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Follow Herb!



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Herb Montgomery

"Instead of arguing whether we should mandate vaccinations for the sake of the common good and for those who are vulnerable among us, as Jesus followers we already have a mandate in place: love your neighbor as yourself. This mandate requires us to act not only for our own best interests but also for the best interests of others."



Following Jesus in the Time of Covid

by Herb Montgomery

Our reading this week is from the gospel of John:

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bride-groom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him. (John 2:1-11)

This story has received a lot of attention from Christians over the centuries. Whatever we take from this story, we must remember that it only appears in the last canonical gospel to be written and it was written when the Christian movement was becoming deeply anti-Jewish and trying to distance itself from Judaism in the eyes of the Roman Empire. Christians have used this story to contrast the jars used for "Jewish rites of purification" with Jesus' "best wine" as if to say that Jesus' teachings, though deeply Jewish, were at the same time superior to other Jewish wisdom and knowledge. We don't have to disparage any other religion, especially not Judaism, to value the Jesus story. Anti-Semitic interpretations have historically been at the root of much of the harm Christians have committed against Jewish people. We can and must do better.

This story has also been at the center of teetotaler debates: there are arguments to this day about whether the wine Jesus made in this story was grape juice or alcoholic. These debates are silly to me.

The original audience would have understood that this story established Jesus as a great miracle worker. What can we take away from this story today?

One thing I like about this story is that only a few people were in the know about this miracle: Jesus, Mary, the servants, and the disciples. The wealthy wedding party hosts were oblivious to what Jesus was up to, and this speaks to me of the reality that not everyone experiences life the same way.

Recently, Senator Harry Reid died. Reid grew up in a family in Nevada that fought daily to survive deep poverty, and he carried his experiences with classism into his politics, adult life, and career. So few Congresspeople today have any experience with poverty in the United States and it shows in the decision they make in Congress.

But our story this week gives a nod to the lower social classes for whom the gospel of John was written. Jesus came to be for them. In other gospels, Jesus explains that the reign of God was God's just future for the poor, outcast, marginalized, and excluded. (see Luke 6:22-24, cf. Matthew 5)

And also in this story, Jesus' mother, Mary, is centered. A woman in that society is the one really responsible for this miracle from the reluctant Jesus. Mary persuaded Jesus to do what John's gospel treats as Jesus' inaugural miracle. With Mary's trust in Jesus, this version of the Jesus story really begins.

Mary's words to the servants are at the heart of her role in this narrative: "Do whatever he tells you." I imagine the original audience would have heard this clearly. For us today, following Jesus is much less about the creeds and much more about the ethics we choose to live our lives by. Are we endeavoring to do what Jesus told us? Are we, too, expending our energy to make our world a safer, more compassionate, just home for those our present system makes poor, outcast, marginalized or excluded?

continued on page 3

Following Jesus... continued from page 2

Consider these ancient words found in the epistle of James:

"What good is it, my siblings, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a person is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill, 'and yet you *do nothing* to supply their *bodily needs*, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works. 'Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. (James 2:14-18, italics added for emphasis.)

We will find this emphasis more subtly spoken later in John's gospel:

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35)

What designates one as a follower of Jesus is not the creeds we mentally assent to, but the kind of life we choose to live, the kind of values we seek to embody, the kind of ethics we endeavor to practice.

What we believe does translate into actions, but the emphasis in these teachings is always on which actions our beliefs give birth to.

Christianity's sacred texts repeat this principle of "doing" and having our doing being defined by love. One of my favorite passages is in Romans 13:10:

"Love does no harm to one's neighbor."

This principle is one of the greatest areas of misunderstanding today. Our actions can and do protect us. But they also have implications for others. Like others living lives of compassion, Jesus followers should be choosing a course of action that takes into account the potential for harming others. This is love. Love takes yourself into account, yes, and it also takes into account the wellbeing and safety of those around you.

What does this mean for a Jesus follower in a global pandemic?

It means, if you can get vaccinated, get vaccinated. If you can wear a mask, wear a mask. Concern yourself with your neighbors who may be immuno-compromised. At different stages of the pandemic certain communities have been more heavily impacted than others. Concern yourself with those who are particularly affected. Globally, vaccine disparity means that countries ravaged by colonialism are vulnerable to severe outbreaks.

Instead of arguing whether we should mandate vaccinations for the sake of the common good and for those who are

vulnerable among us, as Jesus followers we already have a mandate in place: *love your neighbor as yourself*. This mandate requires us to act not only for our own best interests but also for the best interests of others.

We live in a system that is putting vulnerable people in harms way. What can we do while we are working to change that system? We can take every step to mitigate harms we may cause others. Others might take advantage of our efforts, but that is not our chief concern. Our priority needs to be doing everything we can to protect those our present system makes vulnerable.

