as president who has brought the bigotry ingrained in American society out into the open.

With this follow-up to his earlier *Burying White Privilege*, De La Torre prophetically outlines how we need to decolonize Christianity and reclaim its revolutionary, badass message. Timid white liberalism is not the answer for De La Torre—only another form of complicity. Working from the parable of the sheep and the goats in the Gospel of Matthew, he calls for unapologetic solidarity with the sheep and an unequivocal rejection of the false, idolatrous Christianity of whiteness.

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.



...Good Shepherd continued from page 3

from knowing that you belong and the general climate of confidence which it inspires. If a Roman soldier pushed Jesus into a ditch, he could not appeal to Caesar [as did Paul]; he would be just another Jew in the ditch. Standing always beyond the reach of citizen security, he was perpetually exposed to all the 'arrows of outrageous fortune,' and there was only a gratuitous refuge—if any—within the state." (Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, p. 34)

In the synoptics, Jesus is a non-citizen, a marginalized person, who was in the end executed by the state for standing up to injustice. At minimum we need to perceive the difference between the synoptic's Jesus and John's Jesus. As a parent, I understand the imagery of John's gospel. I have sacrificed for my children throughout their lives. I know what that kind of sacrifice feels like. And that kind of sacrifice is a very different from asking survivors, the abused, the oppressed to sacrifice themselves to change the hearts and minds of their abusers or the laws and policies unjust systems.

However you interpret the shepherd's willingness to lay his life down for his sheep as contrasted with the commitment level of a "hired hand" here in John, what we don't read in this passage is a sheep being willing to lay down their life to change the heart of an oppressive shepherd. The self-sacrifice of victims and survivors, people whose self is already being sacrificed and whose humanity is already being denied, only causes further damage. Justice in this context would be achieved by taking hold of one's humanity, not sacrificing it.

And that leads me to my overall point this week.

Justice only wins in the end if we make it win.

We are in need of new stories of justice overcoming in the end in our context to-day. And I believe we can create those stories with our choices, here and now. When we choose to make justice ultimately win, not just in isolated occurrences but systemically, we are determining whether our ancient,

Are you taking advantage of all of RHM's *free* resources?

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



continued on page 6

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/



The Good News of Forceful Nonviolent Resurrection (Part 1)

"The good news was not that Jesus died, or even that he died for you. The good news rather was that this Jesus whom they killed, has been brought back to life!"

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/04/good-news-forceful-nonviolent-resurrection-part1

The Good News of Forceful Nonviolent Resurrection (Part 2)

"The book of Acts offers just one example of this alternative focus and emphasis; the good news of life-giving, life-conquering, death-reversing, injustice-overturning resurrection."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/04/good-news-forceful-nonviolent-resurrection-part2

The Good News of Forceful Nonviolent Resurrection (Part 3)

"God's power never expresses itself through the humiliation or denigration of another. It does not triumph over life. It conquers death by resurrecting life."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/04/good-news-forceful-nonviolent-resurrection-part3



Being Sent for the Work of Justice (Part 1)

"The Jesus of John's story doesn't do things instead of us, as our substitute so we don't have to do them. This Jesus calls his followers to participate in his actions alongside him."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/04/being-sent-work-justice-part1

Being Sent for the Work of Justice (Part 2)

"I understand this is a subtle difference in interpretation but it creates a huge difference in how we response to injustice."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/04/being-sent-work-justice-part2

Being Sent for the Work of Justice (Part 3)

"We must be careful not to spiritualize these elements. What does concrete good news look like in our social context today?"

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/04/being-sent-work-justice-part3



Social Repentance and Change (Part 1)

"The gospels 'post resurrection appearance stories follow a familiar pattern that meets the expectations of the communities each version was written for."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/04/social-repentance-change-part1

Social Repentance and Change (Part 2)

"The kind of repentance that leads to that kind of forgiveness, then, is a social rethinking of the current social course of injustice and implies a society, not just a few individuals, choosing to embrace a different path filled with a more just set of policies for the polity."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/04/social-repentance-change-part2

Social Repentance and Change (Part 3)

"It's a story that is intended to awaken in us the choice to shape a different kind of society, where those presently marginalized are centered, where surviving is replaced with thriving, a society that is a safe, compassionate, just home for everyone."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/04/social-repentance-change-part3



Imagery of a Good Shepherd (Part 1)

"Even today when you do a simple image search for Jesus, you'll get ten or more images of a Jesus on a cross for every single image of a shepherd. Early Jesus followers had a very different focus."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/04/imagery-good-shepherd-part1

Imagery of a Good Shepherd (Part 2)

"This story that so many White Christians hold dear puts God on the side of these lost Black lives. And

continued on page 7

cherished stories of justice overcoming ring true or are merely desperate, wishful fairytales.

