

RENEWED
HEART
MINISTRIES



αwakenings

∴ THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES ∴ SEPTEMBER 2021 ∴



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@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 donate 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 continue being a voice for change because of you.



"Love and justice are connected in the gospels. Proclaiming love, specifically a universal love of which everyone is the object, and embracing the directive to practice that love for every one of our neighbors, will necessarily move us to make sure every person around us has what they need to thrive. We won't focus only on ourselves individually, but also account for others within our collective communities, too."

Universal Love Means Universal Thriving

by Herb Montgomery

Our reading this week is from the gospel of John.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread

will live forever." He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them." From this time many of his disciples turned back

and no longer followed him. "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God." (John 6:56-69)

There is a lot to unpack this in this week's reading. This passage starts Jesus' command to eat his flesh and drink his blood. The original audience would have immediately recognized this as a metaphor and not meant to be taken literally. Nonetheless, as we discussed last week, it is very hard to imagine a 1st Century Jewish male, deeply cultured in the teachings of Torah, using this kind of language *even metaphorically*. And even

the text itself recognizes this language is problematic on the lips of a Jewish teacher:

“On hearing it, many of his disciples said, ‘This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?’”

The author recognizes the problem that this language creates for its Jewish audience and seems to be trying to get out in front of it by highlighting the tension in the story itself: “From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.”

This passage also includes the early Gnostic and Pauline view of the world as divided between the spirit and the flesh. Christianity has a long history of harmfully categorizing things of “the flesh” as evil and things of the “spirit” as good. (For an excellent telling of this history I would recommend reading, *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire* by Brock and Parker.)

The Jesus of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) does not draw the deep distinction between the spirit and the flesh that’s described in the gospel of John or in Paul’s works. In the synoptic gospels, we see a very fleshly Jesus who is deeply concerned with what negatively impacts people’s material, concrete well-being. His response to suffering is not to focus on the spirit but to liberate humanity from whatever oppresses people in their “flesh.” The Jesus of these gospels is very *enfleshed*.

What I do appreciate about this week’s passage in John is that its author keeps defining “spirit” for Jesus followers in terms of the “words” of Jesus. Jesus ‘words “are spirit and life.” Simon Peter also affirms that Jesus has the words of life in the story when he says, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the *words* of eternal life” (emphasis added).

He’s pointing to the words of Jesus—his teachings, his message. In our context today, it’s difficult to understand the distinction between “flesh” and “spirit, even if John’s original audience understood it. But defining whatever is meant by “spirit” as focused on the words or teachings of Jesus—this I can

begin to get my head around. Perhaps it’s easier for you to understand as well.

The teachings of Jesus bring to my mind Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount, which the author of the gospel of John does not mention, and the economic justice found throughout the entire gospel of Luke. In Mark, the teachings of Jesus repeatedly challenge the political status quo through stories full of political symbols and meaning. And even in John, the teachings of Jesus emphasize the importance of love more than any of the synoptics.

Consider the following passages:

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 7:12 cf. Luke 6:31)

And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ (Matthew 22:39)

To love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. (Mark 12:33)

He answered, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ‘You have answered correctly,’ Jesus replied, ‘Do this and you will live.’ (Luke 10:27-28)

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35)

These are the words/teachings that are life, two thousand years ago and today. Love is not only named in the gospels as an ethic of life, but it is also defined in the gospels. John emphasizes love more than the other canonical gospels and yet the synoptic gospels are still needed to define what that love looks like publicly: as Cornel West often says, justice is what love looks like in public. Matthew and Luke can be interpreted to teach this:

“Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight;

I will put my Spirit on him,

and he will proclaim justice to the nations. (Matthew 12:18, emphasis added.)

“You neglect *justice* and the love of God.” (Luke 11:42)

Love and justice are connected in the gospels. Proclaiming love, specifically a universal love of which everyone is the object, and embracing the directive to *practice* that love for every one of our neighbors, will necessarily move us to make sure every person around us has what they need to thrive. We won’t focus only on ourselves individually, but also account for others within our collective communities, too. *That* is social justice. We at RHM sometimes call it making our world a safe, compassionate, just home for everyone. Yet whether you call it social justice, or politics, or economics, or whatever, in the end what we are talking about is love and treating others the way oneself would like to be treated.

