

RENEWED
HEART
MINISTRIES



Awakenings

∴ THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES ∴ MARCH 2022 ∴



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Herb Montgomery

"In this story, the early Jesus followers are trying earnestly to make sense of Jesus' execution at the hands of the Roman empire. Their association of both Elijah and Moses with Jesus pointed Jesus followers to the claim that although Jesus ministry and work of salvation had been **interrupted** by a Roman cross, God had overturned, reversed, and undone that act of unjust state violence and raised Jesus from the dead, which meant his salvific work lived on. In the Hebrew tradition, Elijah and Moses are figures for whom death did not have the final say."



Encouragement When the Work is Lonely and Hard

by Herb Montgomery

Our reading this week is from the book of Luke:

"About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, 'Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' (He did not know what he was saying.) While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.' When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to them-selves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen." (Luke 9:28-36)

The first version of this story is found in the gospel of Mark (Mark 9:1-8). Matthew's gospel elaborates on the story, adding parallels for Jesus that Matthew's audience would have associated with Moses (cf. Matthew 17:1-8; and Exodus 24:1,15-18; 34:29-35). Matthew also added another association between his version of Jesus' baptism and the words found in Isaiah 42:1. Luke later adds versus 31-34 and 36, and changes the six days Mark describes at the beginning of the story to eight.

Unfortunately, Christianity has become filled with anti-Semitic interpretations of the transfiguration, usually contrasting Moses and Elijah with Jesus. With a kind of Christian supremacy, or supercessionism (replacing Judaism with Christianity), some Christians compare Moses and Elijah with "the law and the prophets" and claim Jesus is superior to both.

I want to offer an interpretation of this story that honors Judaism instead of contrasting with it. Jesus was a Jewish man after all. His was a 1st Century Jewish voice among many other Jewish voices, rooted in interpretations of the Torah and other Hebrew wisdom. Jesus, even in these stories, did not envision himself as beginning a new religion: he and his teachings were deeply influenced by the Judaism he was raised within. So when we read the gospels, I find it much more helpful to read the synoptic gospels as a debate within Judaism among Jewish voices on what it means to be faithful to the God of the Torah rather than as an anachronistic debate between

Christianity and Judaism as world religions. (I feel the gospel of John breaks from this pattern.) As I've said recently, we don't have to disparage Judaism to value the ethical teachings of Jesus.

What purpose might the gospel authors, who wrote for both Jewish and Gentile Jesus followers, have had in associating Moses and Elijah with Jesus in this story?

First, Jewish tradition held that Moses and Elijah had both talked directly with God (Deuteronomy 34:10; 2 Kings 19:9-13). When they are introduced in the gospels, Jesus has begun his final trek to Jerusalem where he will confront the economic injustices of the Temple state (flipping the tables), and that confrontation will most likely result in state violence against him. Before the week is over, Jesus will be crucified on a Roman cross.

But in this story, the early Jesus followers are trying earnestly to make sense of Jesus' execution at the hands of the Roman empire. Their association of both Elijah and Moses with Jesus pointed Jesus followers to the claim that although Jesus ministry and work of salvation had been interrupted by a Roman cross, God had overturned, reversed, and undone that act of unjust state violence and raised Jesus from the dead, which meant his salvific work lived on. In the Hebrew tradition, Elijah and Moses are figures for whom death did not have the final say. Elijah was taken directly to heaven not seeing death (2 Kings 2:11), and Moses' death was also surrounded with mystery, his burial place of being unknown and several traditions

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Following Jesus... continued from page 2

believing that he was taken into the presence of the Divine after death (Deuteronomy 34:6; Jude 9).

Again, early Jesus followers are trying to find a life-giving framing for Jesus' murder by the system because of his call for change. They are trying to strengthen the claim that he's been resurrected.

There are other associations, as well. Moses was the law giver and deeply associated with themes of liberation from oppression. Jesus' early followers, Jewish and Gentile, understood him as another great teacher whose message was of liberation from oppression (see Luke 4:18-19).

