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Herb Montgomery

"And what does change cost? Is it this cost that causes us to be more moderate when we should be directly and actively opposed to things in our system that are harming the objects of the Universal Divine love we preach? Do we see ourselves in this story?"



## When Liberation Becomes Complicated

by Herb Montgomery

Our reading this week is from the gospel of Luke:

They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!" For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man.

Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.

The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him. (Luke 8:26-39)

This week's story hasn't aged well. Taking the story literally has born harmful fruit to those with disabilities because the culture in which the Jesus story was written and shared believed that things like mental disabilities and epilepsy were the result of demonic possession.

Josephus, a Jewish historian near the time of Jesus, wrote:

"Exorcism is an exceptionally powerful cure among our own people down to this very day." (Jewish Antiquities, 8:46)

Today we know better. Things we once did not understand that once had supernatural explanations now have scientific explanations. The history of scientific discovery should make us

careful about explaining things we still do not understand today with supernatural explanations, especially explanations like demon possession that have historically only hurt marginalized communities. Stories like this week's now need to be shared with interpretive explanations to reduce the risk that Christians might use them to wittingly or unwittingly harm others.

In this story, the demonic possession is a metaphor for the very concrete, literal political reality of the Jewish people during this time. The Jewish people were possessed, that is, occupied by the Roman empire. One hint that this story should not be taken literally but as code for political oppression is that the name of the "demon" possessing the man in the story is Legion.

A Roman legion was the Roman army's largest military unit. This occupying, militaristic presence kept Rome's invaded and conquered territories in line during the Pax Romana, the peace of Rome. These occupying forces, literally peacekeepers, kept uprisings and rebellions repressed through their continual military presence.

Another sign of metaphor in this story is the presence of pigs and pig farmers in a Hellenized Jewish community. Pigs are unclean in the Torah and forbidden as food. I imagine that the Jewish farmers in this story may have raised them for export to other regions of the Roman empire. Pig farming in this Jewish community indicates the economic entanglement of being "possessed" by the Roman empire. Roman occupation,

*continued on page 3*

## Complicated... continued from page 2

especially in Hellenized Galilee, was a complex reality where Roman occupation both harmed and benefited the people simultaneously.

And this is a major story theme. To be liberated from Rome would come at a cost, an economic cost at least. The community eventually rejects Jesus' liberation ministry because even though Roman occupation harmed them in some areas of their lives, it was beneficial in others and they were willing to live with it.

Jesus' exorcism represented a real, political repudiation of the Roman occupying force. The people's response to Jesus reveals the sentiment in some Hellenized communities that they didn't want to be liberated to the extent that they would lose the benefits of Rome's occupation. They may have wanted independence but that desire simply did not outweigh the benefits occupation brought to their daily lives.

Last month, Renewed Heart Ministries recommended book of the month was Kwok Pui-lan's *Postcolonial Politics and Theology: Unraveling Empire for a Global World*. The work of decolonizing our theology and unravelling from empire is relevant to our story this week. The tension we encounter in this story between the desire for liberation and the fear of uncertainty and change that freedom and independence would bring is very real and not something we should brush off too lightly.

I used to read this story with eyes focused primarily on the demoniac. But as I get older, I'm starting to perceive the demoniac as a story device to connect the hearers of this story to its central characters: those so enmeshed and entangled in the system of their oppressors that they no longer want liberation when the possibility arises. Ched Myers reminds us, "Whether personal or political, liberation has a cost, and there will always be those unwilling to risk it." (\*Myers, Ched; Dennis, Marie; Nangle, Joseph; Moe-Lobeda, Cynthia; Taylor, Stuart, *"Say to This Mountain": Mark's Story of Discipleship*, p. 60)

We often have said here at Renewed Heart Ministries that our primary work as followers of the moral philosophy

of Jesus in our contemporary context is to, in whatever way we can, work toward shaping our world into a safe, compassionate, just home for everyone, especially those made unsafe in our world and our societies.

As we imagine what a safer, more just world could look like, and as we work toward that kind of world, how do our entanglements with our current society create tension and reluctance for us to change things today?

For some people, this society doesn't outweigh the desire for change; it doesn't even come close. But for many others, and I'm thinking of many of my liberal friends who are straddling two realities, the present iteration both benefits them and causes them deep concern for the people who are harmed by capitalism, classism, the patriarchy, White supremacy, hetero-sexism, gun legislation, or so many other things.

There are times when it is appropriate to take inventory of whether you really want things to change? Is it enough to grant equal opportunity in a system that will continue to produce winners and losers? Or does the system itself desperately need change.

And what does change cost? Is it this cost that causes us to be more moderate when we should be directly and actively opposed to things in our system that are harming the objects of the Universal Divine love we preach?

Do we see ourselves in this story?

When liberation stands on the threshold of our lives, knocking, are we through our choices quietly asking it to also leave because we are "over-come with fear"?

