



# Awakenings

"Only by love is love awakened."

::::: The Official Newsletter of Renewed Heart Ministries :::::: Volume 9 :::::: Issue 10 ::::::



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## The Subversive Narratives of Advent

(Part 1 of 3)

by Herb Montgomery

### Quotable Quotes

*"The terrible truth is that our world has never established peace through victory. Victory establishes not peace, but lull. Thereafter, violence returns once again, and always worse than before. And it is that escalator violence that then endangers our world."*

– Marcus J. Borg &  
John Dominic Crossan;  
*The First Christmas* (p. 166)

***"I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all people."***

**(Luke 2:10)**

Advent season has begun!

Over the next two weeks I want to look at the birth narratives of Jesus from first century Christian, Jewish, and Roman perspectives. Much has been lost, co-opted, and eclipsed by the Imperial Christianity that began in the fourth century when Christianity became the official religion of the Empire. So in the next two weekly e-Sights, we'll be looking first at Matthew's birth narrative and then at Luke's. Both Matthew and Luke have story elements in common. They also differ greatly on other narrative details. We will be reading each story in the contexts they were each written in. Seen that original context, these narratives are intensely subversive of the military, political, and economic ways of empire as well as imperial theologies, not just in Rome but across time, including our own era.

A useful tool that I want to recommend this holiday season is Marcus Borg's and Dominic Crossan's timely volume, *The First Christmas*. They've done invaluable work in compiling information about the historical/cultural setting in which these birth-narratives were originally told. That information helps us rediscover the stories' meaning not simply to the first century followers of Jesus but also to us today as well. If I were teaching a class on the Christmas narratives this holiday season, not only would each student have a copy of Matthew's and Luke's narratives, they'd also have this 244-page volume as an accompanying text book. It is a fantastic overview.

### A Preliminary Word about Both Narratives

Something to note before we begin: These narratives are primarily concerned with *this world*, not with heaven. They are focused on *this life*. Too often, the birth-narratives of Jesus are read through the lens of salvation defined as entrance into

a post-mortem heaven. But that is not how the original Jewish Jesus community would have heard these stories. They were concerned with the whole of life, not merely with an afterlife. A spiritual or afterlife application of these narratives became the dominant interpretation through the cultural influence of the expanding Roman Empire and European colonialism. We've talked about the way that reading the gospel narratives with an otherworldly focus has had intensely destructive fruit. Before imperial Christianity, these narratives were understood to be about the transformation of this world. They were not solely theological; they were theological and political! They announced the Divine dream for this world and announced that the fulfillment of that dream had begun in Jesus. They were not about the destruction of this world but about the restoration of it. This restoration, seen in the narratives as they were originally understood, was symbolized by visions of the end of war, violence, injustice, and oppression.

### The Importance of Context

A point that I have been harping on for months now (and was happy to see addressed by Borg and Crossan) is the importance of acknowledging the historical context in which the Jesus narratives were created. Two examples that I use regularly to help people see the historical context of the Jesus story are Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I was overwhelmingly pleased to see Marcus and Dom use these examples as well:

*"What would you think of a book that started with the opener, 'I am going to discuss Mahatma Gandhi as a Hindu saint, but I'll skip all that distracting stuff about British imperial India'? Or another with, 'I am going to describe Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as a Christian saint, but I'll get right to his biography and skip all that stuff about racism in America as background baggage'? You would know immediately that something is seriously wrong with those authors' presentations."*

—*The First Christmas* (p. 55)

cont'd on page 3

### ...Subversive Narratives... cont'd from page 2

I couldn't agree more!

If we're going to be able to wrest these two narratives from the militaristic, political, economic, and theological eclipse of empire and restore them to their original, deeply imperially subversive character, we must discover their Jewish, Christian, and Roman context.

Once we see the historical context of these stories, we cannot unsee it. Once we know it, we cannot unknow it. And once we experience these stories, they will forever change how we read the birth-narratives of Jesus.

