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Herb Montgomery



## End of Year Matching Donations!

2021 has been a year of big challenges. Doing ministry during an ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has brought its share of change along with moments of heartwarming providence and blessings.

As this year is coming to a close, I'm deeply humbled and thankful for all of you who read, listen to, and share RHM's work. I'm also grateful for the actions you have taken to make our world a safer, compassionate, just home for all. Thank you for being such an important part of our community, and for your continued support.

Thanks to a kind donor, who also believes in our work, we are able to extend matching donations through the end of month of December. All donations this month will be matched,

dollar for dollar, making your support of Renewed Heart Ministries, and the work we do, go twice as far.

Your support enables RHM to continue providing much needed resources to help Jesus-followers find the intersection between their faith and labors of love, compassion, and justice in our world today.

As 2021 ends, we invite you to consider making a donation to Renewed Heart Ministries to make the most of this very kind offer.

You can donate online by clicking online at [renewedheartministries.com](https://renewedheartministries.com) and clicking "Donate."

Or you can make a donation by mail at:  
Renewed Heart Ministries  
PO Box 1211  
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Thank you in advance for your continued support.

This coming year, together, we will continue being a voice for change.

## Weekly Zoom HeartGroup Every Wednesday Night

***"I've experienced paradigm shifts in my thinking that are transforming my spiritual journey."***

That's what one participant recently wrote. 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](mailto:info@renewedheartministries.com) to receive the link for the Zoom meeting.



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

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# Advent, Hope, and Living on the Margins

by Herb Montgomery

Our reading is from the Gospel of Luke:

"In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Tracōnitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

"A voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
'Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.  
Every valley shall be filled in,  
every mountain and hill made low.  
The crooked roads shall become straight,  
the rough ways smooth.  
And all people will see God's salvation.'"  
(Luke 3:1-6)

I love this week's Advent reading for so many reasons.

The narrative has the "word of God" coming to John in an unusual location. John was a son of Zechariah the priest (Luke 1:5) and therefore, by lineage, he should not be in the wilderness acting like an ancient Hebrew prophet. He should have been occupying his place in the temple services, being a priest like his father. Instead, John rejected the path of working in the system or changing the system from the inside. I can imagine the struggle John might have gone through when he told his father that he wasn't going to follow the family expectations and abandon a path toward priesthood for the margins of his society, the edges, and the wilderness.

The narrative's contrast between the temple versus the wilderness resurrects



a tension repeated by the Hebrew prophets: the centralized temple state and its priesthood versus those on the margins or edges of their society. The Hebrew prophets in the wilderness called for justice, for liberation, and for all violence against society's vulnerable to cease.

This contrast takes on even more meaning when one realizes that one national myth of the Judean Temple-state was that Jerusalem and the Temple would eventually become the center of the world and all nations would flow to it. Consider these passages. All emphasis is added:

**Psalms 2:6:** "I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain [the temple in Jerusalem]."

**Psalms 14:7:** Oh, that salvation for Israel would *come out of Zion!* [Jerusalem and the Temple]

When the LORD restores his people,  
let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!  
(emphasis added,

**Psalms 69:35-46:** for God will save Zion [Jerusalem and the Temple]

and rebuild the cities of Judah. Then people will settle there and possess it; the children of his servants will inherit it,  
and those who love his name will dwell there.

**Psalms 102:15-16:** The nations will fear the name of the LORD,  
*all the kings of the earth will revere your glory.*

For the LORD will rebuild Zion [Jerusalem and the Temple]

and appear in his glory.  
He will respond to the prayer of the destitute;

he will not despise their plea.  
Let this be written for a future generation,  
that a people not yet created may praise the LORD:

"The LORD looked down from his sanctuary on high,

from heaven he viewed the earth,  
to hear the groans of the prisoners  
and release those condemned to death."

So the name of the LORD will be declared in Zion [Jerusalem and the Temple]  
and his praise in Jerusalem  
*when the peoples and the kingdoms assemble to worship the LORD.*

**Isaiah 4:5:** Then the LORD will create over all of Mount Zion [Jerusalem and the Temple] and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over everything the glory will be a canopy.

**Isaiah 18:7:** At that time gifts will be brought to the LORD Almighty  
from a people tall and smooth-skinned,  
from a people feared far and wide  
an aggressive nation of strange speech,  
whose land is divided by rivers—  
the gifts will be brought to Mount Zion [Jerusalem and the Temple], the place of the Name of the LORD Almighty.