In this week's story, Mary says simply: "Whatever he tells you to do, do it."

Those words have echoed from within this story over the centuries for every generation of Jesus followers. Jesus has told us to love. As this new year begins, take inventory of your life. Today, how is the Jesus of this story telling you to love?

HeartGroup Application

1. Share something that spoke to you from this week's eSight/Podcast episode with your HeartGroup.
2. How is the Jesus of this story telling you to love in 2022? 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. ■



Photo by Derick McKinney on Unsplash.com

RHM's Recommended Reading for February

***The 1619 Project:
A New Origin Story***
by Nikole Hannah-Jones

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
A dramatic expansion of a ground-breaking work of journalism, *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* offers a profoundly revealing vision of the American past and present.

ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR: *The Washington Post*, *NPR*, *Esquire*, *Marie Claire*, *Electric Lit*, *Ms. magazine*, *Kirkus Reviews*, *Booklist*

In late August 1619, a ship arrived in the British colony of Virginia bearing a cargo of twenty to thirty enslaved people from Africa. Their arrival led to the barbaric and unprecedented system of American chattel slavery that would last for the next 250 years. This is sometimes referred to as the country's original sin, but it is more than that: It is the source of so much that still defines the United States.

The New York Times Magazine's award-winning "1619 Project" issue



reframed our understanding of American history by placing slavery and its continuing legacy at the center of our national narrative. This new book substantially expands on that work, weaving together eighteen essays that explore the legacy of slavery in present-day America with thirty-six poems and works of fiction that illuminate key moments of oppression, struggle, and resistance. The essays show how the inheritance of 1619 reaches into every part of contemporary American society, from politics, music, diet, traffic, and citizenship to capitalism, religion, and our democracy itself."

This is a book that speaks directly to our current moment, contextualizing the systems of race and caste within which we operate today. It reveals long-glossed-over truths around our nation's founding and construction—

and the way that the legacy of slavery did not end with emancipation, but continues to shape contemporary American life.

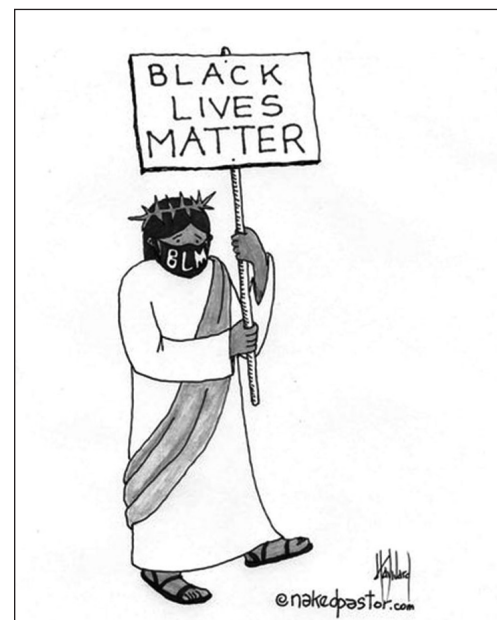
Featuring contributions from:

Leslie Alexander, Michelle Alexander, Carol Anderson, Joshua Bennett, Reginald Dwayne Betts, Jamelle Bouie, Anthea Butler, Matthew Desmond, Rita Dove, Camille T. Dungy, Cornelius Eady, Eve L. Ewing, Nikky Finney, Vievee Francis, Yaa Gyasi, Forrest Hamer, Terrance Hayes, Kimberly Anne Henderson, Jeneen Interlandi, Honorée Fanonne Jeffers, Barry Jenkins, Tyehimba Jess, Martha S. Jones, Robert Jones, Jr., A. Van Jordan, Ibram X. Kendi, Eddie Kendricks, Yusef Komunyakaa, Kevin M. Kruse, Kiese Laymon, Trymaine Lee, Jasmine Mans, Terry McMillan, Tiya Miles, Wesley Morris, Khalil Gibran Muhammad, Lynn Nottage, ZZ Packer, Gregory Pardlo, Darryl Pinckney, Claudia Rankine, Jason Reynolds, Dorothy Roberts, Sonia Sanchez, Tim Seibles, Evie Shockley, Clint Smith, Danez Smith, Patricia Smith, Tracy K. Smith, Bryan Stevenson, Nafissa Thompson-Spires, Natasha Trethewey, Linda Villarosa, Jesmyn Ward

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.

