



Inside This Issue:

Page 2

A Shared Table 2021

Page 3

*Social Justice,
Jesus and Hell*

Page 4

Book of the Month
for October

Page 5

RHM's *Social Jesus*
Blog on Patheos

Upcoming Events!

Page 6

Jesus for Everyone
Podcast

Page 7

Budget Thermometer

Weekly Zoom
HeartGroup

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 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!



A Shared Table 2021 Next Month!

November 2021 has been chosen for the month when we will be holding our 3rd Annual Shared Table fundraising event for Renewed Heart Ministries!

We are so excited to be able to be offering this opportunity again after having to cancel this event last year due to the pandemic.

We'll be posting each week beginning **November 1st**.

Go to renewedheartministries.com on **November 1st** to find out how you, too, can participate this year in supporting RHM's ongoing work and ministry.

"It is not acceptance of suffering that gives life; it is commitment to life that gives life. The question, moreover, is not, Am I willing to suffer? but Do I desire fully to live? This distinction is subtle and, to some, specious, but in the end it makes a great difference in how people interpret and respond to suffering. If you believe that acceptance of suffering gives life, then your resources for confronting perpetrators of violence and abuse will be numbed."

JOANNE CARLSON BROWN & REBECCA PARKER
CHRISTIANITY, PATRIARCHY, AND ABUSE, P. 18

renewedheartministries.com





"I want to be clear: I reject the common Evangelical doctrine of eternal torment, including a belief in a literal, eternally burning hell. If we take all the descriptions of a post-mortem 'hell' that we find in the scriptures, they are filled with internal incongruencies and contradictions, let alone with each other. So I want to offer an alternative, especially for those attracted to the ethical teachings of Jesus but who rightly have no tolerance for the evangelical Christian belief in a literal, eternally burning hell."

Social Justice, Jesus and Hell

by Herb Montgomery

Our reading this week is from the gospel of Mark,

"Teacher," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us." "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us. Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward. "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to

stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where' "the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched.' Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other." (Mark 9:38-50)

There is a lot in this week's reading to unpack.

First, this week's passage is connected to the debate among Jesus scholars about whether or not the historical Jesus actually believed he was the Messiah and ways Christians have long used that title for Jesus in damaging and destructive ways toward the Jewish community.

Second, the passage references a curse against those who cause "little ones" to stumble. This title could apply to children, the most subjugated and marginalized population in many of our social systems. And yet limiting this phrase only to children enables those who benefit by oppressive systems to escape the scrutiny of this passage as well. In truth, children in 1st Century Mediterranean societies lived at the bottom of the political, economic, and social hierarchical

system. We have to ask whether Jesus simply loved children and thus spoke in their defense, or whether he stood in solidarity with all who were at the bottom of their social structures and all those pushed to the edges or margins of his society, of which children were the foremost. If this second option is right, then this passage warns everyone who structures society to push some people to the bottom or edges, and those who make life even more difficult for those on the bottom or edges after they have been pushed there. Much to ponder here.

Third, the passage uses the deeply ableist language about entering into the kingdom "maimed," "crippled," or having "one eye." This is more than a translation problem, and more than language that was once acceptable falling out of vogue. It has always been damaging to deem people with disabilities as less than abled people. Jesus' overt argument is that righteous disabled people are better off than unrighteous abled people. Passages that provide a subtext of a hierarchy lead us into territory of interpretations that are ableist. We can do better than this today. We don't have to repeat ableist language as we tell the Jesus story and we can also find better ways to tell the story than to imply anyone is inferior because of their differences.

Lastly there are the verses about being "thrown into" or "going to hell."

I want to be clear: I reject the common Evangelical doctrine of eternal torment, including a belief in a literal, eternally burning hell. If we take all the descriptions of a post-mortem "hell" that we find in the scriptures, they are filled with internal incongruencies and contradictions, let alone with each other.

So I want to offer an alternative, especially for those attracted to the ethical teachings of Jesus but who rightly have no tolerance for the evangelical Christian belief in a literal, eternally burning hell.

First, the language that the gospels used here would not have conjured a vision of post-mortem, eternal torment for the original Jewish audience. The word translated into English as "hell" is the Greek word, *gehenna*. That word already

continued on page 4

had a history and association for Mark's original Jewish audience. Gehenna is the Greek form of the Hebrew/Aramaic valley of Gehinnom, or Ge Ben (son of) Hinnom. It named "a valley on the south and east of Jerusalem, which was so called from the cries of the little children who were thrown into the fiery arms of Moloch" (Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. American Book Company, 1889; read stories about Gehenna in 2 Chronicles 28:1-4, 2 Chronicles 33:1, and Jeremiah 7:31-32).