As someone who didn't ask to be born into my social location, my prayer is that when liberation comes knocking, I will have the courage to open the door and invite the change in.

## HeartGroup Application

1. Share something that spoke to you from this week's eSight/Podcast episode with your HeartGroup.
2. What does change cost? Is it this cost that causes us to be more moderate when we should be directly and actively opposed to things in our system that are harming the objects of the Universal Divine love we preach? 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 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](mailto:info@renewedheartministries.com) for the link for the Zoom meeting.





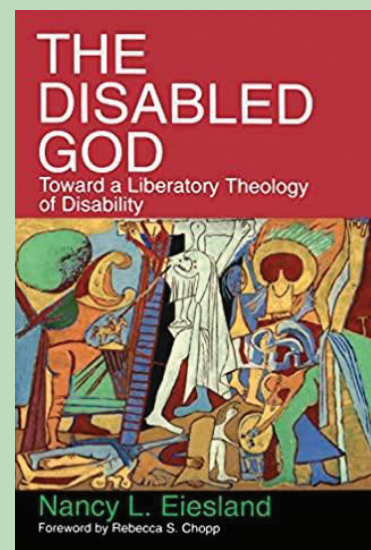
# RHM's Recommended Reading for July

## *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*

by Nancy L Eiesland

"Draws on themes of the disability-rights movement to identify people with disabilities as members of a socially disadvantaged minority group rather than as individuals who need to adjust. Highlights the hidden history of people with disabilities in church and society. Proclaiming the emancipatory presence of the disabled God, the author maintains the vital importance of the relationship between Christology and social change. Eiesland contends that in the Eucharist, Christians encounter the disabled God and may participate in new imaginations of wholeness and new embodiments of justice.

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.



***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**



**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!"

## 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/)



#### ***The Gospel of Interdependence (Part 1 of 3)***

"These itinerant workers were to be characterized by dependence, not independence, connectedness as contrasted with individualism."

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/06/gospel-interdependence-part1/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/06/gospel-interdependence-part1/)

#### ***The Gospel of Interdependence (Part 2 of 3)***

"We deeply need to reconnect with the reality that we are part of one another. Either we survive and thrive together, or we don't survive or thrive."

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/06/gospel-interdependence-part2/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/06/gospel-interdependence-part2/)

#### ***The Gospel of Interdependence (Part 3 of 3)***

"This calls us to reassess the social waters we swim in. It encourages interdependence rather than independence."

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/06/gospel-interdependence-part3/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/06/gospel-interdependence-part3/)



#### ***Jesus & God as Woman (Part 1 of 3)***

"For Boyer, every other detail of the incarnation is incidental, but the fact that Jesus was male is substantive."

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/05/jesus-god-woman-part1/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/05/jesus-god-woman-part1/)

#### ***Jesus & God as Woman (Part 2 of 3)***

"This declaration specifically excludes women from the Imago Dei and justifies the exclusion by referring to Jesus as the exclusive revelation of the Divine."

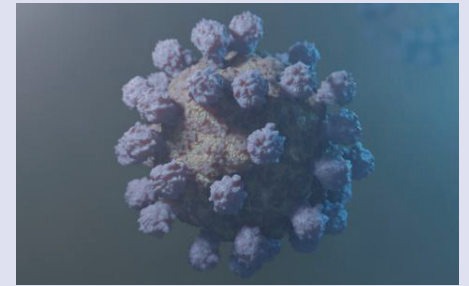
[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/06/jesus-god-woman-part2/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/06/jesus-god-woman-part2/)

#### ***Jesus & God as Woman (Part 3 of 3)***

"People of all genders should be able to see themselves as bearing the image of the Divine because we all do."

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/06/jesus-god-woman-part3/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2022/06/jesus-god-woman-part3/)

## Recent Events



### ***Covid at RHM***

Some of you have noticed fewer podcast episodes and blog posts on RHM's website and on our Patheos Social Jesus blog last month. We're glad so many of you reached out. It shows us that you are tracking with our weekly resource publications.

The reason there were fewer postings in June was due to the Montgomery family being hit with Covid. We have been so careful not to unduly risk ourselves or to put others in harms way, and it finally caught us. I'm thankful for the vaccinations and boosters. As bad as it was, I know it could have been worse. I'm happy to report that we all got through it with varying degrees of symptoms. With the exception of a couple really awful days, our experiences were mild. We made it through and we are all out of quarantine now. We're happy to be looking forward to July with renewed hearts and refreshed energy.

Thank you to everyone who checked on us.

Here's to a much better July!

## Quotable Quotes

"If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again." — Sojourner Truth; *Ain't I a Woman*





# Called at the Margins

by Herb Montgomery

Last month I had the immense pleasure of participating with SDA Kinship International in relation to the Called Conference.

What is Called?

Called is the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventist pastor's family convention for pastors, chaplains, volunteer lay pastors, administrators, Bible instructors, seminarians, pastor's spouses and children.