Next week, we'll look again at Matthew's narrative. The following week, just before Christmas, we will be turning our attention to Luke's. My hope is that through this short series that you will read the birth-narratives in Matthew's and Luke's gospels anew, that your heart will be renewed, and that you will be inspired, as a Jesus follower, to more deeply embody the this-world-transforming values taught within these narratives.

Though the early Jesus birth-narratives were originally intended to subvert the Roman Empire, I believe they also hold significance for us today who live in or in the shadow of the American Empire. In our era, these narratives are being eclipsed by the consumerism of our Empire's economic machine. The early followers' voices are lost even to Christians who are most familiar with these Christmas stories. Systemic racism continues to thrive, xenophobia toward Syrian refugees and Muslim Americans flourishes, and U.S. militaristic methods of achieving peace are continually touted by those who carry the name of this babe from Bethlehem.

If we are to rediscover the original subversive power of the birth-narratives of Jesus and rightly apply the stories to our lives today, we must begin with reading these narratives in the matrix of Imperial Rome and its grinding clash with the hopes of first-century Judaism.

"Who is the 'King of the Jews'? That was Herod the Great's title, but Matthew's story tells us Herod was more like Pharaoh, the lord of Egypt, the lord of bondage and oppression, violence and brutality. And his son was no better. Rather, Jesus is the true King of the Jews. And the rulers of his

world sought to destroy him.

Who is the Son of God, Lord, savior of the world, and the one who brings peace on earth? Within Roman imperial theology, the emperor, Caesar, was all of these. No, Luke's story says, that status and those titles belong to Jesus. He—not the emperor—is the embodiment of God's will for the earth.

Who is the light of the world? The emperor, son of Apollo, the god of light and reason and imperial order? Or is Jesus, who was executed by empire, the light in the darkness, the true light to whom the wise of this world are drawn?

Where do we find the fulfillment of God's dream for Israel and humanity? In the way things are now? Or only beyond death? Or in a very different world this side of death?"

—*The First Christmas*, p. 37.

The Gospel of Rome promised peace through victory achieved by violence. The conquered interpret this kind of peace in a vastly different way than the conquerors do. The Gospel of the Early Jesus Community envisioned a peace through restored justice for all, through a distinctly nonviolent transformation.

Over the next two weeks, I'm looking forward to sharing these two birth-narratives with you and focusing on how the first century Jesus community heard

and read them in the context of their era.

What we are about to discover may mean you'll never read these stories in quite the same way again.

## HeartGroup Application

1. Take time this week to read Matthew 1-2 as well as Luke 1-2. Familiarize yourself with each story. Try to keep them separate, for now, in your reading.
2. List what each story has in common. Then where each narrative differs from the other.
3. In preparation for next week, create an outline of Matthew's birth-narrative as this is the one we will be looking at first. You can do this on your own or as a group in your HeartGroup.

I'm looking forward to next week already! Until then, keep living in the way of love, till the only world that remains is a world where only love reigns.

I love each of you dearly.

Happy Holidays, and I'll see you next week. ■

For the next two articles in this series go to: [renewedheartministries.com/Esights/12-04-2015](http://renewedheartministries.com/Esights/12-04-2015)



## A Shared Table

*The Heart of the Universe that beats for those on the Margins.*

by Herb Montgomery

*(Originally posted Online)*

**Glendale City Church  
Glendale, CA  
October 2-3, 2015**

This last weekend I had the extreme pleasure of giving a series of presentations at Glendale City Church in Glendale, California. Very few churches within the Adventist faith tradition are practicing a shared table in the way I witnessed these folks presently doing. I was so encouraged by what I saw taking place.