In the Hebrew scriptures, Gehenna evolves from the location of horrific atrocities to the symbol of the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem at the hands of foreign, Gentile powers. Consider these examples:

"Thus said the LORD: Go and buy a potter's earthenware jug. Take with you some of the elders of the people and some of the senior priests and go out to the valley of the son of Hinnom at the entry of the Potsherd Gate and proclaim there the words that I tell you. You shall say: Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to bring such disaster upon this place that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. Because the people have forsaken me, and have profaned this place by making offerings in it to other gods whom neither they nor their ancestors nor the kings of Judah have known; and because they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent, and gone on building the high places of Baal to burn their children in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, nor did it enter my mind. Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when this place shall no more be called Topheth, or the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of Slaughter. And in this place, I will make void the plans of Judah and Jerusalem and will make them fall by the sword before their enemies, and by the hand of those who seek their life. I will give their dead bodies for food to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth." (Jeremiah 19:1-7)

"But if you do not obey me to keep the Sabbath day holy by not carrying any load as you come through the gates of

RHM's Recommended Reading for October

See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love

by Valarie Kaur

An urgent manifesto and a dramatic memoir of awakening, this is the story of revolutionary love.

Finalist for the Dayton Literary Peace Prize "In a world stricken with fear and turmoil, Valarie Kaur shows us how to summon our deepest wisdom."—Elizabeth Gilbert, author of *Eat Pray Love*.

How do we love in a time of rage? How do we fix a broken world while not breaking ourselves? Valarie Kaur—renowned Sikh activist, filmmaker, and civil rights lawyer—describes revolutionary love as the call of our time, a radical, joyful practice that extends in three directions: to others, to our opponents, and to ourselves. It enjoins us to see no stranger but instead look at others and say: You are part of me I do not yet know. Starting from that place of wonder, the world begins to change: It is a practice that can transform a relationship, a community, a culture, even a nation.

Kaur takes readers through her own riveting journey—as a brown girl growing up in California farmland finding her place in the world; as a young adult galvanized by the murders

Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle an unquenchable fire in the gates of Jerusalem that will consume her fortresses.'" (Jeremiah 17:27)

"Edom's streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into burning sulfur; her land will become blazing pitch! It will not be quenched night or day; its smoke will rise forever. From generation to generation it will lie desolate; no one will ever pass



of Sikhs after 9/11; as a law student fighting injustices in American prisons and on Guantánamo Bay; as an activist working with communities recovering from xeno-phobic attacks; and as a woman trying to heal from her own experiences with police violence and sexual assault. Drawing from the wisdom of sages, scientists, and activists, Kaur reclaims love as an active, public, and revolutionary force that creates new possibilities for ourselves, our communities, and our world. *See No Stranger* helps us imagine new ways of being with each other—and with ourselves—so that together we can begin to build the world we want to see.

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.

through it again." (Isaiah 34:9-10)

"The voice of the LORD will shatter Assyria; with his rod he will strike them down. Every stroke the LORD lays on them with his punishing club will be to the music of timbrels and harps, as he fights them in battle with the blows of his arm. His Topheth [the Valley of Hinnom or Gehenna] has long been prepared; it has

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/



Social Justice, Jesus and Hell (Part 1 of 3)

"There is an alternative, especially for those attracted to the ethical teachings of Jesus but who rightly have no tolerance for the evangelical Christian belief in a literal, eternally burning hell."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/09/social-justice-jesus-hell-part1/

Social Justice, Jesus and Hell (Part 2 of 3)

"The language that the gospels used here would not have conjured a vision of post-mortem, eternal torment for the original Jewish audience."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/09/social-justice-jesus-hell-part2

Social Justice, Jesus and Hell (Part 3 of 3)

"Something is good, remember, based on the kind of fruit it produces, whether it is life-giving or death-dealing. And that fruit is either enough of an argument in its favor, or a sign of something it's time for us to leave behind."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/09/social-justice-jesus-hell-part3



Taking Up Our Crosses, Injustice, and Abuse (Part 1 of 3)

"Oppressors throughout history have used the concept of 'taking up one's cross' to prioritize themselves over survivors and to encourage oppressed people to passively and patiently endure violence rather than resist."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/09/crosses-injustice-abuse-part1/

Taking Up Our Crosses, Injustice, and Abuse (Part 2 of 3)

"'If you believe that acceptance of suffering gives life, then your resources for confronting perpetrators of violence and abuse will be numbed.'"

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/09/crosses-injustice-abuse-part2/

Taking Up Our Crosses, Injustice, and Abuse (Part 3 of 3)

"This story is, on the other hand, encouraging Jesus' followers to resist as he did flipping tables in the temple courtyard, even though it resulted in the state violence of a cross."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/09/crosses-injustice-abuse-part3



Openness to Change (Part 1 of 3)

"This story offers a lot to us in the context of our own blinkered ways of understanding the experiences of those different from ourselves and with whom we share this world."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/08/openness-change-part1/

Openness to Change (Part 2 of 3)

"The story illustrates what we would call intersectionality today. Intersectionality is a way of describing the relationships between systems of oppression, domination, and discrimination... Intersectionality helps us that every person has a complex identity."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/09/openness-change-part2

Openness to Change (Part 3 of 3)

"We can choose in these moments, not to get defensive, but to apologize when our own faults are pointed out, and to be humble enough and willing to embrace change."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/09/openness-change-part3/

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

been made ready for the king. Its fire pit has been made deep and wide, with an abundance of fire and wood; the breath of the LORD, like a stream of burning sulfur, sets it ablaze." (Isaiah 30:31-33)

"As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,' declares the LORD,' so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,' says the LORD.' And they will go out and look on the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; the worms that eat them will not die, the fire that burns them will not be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.'" (Isaiah 66:22-24)

Jeremiah uses the phrase "unquenchable fire" to refer to destruction by an outside empire. In Isaiah, the language of Assyria's "Topheth" focuses on events happening in this life. In light of this, both Jeremiah's language of eternally burning fire and Isaiah's language of worms not dying (quoted in this week's reading from Mark's gospel) are highly metaphorical and to be taken seriously, not literally.