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. How does focussing through the lens of a good shepherd rather than a substitutionary, crucified Jesus impact your own Jesus following and your engagement with public social injustice? Contrast and 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 everyone?

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. ■

New episodes every Friday!

The *Jesus For Everyone* podcast.

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

EPISODE 369: BRANCHES GRAFTED TO A POISONOUS VINE

“Although the passage we began with focuses on bearing fruit rather than being a dead or withered branch that bears nothing, we see that the kind of fruit one bears matters too. What does it mean for American Christians to live as Jesus did?”



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.



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.

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.

**2021's Projected Budget
Goal: \$185,000.00**

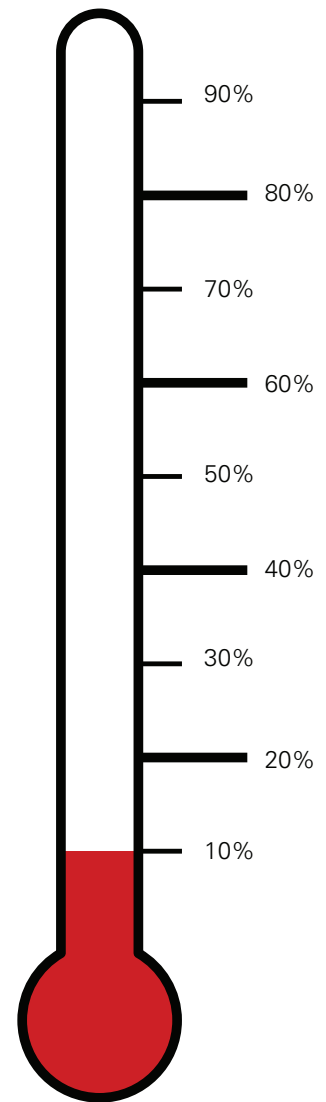
**March's Budget Goal:
\$15,416.67**

**March's Contributions
Received:
\$5,084.69**

**2021 Budget Goal
Through March:
\$46,250.01**

**2021 Contributions Received
Through March:
\$18,972.40**

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



Social Jesus continued from page 5

where we stand, whether in solidarity, neutrality, devil's advocacy, indifference, or even opposition, reveals where we stand in relation to the God of the Jesus story. We are only with this God when we are with them."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/04/imagery-good-shepherd-part2

Imagery of a Good Shepherd (Part 3)

"When we choose to make justice ultimately win, not just in isolated occurrences but systemically, we are determining whether our ancient, cherished stories of justice overcoming ring true or are merely desperate, wishful fairytales."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/04/imagery-good-shepherd-part3



Branches Grafted to a Poisonous Vine (Part 1)

"After almost two centuries of Christian patriarchy gendering God as exclusively male, we must recognize women bear the image of the Divine, too."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/04/branches-grafted-poisonous-vine-part1

Branches Grafted to a Poisonous Vine (Part 2)

"Although the passage we began with focuses on bearing fruit rather than being

a dead or withered branch that bears nothing, we see that the kind of fruit one bears matters too. What does it mean for American Christians to live as Jesus did?"

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/04/branches-grafted-poisonous-vine-part2

Branches Grafted to a Poisonous Vine (Part 3)

"I'm concerned about the type of fruit so many White, straight, cisgender Christians are producing. Is this fruit life-giving or is it poisonous? Does our fruit look like the fruit of the original vine, and if not, what vine have we allowed ourselves to be grafted into instead?"

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/04/branches-grafted-poisonous-vine-part3

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



"Wherever human beings are violated, diminished, or have their life drained away, God's glory is dimmed and dishonored. Wherever human beings are quickened to fuller and richer life, God's glory is enhanced. A community of justice and peace (thriving among human beings) and God's glory increase in direct and not inverse proportion."

Elizabeth A. Johnson
She Who Is

www.renewedheartministries.com