The last association is the most meaningful to me: the association of Jesus with Elijah. In the Jewish stories, Elijah's mountaintop experience in 1 Kings 19 was one of epiphany as his life was threatened for speaking truth to power and while he was deeply discouraged about his mission. I can identify with moments of discouragement while considering one's life work. I can also imagine Jesus, too, wrestling similarly to Elijah during the last days of his life before the cross.

"He [Elijah] traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He replied, 'I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.' The LORD said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.' Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face

and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He replied, 'I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.' The LORD said to him, 'Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.'"

In our story this week, both Elijah and Moses appear, possibly to encourage Jesus during his own time of discouragement as his own life is in jeopardy. Even the Divine shows up in the story, with words of encouragement, of filial approval repeated from Jesus' baptism, and the admonishment for Peter, James and John to listen to Jesus.

I can see why the early Jewish Jesus followers would have found solace and encouragement through these associations.

I, too, think of those who I've journeyed with along the way who have been an encouragement to me when I've had difficult decisions to make. I'm thankful for each of them.

Have you had moments when you, also, have had to make some pretty difficult decisions? Moments where doing the right thing was not the easy choice? Who in your life were your Moses and Elijah? Who was there to encourage you? And lastly, who do you know who is engaging the work necessary for a better iteration of our present world, working to shape our world into a safe, compassionate, just home for us all, who right now could use your encouragement?

Take a moment this week and reach out.

You never know what difference your just showing up could make. It doesn't have to be a blinding light with radiant clouds and big voices from the sky. It could just be a text, or a phone call. However you choose to show up, take some time this week to let someone know that, in this work, they are not alone.

Here's to a better world.

And here's to all who right now are working toward it.

HeartGroup Application

1. Share something that spoke to you from this week's eSight/Podcast episode with your HeartGroup.
2. Share a story with your group from your own experience when someone was your Elijah or Moses and encouraged you when you had a difficult decision to make in a context of justice, liberation, or compassion.
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. ■

March is Donor Appreciation Month at Renewed Heart Ministries

This month, we want to do something special to thank those of you who support Renewed Heart Ministries with the much needed funding that enable our work to continue.

Renewed Heart Ministries provides much needed resources that help enable Christians to discover the intersection of their love for Jesus and the work of healing our world through actions of love, justice and compassion as Jesus also modeled.

Engaging our societies in ways that shape our world into a safe, compassionate just home for everyone is hard work and its worth it. We appreciate actions, big and small, each of you take each day to engage this work.

This month, we are partnering with Watchfire Media to offer as a free *thank you* gift (shipping included) this beautiful *Holy Troublemakers & Unconventional Saints* 2022 Wall Calendar to everyone who makes a special one-time donation of \$50 or more through the *following special link* during the month of March to support RHM's work.

(Or you donate by mail by sending your donation to:

Renewed Heart Ministries
PO Box 1211, Lewisburg, WV 24901

If donating by mail, simply make sure that your donation is specially marked indicating you would like a *Holy Troublemakers & Unconventional Saints* 2022 Wall Calendar.)



If you are unfamiliar with this special calendar, The *Holy Troublemakers & Unconventional Saints* 2022 Wall Calendar features 12 "holy troublemakers," people of faith from different faiths and different eras who worked for more love, kindness, and justice in their corner of the world. Each of them did the right thing even when

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RHM's Recommended Reading for March

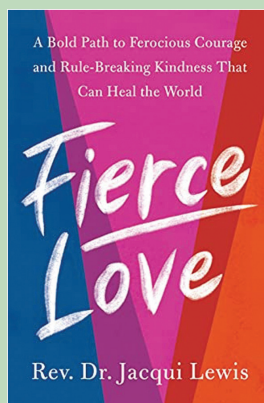
Fierce Love: A Bold Path to Ferocious Courage and Rule-Breaking Kindness That Can Heal the World

by Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis

A healing antidote to our divisive culture, full of evocative storytelling, spiritual wisdom, and nine essential daily practices—by the first female, Black senior minister at the historic Collegiate Churches of New York.