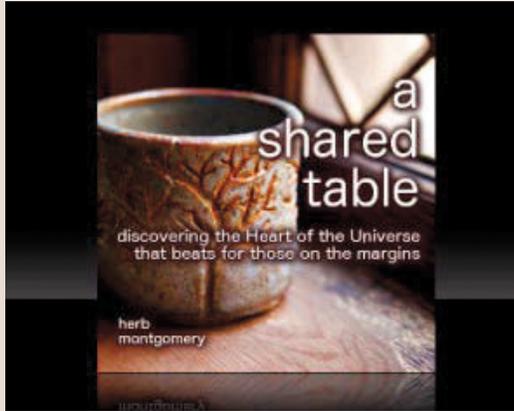
I spoke four times over the course of Friday and Saturday

Presentation 1: *The Heart of the Universe*

Presentation 2: *A Shared Table*

Presentation 3: *Lambs Among Wolves*

Presentation 4: *Three Reasons Jesus Remains Relevant*



I met some really fantastic people from all different walks of life! I had the opportunity to also learn about an amazing ministry that seeks to eliminate economic need within their own community. This organization is the Glendale Communitas Initiative, and you can learn more about them at [glendalecommunitasinitiative.org](http://glendalecommunitasinitiative.org).

I also was able to reconnect with some wonderful friends from the past. It was so good to see each of you. To those who were able to attend, I absolutely loved the time we shared.

Lastly, we spoke of starting a new

HeartGroup in this area, as well. For those in the Glendale area who would be interested in being a part of a HeartGroup please email Jeremy at [jcowin@me.com](mailto:jcowin@me.com).

For the rest of you who were not able to be at this event, the recordings from these presentations can be found at [renewedheartministries.com/presentation/A-Shared-Table](http://renewedheartministries.com/presentation/A-Shared-Table).

For the rest of you who were not able to be at this event, the recordings from these presentations can be found at <https://renewedheartministries.com/presentation/A-Shared-Table>.

As you listen to each of these presentations, it is my prayer that your heart will be awakened, renewed, empowered to embrace compassion toward those to whom the present arrangements of our world are doing harm. Jesus offered us the way of the Shared Table instead. It's up to us to choose it.

Thank you for supporting RHM.



# The Revolutionary Jesus

by Herb Montgomery

I'm just getting back from a week-long series of presentations in Phoenix, Arizona, and I'm so excited to offer you this new series.

First, I want to give a big "Thank You" to AWC, where these presentations were given. Your kindness and hospitality was overwhelming. I felt so loved by you. You are an amazing group of people. Thank you.

This new series explores the temporal, concrete teachings of Jesus regarding the things we face each day, here and now, that prevent us from being fully human. It's what many have called the *Liberation* teachings of Jesus.

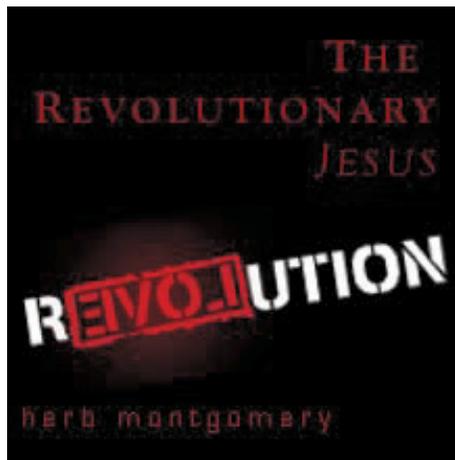
Was Jesus a revolutionary?

Absolutely.

He was God's revolutionary.

What was he passionate about?

A very different kind of world where swords are beaten into plowshares, and in which nations do not make war against nations anymore; a world where *every*



family shall live under their own vine and fig tree, with more than enough to share, and no one made to feel afraid. (Micah 4:1-4 cf. Isaiah 2:1-4).

The Jesus of the synoptic gospels taught such things such as nonviolent, self-affirming, enemy-confronting and transforming Love, Forgiveness, Wealth-redistribution, Equality, Inclusivity, the value of our Differences (including what those differences can teach us), and more.

His teachings were not so much about how one can get to heaven, as they were about transforming things here on earth to be "as

they already are in heaven." (see Matthew 6:10)

If you would like to discover or rediscover the revolutionary teachings of Jesus for yourself, I cannot recommend this series to you highly enough.

