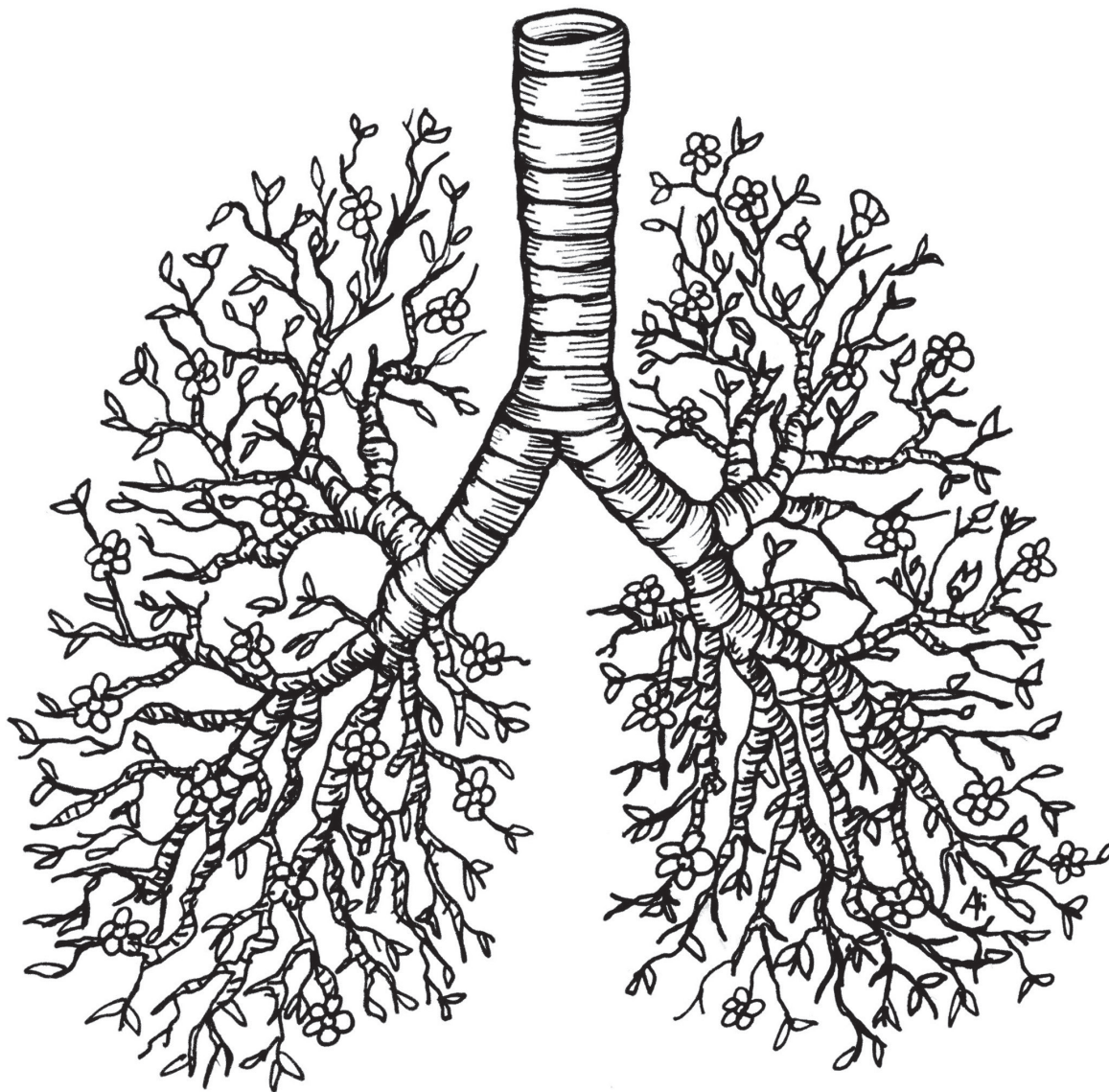


RENEWED
HEART
MINISTRIES



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



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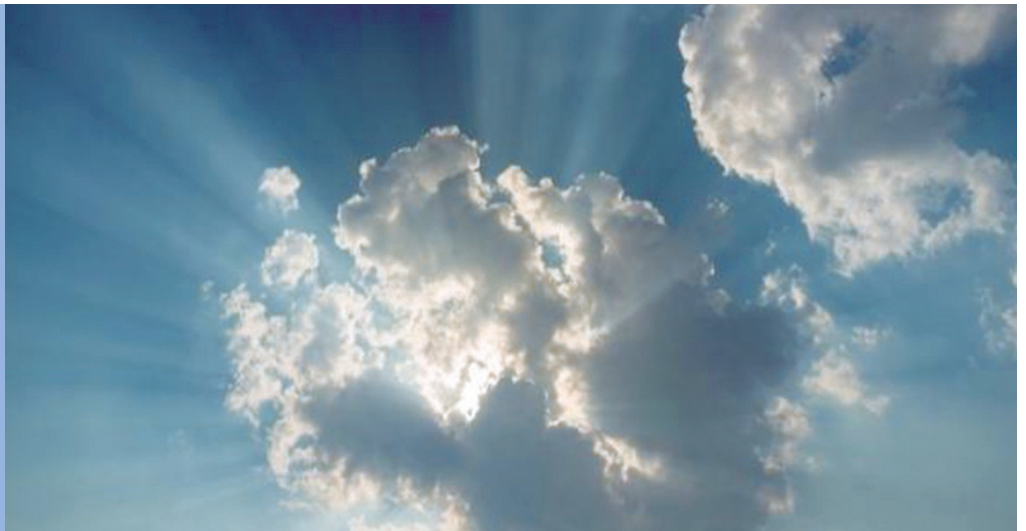


@HerbMontgomery



Herb Montgomery

In the stories, Jesus doesn't come back from the dead just to live another 30 or so years doing the same thing he'd done before he was executed. The attempted silencing of Jesus and his saving work is only an interruption, not an end. Each resurrection story defines Jesus' resurrection as causing his life work to continue in the lives of his followers. Jesus commissioned his disciples to continue his life work in the same spirit that inspired him."



Breathing In Spirit, Exhaling Love and Justice

by Herb Montgomery

Our reading this week is from the gospel of John:

"On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Messiah. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Messiah!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it

into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Savior and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:19-31)

This first weekend after Western Christianity's Easter each year, we begin reading the stories of the early believers after the resurrection. In each post resurrection story, the good news or gospel is not that Jesus died or even died for you, but that this Jesus that was brutally murdered by the state and those who controlled the status quo is risen. He's alive! The crucifixion and all that Jesus' death accomplished has been undone, reversed, and overcome!

This week's story from John is similar to, yet still very different from, those found in Luke 24:36-49, Mark 16:14-18, Matthew 28:18-20, and Acts 1:8.