Anything less isn’t love, no matter how “Christian” the language for it. As Jesus followers, our words of love must be accompanied by actions of justice. We say something about this every week: Choose compassion. Take action. Work toward justice. *This* is how we define living in the way of love repeated in each version of the Jesus story we hold sacred.

Love and justice.

These are spirit.

These are life.

HeartGroup Application

1. Share something that spoke to you from this week’s eSight/ Podcast episode with your HeartGroup.
2. Many of us are feeling deeply concerned with the events in Afghanistan this week. Here are a few organizations that are providing ways for those who are moved to take action to do so:

No One Left Behind
nooneleft.org

International Refugee Assistance Project
refugeerights.org

Women For Afghan Women
womenforafghanwomen.org/
afghanistan

continued on page 4

Lutheran Immigration And
Refugee Service
lirs.org

International Rescue Committee
rescue.org

Global Giving
globalgiving.org

WorldHelp
worldhelp.ne/

Child Foundation
childfoundation.org

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.

I love each of you dearly. ■

Upcoming Events!

OCTOBER 16, 2021

Good News Fellowship
(via Zoom)
Toronto, Ontario Canada
304.520.0030

NOVEMBER 20, 2021

Good News Fellowship
(via Zoom)
Toronto, Ontario Canada
304.520.0030

DECEMBER 18, 2021

Good News Fellowship
(via Zoom)
Toronto, Ontario Canada
304.520.0030

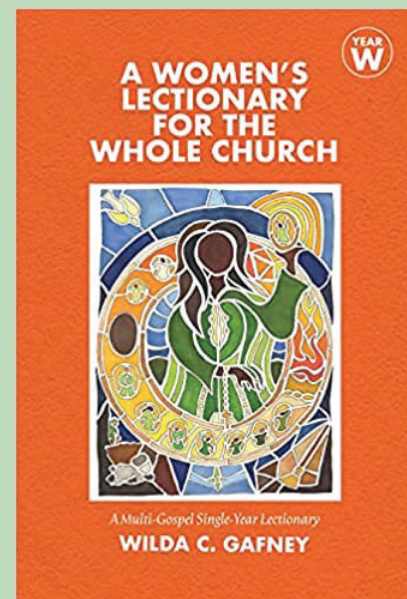
RHM's Recommended Reading for September

***A Women's Lectionary for
the Whole Church: Year W***
by Wilda C. Gafney

**What would it look like if women
built a lectionary focusing on
women's stories?**

What does it look like to tell the good news through the stories of women who are often on the margins of scripture and often set up to represent bad news? How would a lectionary centering women's stories, chosen with womanist and feminist commitments in mind, frame the presentation of the scriptures for proclamation and teaching?

The scriptures are androcentric, male-focused, as is the lectionary that is dependent upon them. As a result, many congregants know only the biblical men's stories told in the lectionary read in their churches. A more expansive, more inclusive lectionary will remedy that by



introducing readers and hearers of scripture to "women's stories" in the scriptures.

A Women's Lectionary for the Whole Church, when completed, will be a three-year lectionary accompanied by a stand-alone single year lectionary, Year W, that covers all four gospels.

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 hosts 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 us at info@renewedheartministries.com to receive the link for the Zoom meeting.



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/



Worshipping in Vain (Part 1 of 3)

"Throughout history Christians have used the label of Pharisee as a disparaging or derogatory title very carelessly and in very anti-Semitic ways. Some Christians continue to do so today. We can do better."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/08/worshipping-vain-part1

Worshipping in Vain (Part 2 of 3)

"These characters are used in Mark not to pit Christians against Jews, but to help us understand classism within the Jesus stories and the conflict between upper classes (the elites) and the lower classes (the marginalized)."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/08/worshipping-vain-part2

Worshipping in Vain (Part 3 of 3)

"We're not saying that we can retrospectively make Jesus a critical race theorist because he was not that, and he wasn't even really talking about that. But we today can build on his individualist critique and ask if there is something here that can also be applied to our social systems today."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/08/worshipping-vain-part3



Universal Love Means Universal Thriving (Part 1 of 3)

"Christianity has a long history of harmfully categorizing things of 'the flesh' as evil and things of the 'spirit' as good."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/08/universal-love-means-universal-thriving-part1

Universal Love Means Universal Thriving (Part 2 of 3)