This summer the conference was held at the Central Bank Convention Center in Lexington, Kentucky.

Who is Seventh-day Adventist Kinship?

SDA Kinship International is an LGBTQIA+ affirming and inclusive community which has for the past forty years provided a safe space and resources for current and former LGBTQIA+ Seventh-day Adventists. (See <https://www.sdakinship.org/en/>).

Because this is primarily a conference for ministers, Called attendees are also provided access to an exhibit hall where hundreds of ministries, both within the institution as well as independent, supportive, self-supporting ministries who provide specialized ministry-related resources, products and/or services, can share what their ministry has to offer to ministers and their congregations.

Applications to have a booth in the exhibit hall from SDA Kinship, as well as other Adventist ministries who are working to broaden the dialogue on acceptance and affirmation for LGBTQIA+ Adventists, were all rejected.

In response to this rejection, SDA Kinship went to work immediately to rent space outside, across the street from the conference center in Triangle Park for their booth to be present and for those representing the Kinship community to be able to still provide their resources to Adventist pastors.



I did not attend this conference, but I was given a call to be one of the allies present at Kinship's booth across the street to participate at their booth which was appropriately titled on their banner, "Called at the Margins".

Kinship also organized evening meetings at a local church during the pastor's dinner break from the convention only three or four blocks away from the convention center. These meetings provided space for presentations, discussion, questions and answers, and many more resources for pastors wanting to open dialogue with their congregations on LGBTQIA+ affirmation and acceptance.

My dear friend Alisha Johnston was also present at this event to promote her brand new book, *The Bible and LGBTQ Adventists*, which had just hit the shelves the week of the convention. We'll soon be posting on our website at Renewed Heart Ministries how you can get a copy.

For me, it was good so see many of my LGBTQ friends whom I hadn't seen since before Covid.

The conference was a mixed experience. I didn't attend any of the sanctioned sessions. I did walk through the exhibit hall once the first day along with a LGBTQ friend who didn't want to go alone. I was content to hang out in the Kentucky summer heat outside at the booth and dialogue with those who had

the courage or curiosity to stop by. Many of those conversations were positive and encouraging. Some were quite the opposite with only one or two being verbally violent. Also, our Called At The Margins banner seen in the picture above was stolen one night half way through the conference. We pushed forward anyway and we are glad we did.

The conversation that meant the most to me was one I held with another member of the Kinship community after I witnessed an exchange where some very bigoted and hurtful things were said to them by one of the attending pastors. I asked my friend, "Why do you keep doing this? Is it really worth all of this?"

They shared with me an email they had just received on their way to the conference from an Adventist teenager who was gay but had expressed that they were alone, and could not even come out to their parents. They felt deeply isolated and without hope. They had reached out to my friend at Kinship asking sincerely if they, as an Adventist young person, "had any other option than suicide." I sat there as tears welled up in my friend's eyes. "That young person is why I continue to do this. As long as children are being born as LGBTQIA+ in the Adventist denomination, I'll be here providing a safe space and a person for them to talk to."

I sat there a long time letting that sink in.

I was proud to stand alongside my LGBTQIA+ Adventist friends this past month. I'm also thankful for all of you who support our work at Renewed Heart Ministries which enables us to engage events like these. From all of us here at RHM, thank you! Together we will continue to work to make a difference. Here's to a safer, more just, more compassionate world.



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](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

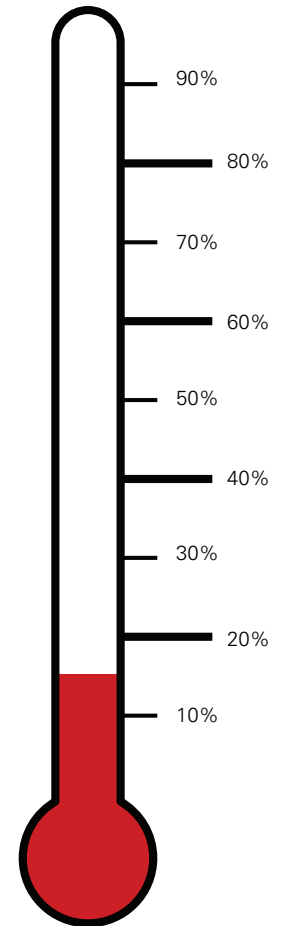
**And to those of you out there who are already supporting this ministry, I want to say thank you.** We continue being a voice for change because of your support.

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

**Donations Received  
May 2022:  
\$6,683.53**

**Donations Received  
January through May:  
\$27,984.33**

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



## Quotable Quotes

"No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and God's love is made complete in us."

– 1 John 4:12

"God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. God did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith."

– Acts 15:8-9



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**  
**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.

"This exclusive speech about God serves in manifold ways to support an imaginative and structural world that excludes or subordinates women. Wittingly or not, it undermines women's human dignity as equally created in the image of God."

Elizabeth A. Johnson  
She Who Is