These prophetic warnings about Gehenna pointed to Gentile empires destroying people in this life, not after death. This destruction was consistently threatened as punishment for systemic injustice, oppression and violence done to the vulnerable and marginalized.

No wonder it was to be taken seriously.

It makes sense that Jesus would use this language taken from his Hebrew scriptures to speak to those who cause "little ones" to stumble. It is also quite possible that the author of Mark used this language to be connected to the destruction of Judea and Jerusalem by the Roman Empire in the 1st Century. Again, Jerusalem was being destroyed by a foreign, Gentile power.

I'll end this week with some thoughts on Jesus' command not to forbid people outside of his own disciples and followers from doing things in his name. Just because they were not part of the community of Jesus' disciples didn't mean they were to be stopped. I want to go a step further, though.

EPISODE 388: TAKING UP OUR CROSSES, INJUSTICE, AND ABUSE

"Oppressors throughout history have used the concept of 'taking up one's cross' to prioritize themselves over survivors and to encourage oppressed people to passively and patiently endure violence rather than resist . . . This story is, on the other hand, encouraging Jesus' followers to resist as he did flipping tables in the temple courtyard, even though it resulted in the state violence of a cross."

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

Within the Jesus story we find universal values that have proven life giving. These values and ethics are in many more cultures and religions than mere Christianity—including those with no connection to the historical Jesus whatsoever. I encourage Christians to honor those traditions and values because of their intrinsic, life-giving quality. I'm reminded of a statement we at RHM shared as a meme a few weeks ago now:

"There was an ancient prophetic tradition in which God insisted not 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." (Borg and Crossan, *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus's Final Days in Jerusalem*, Kindle Location 767) (cf. Amos 5:21-24; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8; Isaiah 1:11-17)

For me, it's not about making sure that we attach "Jesus" as a label to things, but that I value those things the Jesus of the Jesus story has taught me in my life. These things are valuable to me, and not merely because Jesus taught them but because I've experienced their intrinsic fruit for myself. Again, I don't believe these things are valuable simply because Jesus taught them. Instead, I

continued on page 7

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**

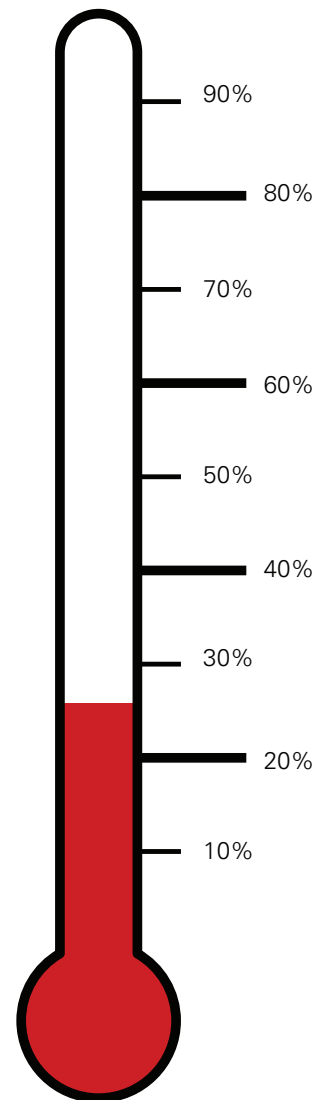
**August's Budget Goal:
\$15,416.67**

**August's Contributions
Received:
\$5,132.37**

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

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

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



...Jesus and Hell continued from page 6

believe Jesus taught them because they were intrinsically valuable. We can honor these values when we see them in others without trying to make them somehow "Christian" and so worthy of our approval. We can simply honor the good they do in our world.

Something is good, remember, based on the kind of fruit it produces, whether it is life-giving or death-dealing. And that fruit is either enough of an argument in its favor, or a sign of something it's time for us to leave behind.

HeartGroup Application

1. Share something that spoke to you from this week's eSight/ Podcast episode with your HeartGroup.

2. However one interprets Jesus' words on Gehenna, how does Jesus' teachings on social justice impact your own Jesus following? 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?

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. ■

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.

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.

RENEWED
HEART
MINISTRIES



Front cover artwork by Ali Montgomery.

Beauty is dependent on how differences are arranged. Humanity is varied and richly diverse. We can hold our differences in ways that are beautiful, just, compassionate, and life-giving or in ways that are destructive and death-dealing. We have a choice.

renewedheartministries.com