In John, Jesus cryptically breathes the Holy Spirit onto his disciples. He then attaches to this gift of the spirit the authority of "loosing and binding," forgiving, bringing comfort and liberation, and setting people free (cf. Matthew 16:19; Matthew 18:18).

It's vital that the power of forgiving or not forgiving is connected to the disciples receiving the spirit of Jesus. Forgiveness divorced from that spirit

serves to only perpetuate oppression and harm. I'll explain.

Jesus uses this language in the gospel of Luke:

"The Spirit of the Most High is on me, because the Most High has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

The Most High has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners

and recovery of sight for the blind,

to set the oppressed free,

to proclaim the year of the Most High's favor." (Luke 4:18-19)

Here the work of the Spirit is to announce good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for prisoners, set the oppressed free, and announce the year of the Most High's favor, the year when all debts would be forgiven, regardless of creditors' wishes. In that year, debtors were released!

Those who are forgiven in the Jesus story are those on the margins, those pushed to the underside and edges of Jesus' society by those benefiting from the status quo. What about those whose social location was more at the center or upper class? Did Jesus extend forgiveness to them, too?

Remember the story of Zacchaeus? (see Luke 19:1-9) Jesus forgave and loosed him, too. Yet Zacchaeus was not loosed or forgiven from the consequences from his actions. Jesus instead called him to stop participating in oppression. Only then did salvation come to Zacchaeus'

continued on page 3

Breathing In Spirit... continued from page 2

house, because salvation looks like justice for the oppressed. This reminds me of Gandhi critiquing Christianity: he said he didn't want to be saved from the consequences of his actions but from those actions themselves.