**Isaiah 60:10-14:** "Foreigners will rebuild your walls,

and their kings will serve you.  
Though in anger I struck you,  
in favor I will show you compassion.  
Your gates will always stand open,

*continued on page 4*

they will never be shut, day or night,  
so that people may bring you *the wealth  
of the nations*—

*their kings led in triumphal  
procession.*

*For the nation or kingdom that will not  
serve you will perish;*

*it will be utterly ruined.*

“The glory of Lebanon will come to you,  
the juniper, the fir and the cypress  
together,

to adorn *my sanctuary*;

and I will glorify the place for my feet.  
The *children of your oppressors will come  
bowing before you*;

*all who despise you will bow down at  
your feet*

and will call you the City of the LORD,  
Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

[Jerusalem and the Temple]

(emphasis added)

In the gospels, John rejects all of this. He turns his back on the city and its temple and takes up residence along the margins or the wilderness of his own society. The gospel message here, and one of my favorite Advent themes, is that salvation, change, and liberation don't come from the center of our societies, but from the margins.

In *Say to This Mountain* by Ched Myers, Marie Dennis, Joseph Nangle, Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, and Stuart Taylor, the authors write,

“The experience of wilderness is common to the vast majority of people in the world. Their reality is at the margins of almost everything that is defined by the modern Western world as ‘the good life.’ This wilderness has not been created by accident. It is the result of a system stacked against many people and their communities, whose lives and resources are exploited to benefit a very small minority at the centers of power and privilege. It is created by lifestyles that deplete and pollute natural resources... Wilderness is the residue of war and greed and injustice.” (*Say to This Mountain: Mark's Story of Discipleship*, p. 11)

Advent begins by birthing hope within people who live in the wildernesses of

**continued on page 6**

## RHM's Recommended Reading for December

### ***Saving Grace: Speak Your Truth, Stay Centered, and Learn to Coexist with People Who Drive You Nuts***

**by Kirsten Powers**

The CNN senior political analyst and USA Today columnist offers a path to navigating the toxic division in our culture without compromising our convictions and emotional well-being, based on her experience as a journalist during the Trump era, interviews with experts, and research on what leads people to actually change their minds.

“Bracing, elevating, and essential... Kirsten Powers has given us a great gift at an urgent hour.”

—Jon Meacham

For years, New York Times bestselling author Kirsten Powers has been center stage for many of our nation's most searing political and cultural battles as a columnist, TV analyst, and one-time participant in the thunderdome of Twitter. On a good day, there will be civil disagreement. On a bad day, it's all-out trench warfare—nothing but a cycle of outrage and self-righteousness. More and more, Powers finds herself wondering, along with countless Americans: How are we to cope with this non-stop madness?

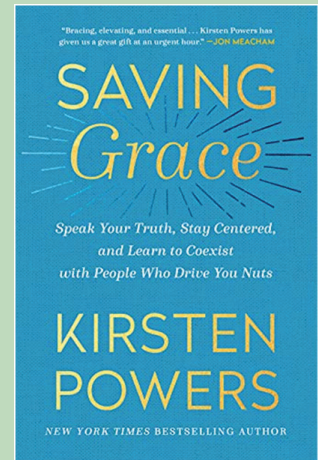
In *Saving Grace*, Powers writes with wit and insight about our country's poisonous political discourse, chronicling the efforts she's made to stay grounded and preserve her sanity in a post-truth era that has driven many of us to the edge. She draws on lessons offered by faith leaders, therapists, theologians, social scientists, and

activists working for change today. She dismantles the widespread misconception that grace means being nice, letting people get away with harmful behavior, or choosing neutrality in the name of peace. Grace, she argues, is anything but an act of surrender; instead, it is a kinetic and transformative force.

*Saving Grace* offers a template for a different kind of America, one where we can engage with people who hold opposing views without sacrificing our values or our passionate beliefs in the causes we care about. It's a culture that embraces repentance and repair, a process through which those who have caused harm can take responsibility and work toward righting the wrongs in which they have participated. It's a place where we're empowered to see the possibility in other people, even people who are driving us nuts.

Provocative, original, and filled with deep wisdom, *Saving Grace* is an essential read for anyone engaged in the struggle to live compassionately in an era of relentless demonization and division.

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.