RHM's Audio Presentations

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



SOCIAL JESUS

A Blog Exploring the Intersection of Faith and Societal Justice



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

Articles posted each week at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/



Liberation for the Oppressed (Part 1 of 3)

"This choice not only reveals a passion for those being marginalized in any system, but also points us to how change happens. Change happens from the grassroots or bottom up and from the margins or edges of our societies inward."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/01/liberation-oppressed-part1/

Liberation for the Oppressed (Part 2 of 3)

"Of all the passages in the Hebrew scriptures that the author of Luke could have chosen to summarize or characterize Jesus life and mission, these two passages are saturated with the theme of liberation for the oppressed."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/01/liberation-oppressed-part2/

Liberation for the Oppressed (Part 3 of 3)

"There are so many of us today who benefit from the violence of our present system. Are we allowing passages like this one in Luke to confront us?"

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/01/liberation-oppressed-part3/



Following Jesus in the Time of Covid (Part 1 of 3)

"We don't have to disparage any other religion, especially not Judaism, to value the Jesus story. We can and must do better."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/01/following-jesus-time-covid-part1/

Following Jesus in the Time of Covid (Part 2 of 3)

"What designates one as a follower of Jesus is not the creeds we mentally assent to, but the kind of life we choose to live, the kind of values we seek to embody, the kind of ethics we endeavor to practice."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/01/following-jesus-time-covid-part2/

Following Jesus in the Time of Covid (Part 3 of 3)

"We already have a mandate in place: love your neighbor as yourself. This mandate requires us to act not only for our own best interests but also for the best interests of others."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/01/following-jesus-time-of-covid-part3/



Jesus 'Baptism as Social Protest (Part 1 of 3)

"The one 'in whom I am well pleased' was to be associated with the world of establishing justice on the earth for the marginalized and oppressed."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/01/jesus-baptism-social-protest-part1/

Jesus 'Baptism as Social Protest (Part 2 of 3)

"John's baptism invited people to denounce injustice, to cleanse the canvas so to speak for something different, societally, to be born."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/01/jesus-baptism-social-protest-part2/

Jesus 'Baptism as Social Protest (Part 3 of 3)

"This makes me wonder what our baptism-like rituals today are. How do we, too, publicly reject present systems of injustice?"

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/01/jesus-baptism-social-protest-part3/

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

***Sign up today so you
don't miss a thing!***

Visit us at:
renewedheartministries.com
and click "Sign Up!"



EPISODE 405: JESUS & ANTISEMITISM

"We can do better today. We don't have to disparage Jewish people, Jewish wisdom, or Judaism to value Jesus and his ethical teachings. There is so much good in the Jesus story that can benefit our communities today as we live out the golden rule and shape our world into a safe, compassionate, just home for everyone. That "everyone" genuinely means everyone, including Jewish people. And that means that we have to be honest about the harmful way Christian narratives have been told in the past and are still told today. We have to name those harmful story elements in our text. We must do better."



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

Weekly HeartGroup on Zoom 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 for 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 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 continue being a voice for change because of your support.

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

**Contributions Received
Through December 2021:
\$130,255.69**

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

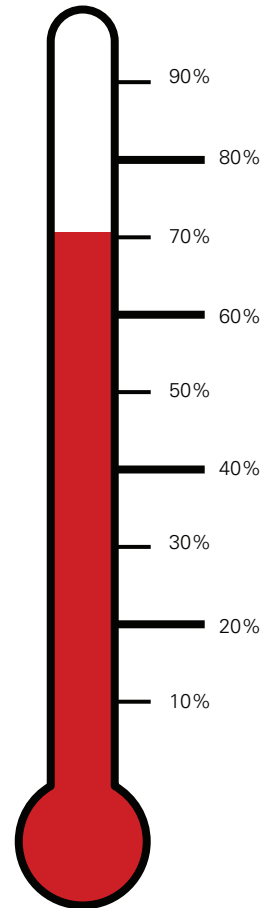


Photo by Sarah Aron on unsplash.com

Quotable Quotes

"The colonization of the Southern economy by capitalists from the North gave lynching its most vigorous impulse. If Black people, by means of terror and violence, could remain the most brutally exploited group within the swelling ranks of the working class, the capitalists could enjoy a double advantage. Extra profits would result from the superexploitation of Black labor, and white workers' hostilities toward their employers would be defused. White workers who assented to lynching necessarily assumed a posture of racial solidarity with the white men who were really their oppressors. This was a critical moment in the popularization of racist ideology."

– Angela Davis;
Women, Race and Class

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.

"I HAVE ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT
THE CHRISTIAN'S PLACE OF
HONOR WAS NOT IN HEAVEN,
BUT IN HELL, TRYING TO TURN
THAT INTO HEAVEN."

W. D. P. Bliss, "Self-Serving Colonies Condemned"
Quoted by Gary Dorrien, American Democratic
Socialism, p. 84
Yale University Press

renewedheartministries.com