How many times have we seen those who harm others or benefit from that harm being forgiven or assured of no condemnation without being called to make restitution or reparations?

Being loosed is not conditional on acts of restoration like a quid pro quo, tit for tat, or an exchange. Rather, for oppressors, being loosed actually is these acts of restoring that which has been taken from others.

This is why I believe the disciples were given authority not to forgive, too. Reserving "forgiveness" is a way to remind them that their freedom is intrinsically tied to their choice to stop participating in the harm being done to others. Anything less than that is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer described as "cheap grace." During the 1930s, Bonhoeffer watched Christians giving assurance to the Nazis. Assuring oppressors that everything is okay while they continuing to do harm is akin to expecting victims or survivors to reconcile with those who have harmed them but done no work of restitution. Neither of these are life-giving interpretations of the forgiveness ethic in the Jesus stories.

These stories don't help us recover so much of the historical Jesus as much as they establish the authority of his disciples. In this week's reading, the focus is Thomas and the story about him serves a double purpose for the fledgling Jesus movement.

First, it establishes Thomas as an early movement leader. Multiple documents in Christian history would later be attributed to this disciple. Thomas is supposed to have taken the gospel to the Parthians and then on to India. He is credited with establishing the Mar Thoma Church and was martyred there as well. Thomas is also a central figure in Syrian Christianity: his bones are claimed by that faith tradition to have been removed from India and brought to Edessa close to the end of the fourth century.

Second, this story challenges people to believe in the Jesus story even though they haven't seen Jesus for themselves.

What speaks to me most about these stories is that Jesus didn't come back from the dead just to live another 30 or so years doing the same thing he'd done before he was executed. The attempted silencing of Jesus and his saving work is only an interruption, not an end. Each resurrection story defines Jesus' resurrection as causing his life work to continue in the lives of his followers. Jesus commissioned his disciples to continue his life work in the same spirit that inspired him. I consider again how Jesus' life work was summarized in passages like Luke 4:18-19: as good news for the poor, release for the prisoners, setting free the oppressed, and proclaiming the most High's favor or forgiving debts. There are similar teachings in both Luke's sermon on the plain (Luke 6) and Matthew's sermon on the mount (beginning in Matthew 5). These are the ethics and values in the Jesus story: Jesus both comforted and challenged individuals and also, in his overturning of the tables, challenged unjust systems, demanding a different order of things in the here and now.

So I ask myself, am I breathing in this same spirit that we read of in this week's passage? And how closely is my story aligning with the Jesus story?

In what areas does my life harmonize with the Jesus story? Where is there dissonance?

Each of us looses and binds things every day. Are the things I bind and loose similar to or vastly different from the liberation work, the love, compassion, safety and justice in the Jesus story?

This first weekend after Easter, I want to foster more harmony between my life story and this story of Jesus that I hold dear.

I'm sure you do, too.

Here's to breathing in that spirit, together, and exhaling love and justice with those our lives touch each and every day.

HeartGroup Application

1. Share something that spoke to you from this week's eSight/Podcast episode with your HeartGroup.
2. In what ways are you inspired to breath in spirit and exhale love and justice in your own spheres of influence this new year? 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 Priscilla Du Preez on Unsplash

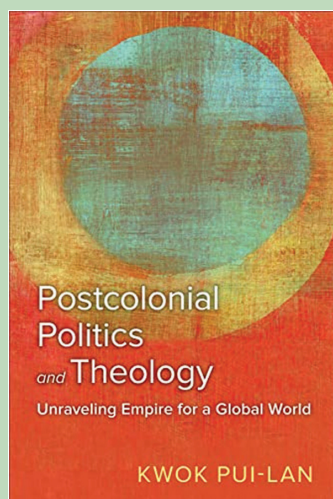
RHM's Recommended Reading for May

Postcolonial Politics and Theology: Unraveling Empire for a Global World

by Kwok Pui-lan

Postcolonial Politics and Theology seeks to reform and reimagine the field of political theology—uprooting it from the colonial soil—using the comparative lenses of postcolonial politics and theology to bring attention to the realities of the Global South. Kwok Pui-lan traces the history of the political impacts of Western theological development, especially developments in the U.S. context, and the need to shift these interlocking fields toward non-Western traditions in theory and practice.