## 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/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/)



#### ***Advent and a Different Iteration of Our World (Part 1 of 3)***

"Even in the chaos of their changing world, they could perceive an opportunity to make the world a just, more compassionate place."

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/11/advent-different-iteration-world-part1](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/11/advent-different-iteration-world-part1)

#### ***Advent and a Different Iteration of Our World (Part 2 of 3)***

"Following this model, one way of interpreting the end of violent empires and the chaos such transitions create is that they could be the end of something beastly or predatory making way for the creation of a more humane world."

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/11/advent-different-iteration-of-our-world-part2](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/11/advent-different-iteration-of-our-world-part2)

#### ***Advent and a Different Iteration of Our World (Part 3 of 3)***

"The hope and belief that a new iteration of our world is possible, and that the creation of that new iteration has begun, is what Advent is genuinely all about."

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/11/advent-different-iteration-world-part3/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/11/advent-different-iteration-world-part3/)



#### ***Declaring War Against Poverty (Part 1 of 3)***

"Christians have long interpreted these events in ways that have proven deeply harmful to our Jewish siblings."

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/11/declaring-war-against-poverty-part1/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/11/declaring-war-against-poverty-part1/)

#### ***Declaring War Against Poverty (Part 2 of 3)***

"Seeing the overthrowing of such economically exploitative systems not as 'the end,' but as the 'beginnings of birth pains' for a new world."

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/11/declaring-war-against-poverty-part2/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/11/declaring-war-against-poverty-part2/)

#### ***Declaring War Against Poverty (Part 3 of 3)***

"I don't want a post-pandemic world that looks like the pre-pandemic world. We can do better...poverty is a matter of human responsibility."

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/11/declaring-war-against-poverty-part3/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/11/declaring-war-against-poverty-part3/)



#### ***A Widow, Taxes, and Giving More Than What is Life-Giving to Give (Part 1 of 3)***

"Common interpretations of our story this week fall short. I find these interpretations deeply harmful and oppressive to the poor."

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/11/widow-taxes-giving-more-life-giving-part1/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/11/widow-taxes-giving-more-life-giving-part1/)

#### ***A Widow, Taxes, and Giving More Than What is Life-Giving to Give (Part 2 of 3)***

"To get life-giving answers, we must first ask life-giving questions, and the common interpretations of this week's story are not life-giving. They are the interpretations of those with privilege and status."

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/11/widow-taxes-giving-more-life-giving-part2/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/11/widow-taxes-giving-more-life-giving-part2/)

#### ***A Widow, Taxes, and Giving More Than What is Life-Giving to Give (Part 3 of 3)***

"This story does not praise the piety of the poor within a system that takes economic advantage of their piety. It condemns any system that conditions and then exploits people to give more than what is life-giving for them to give."

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/11/widow-taxes-giving-more-life-giving-part3/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2021/11/widow-taxes-giving-more-life-giving-part3/)



Photo by Mick Haupt on Unsplash.com

## Upcoming Events!

**DECEMBER 18, 2021**

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

their society: it tells them that their lived experience on the margins of any society is not the result of divine will but the result of social, political, economic and religious forces wielded by the privileged and the powerful in our communities.

Our reading from Luke this week corrects a conflation of passages we first read in Mark's gospel:

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way" —  
"a voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
'Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.'"  
(Mark 1:1-3)

These words were not from the same source but from Exodus, Malachi, and Isaiah.

"See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared." (Exodus 23:20)

I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty. (Malachi 3:1)

These words from Exodus speak of the liberation of Hebrew slaves and those from other groups who left Egypt with them. I question what the indigenous peoples of Canaan thought about this, given the history of how this same narrative was used against indigenous people here in America. We must be careful to remember that the liberation of one community should not mean the genocide of another.

The context of the passage from Malachi is God coming to God's temple opposing "those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice" (Malachi 3:5). Because of this passage, I think of those today who must work more than 40 hours each week for less pay than they need to on.

Luke's gospel drops these references to

## EPISODE 397: ADVENT & A DIFFERENT ITERATION OF OUR WORLD

"As we enter this Advent season this weekend, we are called again to build a better world. Hope can give way to despair if instead of change, we witness unjust systems evolving to perpetuate harm in new ways. But it doesn't have to be that way. We can choose something different. We have the power to begin the world over again."