"This definition brings to my mind Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, the economic justice found throughout the entire gospel of Luke, and the repeated challenge to the political status quo through stories full of political symbols and meaning, in Mark."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/08/universal-love-means-universal-thriving-part2

Universal Love Means Universal Thriving (Part 3 of 3)

"Love and justice are connected in the gospels. Proclaiming love, specifically a universal love of which everyone is the object, and embracing the directive to practice that love for every one of our neighbors, will necessarily move us to make sure every person around us has what they need to thrive."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/08/universal-love-means-universal-thriving-part3



Choosing an Ethic of Love (Part 1 of 3)

"Yet there's a way for us today, with our focus on establishing justice on Earth and making our present world a safe, compassionate, just home for everyone as objects of a Divine, universal love, to reclaim these words in a life-giving way."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/08/choosing-ethic-love-part1

Choosing an Ethic of Love (Part 2 of 3)

"There are others who no longer believe in Christianity's high claims, but who still engage the work of living the golden rule, practicing the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount, and modeling an ethic of personal and social love above all else."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/08/choosing-ethic-love-part2

Choosing an Ethic of Love (Part 3 of 3)

"That the kind of people we choose to be today will impact the kind of world we compose tomorrow."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/08/choosing-ethic-love-part3

Quotable Quotes

"If, for example, every time we were tempted to say something hostile about a colleague, a sibling, or an enemy country, we considered how we would feel if such a remark were made about us—and refrained—we would, in that moment, have gone beyond ourselves. It would be a moment of transcendence."

- Karen Armstrong;
*The Great Transformation:
The Beginning of Our
Religious Traditions*



Photo by Derrick McKinney on Unsplash

EPISODE 386: WORSHIPING IN VAIN

"I'm not saying that we can retrospectively make Jesus a critical race theorist because he was not that, and he wasn't even really talking about that. But we today can build on his individualist critique and ask if there is something here that can also be applied to our social systems today."



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

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!"**



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 today 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**

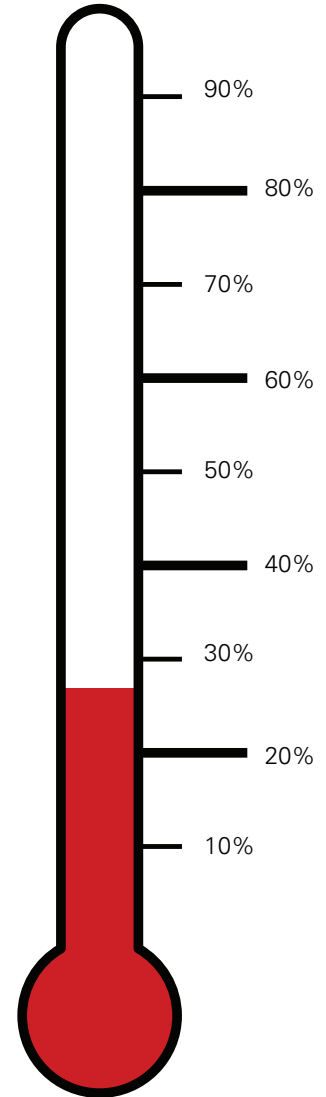
**July's Budget Goal:
\$15,416.67**

**July's Contributions
Received:
\$5,990.24**

**2021 Budget Goal
Through July:
\$107,916.69**

**2021 Contributions Received
Through July:
\$49,862.55**

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



**"To preach the
Universal Love
... is inevitably
to go against
all injustice,
privilege,
oppression, or
narrow
nationalism."**

GUSTAVO GUTIERREZ
A THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION
15TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION
P. 135

renewedheartministries.com

Quotable Quotes

"Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."

- Jesus; Matthew 7:9-12

"No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us."

- John the Beloved; 1 John 4:12

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.

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.

“There was an ancient prophetic tradition in which God insisted not just on justice and worship, but on justice over worship. God had repeatedly said, ‘I reject your worship because of your lack of justice,’ but never, ever, ever, ‘I reject your justice because of your lack of worship.’”

MARCUS BORG AND JOHN DOMINIC CROSSAN
THE LAST WEEK: WHAT THE GOSPELS REALLY TEACH
ABOUT JESUS'S FINAL DAYS IN JERUSALEM
P. 45

WWW.RENEWEDHEARTMINISTRIES.COM