A special focus of the book is on the changing sociopolitical realities of American Empire and Sino-American competition, illustrated in Donald Trump's slogan of "Make America Great Again" and Xi Jinping's hope for a "China Dream." The shifting of U.S. and Asian relationships highlights the need to move our theological and political categories away from a vision of strongman domination and toward a post-modern, postcolonial, and transnational world, especially exemplified in the Asia Pacific context.



Throughout, Kwok overturns the idea of centering one cultural framework and marginalizing others in favor of living into a multiplicity of deeply contextual theologies. She explores how these theologies are being developed in global, postcolonial contexts, through struggles for democracy and civil disobedience in Hong Kong, by efforts to reclaim selfhood and sexual identity from exploitative colonial desire, through the work of interreligious solidarity and peace-building, and in the practice of earth care in the face of ecological crisis.

Remember, you don't have to order this book through amazon.com, but if you do, please consider using Amazon Smile (smile.amazon.com) and selecting Renewed Heart Ministries as your designated charity for a portion of your purchase to be donated to RHM at no additional cost to you.



Weekly HeartGroup on Zoom Every Wednesday Night!

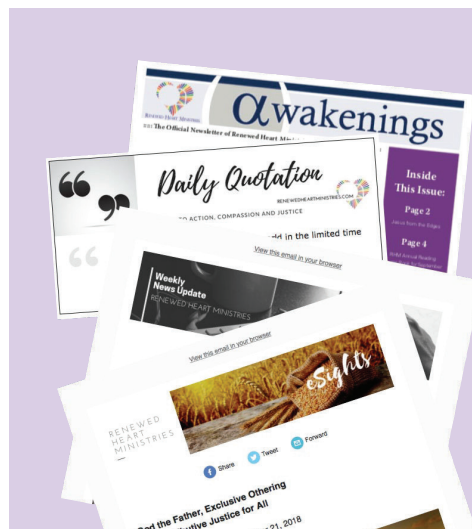
"I've experienced paradigm shifts in my thinking that are transforming my spiritual journey."

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.



Photo by Aaron Burden on Unsplash



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

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miss a thing!***

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and click "Sign Up!"

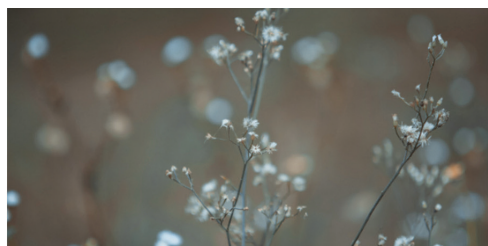
SOCIAL JESUS

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/



Breathing In Spirit, Exhaling Love and Justice (Part 1 of 3)

"Forgiveness divorced from that spirit serves to only perpetuate oppression and harm."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/04/breathing-spirit-exhaling-love-justice-part1/

Breathing In Spirit, Exhaling Love and Justice (Part 2 of 3)

"How many times have we seen those who harm others or benefit from that harm being forgiven or assured of no condemnation without being called to make restitution or reparations?"

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/04/breathing-spirit-exhaling-love-justice-part2/

Breathing In Spirit, Exhaling Love and Justice (Part 3 of 3)

"Each resurrection story defines the resurrection in ways that cause his life work to continue in the lives of his followers. And these are a collection of stories endeavoring to inspire the continuance of his life work in the same spirit that inspired him."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/04/breathing-spirit-exhaling-love-justice-part3/



Easter and the Myth of Redemptive Suffering (Part 1 of 3)

"One thing that is common to all the gospel narratives is the presence of women at the tomb of Jesus."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/04/easter-myth-redemptive-suffering-part1/

Easter and the Myth of Redemptive Suffering (Part 2 of 3)

"These are valid questions. How can we reconcile seeing the cross event as a salvific divine act without unintentionally inferring a willingness to humiliate, physically denigrate, and violate someone 'body to save others?"