"Fierce Love teaches us that with spiritual faith we can transcend the darkest moments and come through stronger."—Gabrielle Bernstein, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *The Universe Has Your Back*

We are living in a world divided. Race and ethnicity, caste and color, gender and sexuality, class and



education, religion and political party have all become demographic labels that reduce our differences to simplistic categories in which "we" are vehemently against "them." But Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis's own experience—of being the first female and first Black minister in her church's history, of being in an interracial marriage, and of making peace with childhood abuse—illustrates that our human capacity for empathy and forgiveness is the key to reversing these ugly trends.

Inspired by the tenets of ubuntu—the Zulu philosophy that we are each impacted by the circumstances that

impact those around us, and that the world won't get better until we all get better—*Fierce Love* lays out the nine daily practices for breaking through tribalism and engineering the change we seek. From downsizing our emotional baggage to speaking truth to power to fueling our activism with joy, it demonstrates the power of small, morally courageous steps to heal our own lives, our posse, and our larger communities. Sharing stories that trace her personal reckoning with racism as well as the arc of her journey to an inclusive and service-driven faith, Dr. Lewis shows that kindness, compassion, and inclusive thinking are muscles that can be exercised and strengthened. With the goal of mending our inextricable human connection, *Fierce Love* is a manifesto for all generations: a bighearted, healing antidote to our rancorous culture.

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

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



Setting in Motion a Safe, Compassionate, Just Society (Part 1 of 3)

"We reject any interpretation that demands we feel some kind of love or positive emotion toward our abusers or oppressors. That interpretation only furthers the harm that abusers and oppressors have committed against survivors."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/02/setting-motion-safe-compassionate-just-society-part1/

Setting in Motion a Safe, Compassionate, Just Society (Part 2 of 3)

"Jesus recommended nakedness in protest over returning violence with more violence."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/02/setting-motion-safe-compassionate-just-society-part2/

Setting in Motion a Safe, Compassionate, Just Society (Part 3 of 3)

"Our choices show not only what kind of people we want to be; they also indicate what kind of community or society we are setting in motion with our choices."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/02/setting-motion-safe-compassionate-just-society-part3/



When Social Justice is Rejected and Spoken of as Evil (Part 1 of 3)

"Just because you're being criticized doesn't necessarily mean you're on the right track, and being praised doesn't necessarily mean you are on the wrong path."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/02/social-justice-rejected-evil-part1/

When Social Justice is Rejected and Spoken of as Evil (Part 2 of 3)

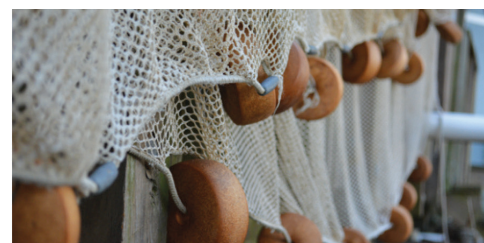
"If the elite and privileged all speak well of you, then chances are this week's saying applies most directly to you."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/02/social-justice-rejected-evil-part2/

When Social Justice is Rejected and Spoken of as Evil (Part 3 of 3)

"We can choose to bend the arc of the universe toward justice for everyone. That arc is going to bend one way or another. Either we will bend it to benefit a few at the expense of the diverse masses or, in the face of being spoken of as evil, we can continue shaping our world into a safe, compassionate, just home for everyone."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/02/social-justice-rejected-evil-part3/



Decolonizing Fishing for People (Part 1 of 3)

"This interpretation has made Christian missionary efforts vulnerable to being coopted by European and later American colonial, capitalist abuses and the genocide of Indigenous people."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/02/decolonizing-fishing-people-part1/

Decolonizing Fishing for People (Part 2 of 3)

"In several Hebrew scriptures, fishing for people was about hooking or catching a certain kind of person, a powerful and unjust person, and removing them from their position of power from where they were wielding harm."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/02/decolonizing-fishing-people-part2/

Decolonizing Fishing for People (Part 3 of 3)

"Lastly, this story places people before profit—especially people who are being harmed, marginalized, excluded, and killed."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/02/decolonizing-fishing-people-part3/



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.