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

Exodus and Malachi and keep only the passage from Isaiah, though Luke will use the passage from Exodus and Malachi later in the Jesus story to refer to John:

"This is the one about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'" (Luke 7:27)

The passage in Isaiah reads, "A voice of one calling: In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain."

Both John and Jesus emerge from the margins of their society and come to



liberate oppressed people and restore justice to them. The gospels describe John as the forerunner for the reign of God that Jesus taught. Jesus came calling for change. But change doesn't just happen.

Before any social change has ever taken place, years of groundwork has been laid. Many of those who did that initial ground work never lived long enough to see the fruit of their labor. They worked for a generation yet to come. Change doesn't always take that long either: we can always choose change today.

But I think of changes taking place presently in the state of Georgia as just

***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 [renewedheartministries.com](http://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**

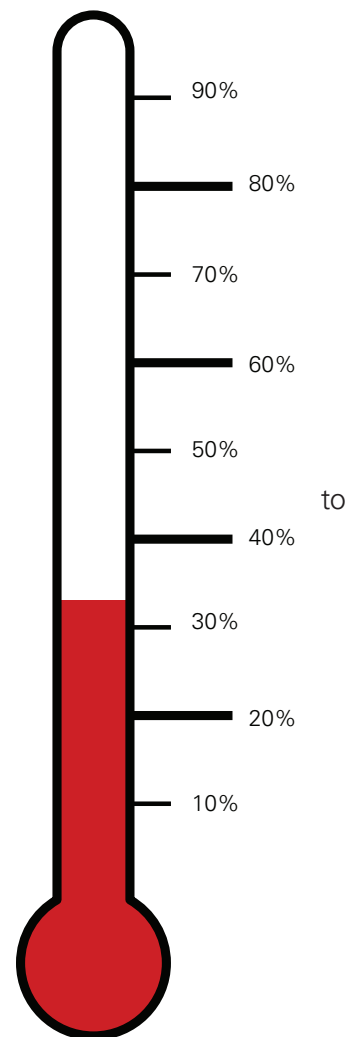
**October's Budget Goal:  
\$15,416.67**

**October's Contributions  
Received:  
\$5,123.96**

**2021 Budget Goal  
Through October:  
\$154,166.70**

**2021 Contributions Received  
Through October:  
\$61,428.14**

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



### ***Advent, Hope,... continued from page 6***

one example. The political changes we are witnessing in Georgia result from years of ground work by so many people including Stacey Abrams.

Changes today also depend on the work of generations who have gone before us. People chose to do the work they did not knowing for sure that change would come. They chose to live the kind of lives they lived because that was the type of people either they were and they refused to let the system shape them. They lived their life in a way that, even if they didn't change the system, at least the system wouldn't change them. Others did their work simply because it was the right thing to do. And still others labored because they hoped that one day, society would "reach the promised land" whether they were there to witness it or not.

This week's reading includes two highly

charged religious words: repentance and forgiveness.

If it helps, think of repentance as "thinking about things differently." It's much more about experiencing a paradigm shift than it is about the negative connotations religious abuse usually attaches to the term. Remember, too, that although contemporary Christianity often discusses forgiveness in the context of personal, individual morality, for the Hebrew prophets forgiveness and repentance sat in the context of calls for systemic justice and liberating a nation from injustice's harmful effects. The Hebrew prophetic tradition speaks of sin as social injustice, repentance as turning away from that social injustice, and forgiveness as social restoration from that social injustice.

This is the context of John's message that his listeners change their unjust ways for God's reign. God's just future was near.

I think of our society now. I think of LGBTQ justice work, racial justice work, and justice work for women. I think of economic justice for those our system pushes into poverty. I think of indigenous justice, and climate justice. So many justice movements are presently engaging our world, seeking to make it a safer, compassionate, just home for everyone.

During this Advent season, I also think of the Jesus story, not as only a Christian story to celebrate at Christmas time, but as a liberation story that 2,000 years ago inspired hope in those who were being forced to live on their own society's margins.

What does Advent have to say to those living on the margins in our world today? ■

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**  
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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.

*"Yes, grace creates the space for reconciliation, but not without repentance and repair from the person who inflicted the damage. We need to develop a culture that models this kind of accountability and provides a path to redemption for those willing to undertake the arduous process of making things whole where they have caused brokenness."*

Kirsten Powers, *Saving Grace*, p. 10 [www.renewedheartministries.com](http://www.renewedheartministries.com)

[renewedheartministries.com](http://www.renewedheartministries.com)