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/04/easter-myth-redemptive-suffering-part2/

Easter and the Myth of Redemptive Suffering (Part 3 of 3)

"This is a story of how life conquers death, love conquers hate, sharing conquers greed, and life giving power conquers death dealing."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/04/easter-myth-redemptive-suffering-part3/



A Different Vision for Memorializing the Last Supper (Part 1 of 3)

"This time of year always amplifies several passages from the passion liturgy that are important for those who care about justice to interpret in life-giving ways."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/04/different-vision-memorializing-last-supper-part1/

A Different Vision for Memorializing the Last Supper (Part 2 of 3)

"This tradition has led quite a few modern Christians to reinterpret how they memorialize Jesus 'last supper, especially at this time of year when our attention is drawn to it once again."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/04/different-vision-memorializing-last-supper-part2/

A Different Vision for Memorializing the Last Supper (Part 3 of 3)

"How we celebrate rituals determines the kind of humans those rituals shape us into being. We don't have to remember the last supper in a way that glorifies death."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/04/different-vision-memorializing-last-supper-part3/

continued on page 6

Social Jesus Continued from page 5**Mary's Perfume and No More Poverty (Part 1 of 3)**

"Mary's act is one of gratitude...The story is not primarily that someone died, but that the state's murder of someone who was calling for social change was overturned, undone, and reversed."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/03/marys-perfume-no-more-poverty-part1/

Mary's Perfume and No More Poverty (Part 2 of 3)

"But this interpretation benefits those who are enriched by the status quo and don't want to see structural change."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/03/marys-perfume-no-more-poverty-part2/

Mary's Perfume and No More Poverty (Part 2 of 3)

"I don't believe Jesus' words in John about poor people should be interpreted as establishing as an existential reality that poverty is an eternal, unchangeable given for our world."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/03/marys-perfume-no-more-poverty-part3/

**EPISODE 418:
ANOTHER
BEGINNING**

"This third weekend after Easter in our western Christian calendar, how is the Jesus of this story calling you to renew how you follow him. In our world deeply in need of love, compassion, justice, and action, what does following Jesus in your context look like? This is a good time of year to reconsider all of these questions."



WWW.RENEWEDHEARTMINISTRIES.COM

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

Understanding and Sharing a Theology of the Cross with Children: Beyond Substitutionary Atonement Ministries

Here's a conversation on talking to children about the violence of the cross during this holiday weekend that was recorded this spring. Grateful to my friends author and pastor Traci Smith of Elmhurst Presbyterian Church and author Daneen Akers of *Holy Troublemakers & Unconventional Saints* for this conversation.

Listen at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uu-aSH3Daqo>



Renewed Heart Ministries is a not-for-profit group that is passionate about rediscovering, following and helping others rediscover the teachings and sayings of the historical Jesus of Nazareth. We believe these teachings have an intrinsic value in informing the work of nonviolently confronting, liberating and transforming our world into a safe, more just, more compassionate home for us all.

Everything we do here at Renewed Heart Ministries is for free. Even the many educational events that we hold in various venues. You can support our work either with a one-time gift or by becoming one of our monthly contributors by going to RenewedHeartMinistries.com and clicking the **donate** tab at the top right.

Or you can mail contributions to:
Renewed Heart Ministries
P.O. Box 1211
Lewisburg, WV 24901

Also, please sign up for our free resources and remember, every little bit helps.

And to those already supporting the work of Renewed Heart Ministries, your generous support makes it possible for us to exist and to continue being a presence for positive change in our world. So with all of our hearts, "Thank You."

Together we are making a difference, till the only world that remains is a world where only Love reigns.



Front cover artwork by Ali Montgomery.

"There is perhaps no expression more traditionally misunderstood than Jesus' invitation to these workers to become 'fishers of men.' This metaphor, despite the grand old tradition of missionary interpretation, does not refer to the 'saving of souls,' as if Jesus were conferring on these men instant evangelist status . . . Taking this mandate for his own, Jesus is inviting common folk to join him in the struggle to overturn the existing order of power and privilege."

Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 132