EPISODE 409: ENCOURAGEMENT WHEN THE WORK IS LONELY AND HARD

"In this story, the early Jesus followers are trying earnestly to make sense of Jesus' execution at the hands of the Roman empire. Their association of both Elijah and Moses with Jesus pointed Jesus followers to the claim that although Jesus ministry and work of salvation had been interrupted by a Roman cross, God had overturned, reversed, and undone that act of unjust state violence and raised Jesus from the dead, which meant his salvific work lived on. In the Hebrew tradition, Elijah and Moses are figures for whom death did not have the final say."



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

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advantage of all
of RHM's *free*
resources?**

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don't miss a thing!**

Visit us at:
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

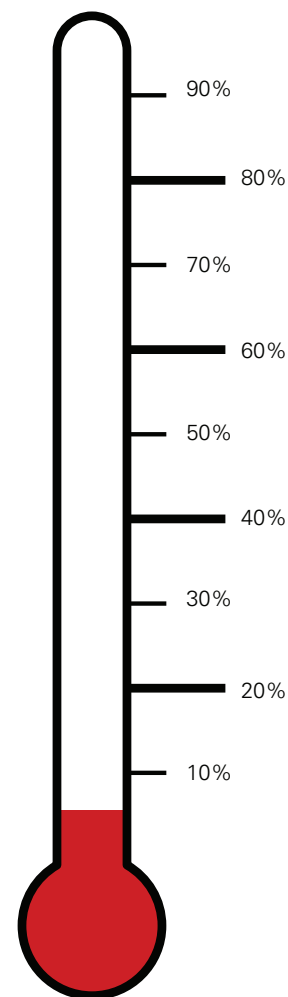
And to those of you out there who are already supporting this ministry, I want to say thank you. We continue being a voice for change because of your support.

**2022 Projected Budget Goal:
\$185,000.00**

**Donations Received
February 2022:
\$5,310.71**

**Donations Received
Year To Date:
\$9,820.06**

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



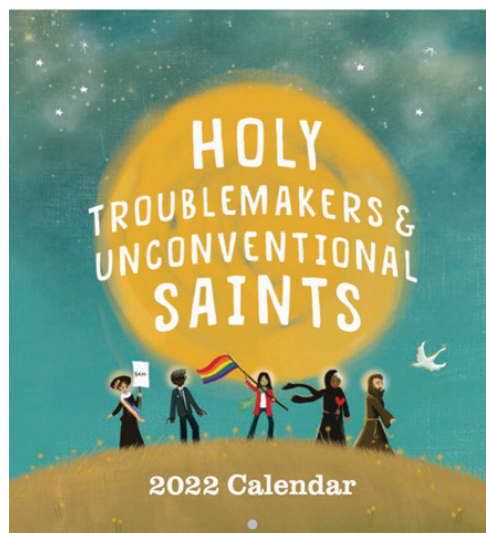
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it was the hard thing, and even when it rocked the religious boat.

Like the book *Holy Troublemakers & Unconventional Saints*, this calendar centers holy troublemakers who are women, LGBTQ, Black, Indigenous, and other people of color who have too often been written out of religious narratives. Their stories inspire, educate, challenge, encourage, and move us all towards more love and a faith that works for the common good of everyone.

Packed with original artwork, short bios, and inspiring quotes, the calendar also includes important holidays from diverse faith traditions, social justice movement anniversaries, and dates that help us remember that joy is an essential part of holy troublemaking.

Thank you in advance for supporting the work of Renewed Heart Ministries. Together we will continue being a voice



for change. And thank you to Watchfire Media, as well, for partnering with RHM this month to be able to share this special thank you gift with our supporters. We appreciate all you do, too!



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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.

**"I know this to be true:
 The world doesn't get
 great unless we all get
 better. If there is such a
 thing as salvation, then
 we are not saved until
 everyone is saved; our
 dignity and liberation are
 bound together."**

REV. DR. JACQUI LEWIS
FIERCE LOVE, P. 14

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**We at
 Renewed Heart Ministries
 add our names to the
 growing list of those who
 condemn Russia's invasion
 of Ukraine, and the choices
 that lead to this moment.
 Our hearts are with all who
 are harmed by this action.
 We continue to maintain
 that the road to peace is not
 war, but distributive justice,
 safety, and compassion.**

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