The presentations in this series that you will find are:

1. For the Love of His Own—Jesus' Passion for the Disinherited.
2. Self-Affirming Enemy Love
3. The End of Poverty
4. The (KIN)gdom
5. The Unstoppable Revolution

You can listen to this series for FREE at: [renewedheartministries.com/presentation/The-Revolutionary-Jesus](http://renewedheartministries.com/presentation/The-Revolutionary-Jesus)

It's my hope that as you explore, once again, the values of the Jesus story, your heart will be renewed and inspired to embody those teachings, till the only world that remains is a world where Love reigns, with safety and compassion for all.

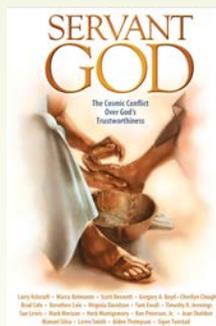
Happy listening!

## New at RenewedHeartMinistries.com!

*We now have an audio book page!*

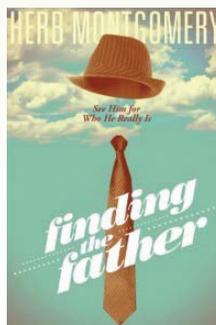
**Servant God audio book –  
FREE Download!**

[www.renewedheartministries.com/  
presentation/Servant-God](http://www.renewedheartministries.com/presentation/Servant-God)



**COMING SOON!**

**Finding the Father audio book –  
FREE Download!**



## Testimony

"I have been meaning to tell you....

Studying a book in our Bible group that is challenging as it appears to allude that ALL things are controlled by God—even when terrible things happen as they are meant as punishment. Anyway, I took issue, ordered the book you gave us *Finding the Father* and had it sent to all the ladies. They have been excited about the message...one lady even saying twice 'this book saved my life.'

So there you have it. Your 'ripples' of love continue to expand.

Thanks! Grateful!" **-E**

# Enough Room at the Table

A Conversation about Faith, Sexuality, and Gender



Fiscal sponsorship by  
SAN FRANCISCO FILM SOCIETY

## Enough Room at the Table

**FREE!**

**Coupon code: "WATCHFREE"**

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

ENOUGH ROOM AT THE TABLE is a dialogue film set at the intersection of faith, gender, and sexuality. It's meant to model the sacred space that opens up when we gather to genuinely listen to each other and participate in each other's lives. Our differences in beliefs, theological paradigms, and practice don't disappear; but we stop seeing each other as position statements or labels and instead see each other as fellow beloved children of God. We start looking like the sort of people who are known by their love.

This film shows a weekend dialogue as 12 Adventists from around the United States gathered to engage and converse

about topics often not discussed (or often discussed without key voices at the table). The group includes pastors, educators, parents, and LGBT+ Adventists, all from differing theological paradigms, experiences, and perspectives.

The participants didn't know each other before this weekend, but they were committed to open, authentic, and respectful dialogue. The deeply honest, sacred, and inspiring dialogue they model is what we're making available now. We hope this dialogue inspires viewers to host your own small group conversations in their own homes, churches, and communities as it's a powerful and transformative

process that will create ripples of hope and healing.

Each pay-what-you-want purchase (only a \$0.99 minimum) includes the feature-length film ENOUGH ROOM AT THE TABLE plus over 45 minutes of additional special features, and a facilitator's guidebook & resources (PDF) to help host your own small group dialogue.

"The first duty of love is listening."  
- Paul Tillich

This film is produced and directed by Stephen Eyer and Daneen Akers.

## Testimony

"I love you and what you are doing! Thank you for speaking up. My whole perspective has changed over the last 5-6 years and I'm thankful that God brought you into my life at Redwood in 2006." **-KB**





This year RHM participated, for the first time, in #Giving Tuesday. If you'd like to make a year end gift, or become one of our monthly contributors, go to:

<https://renewedheartministries.com/donate/>

You can download this image there, as well, and share on your social media pages. (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)

## Schedule

### DECEMBER 5, 2015

Metro NY Adventist Forum  
New York City, NY  
United States

### JANUARY 10 - 16, 2016

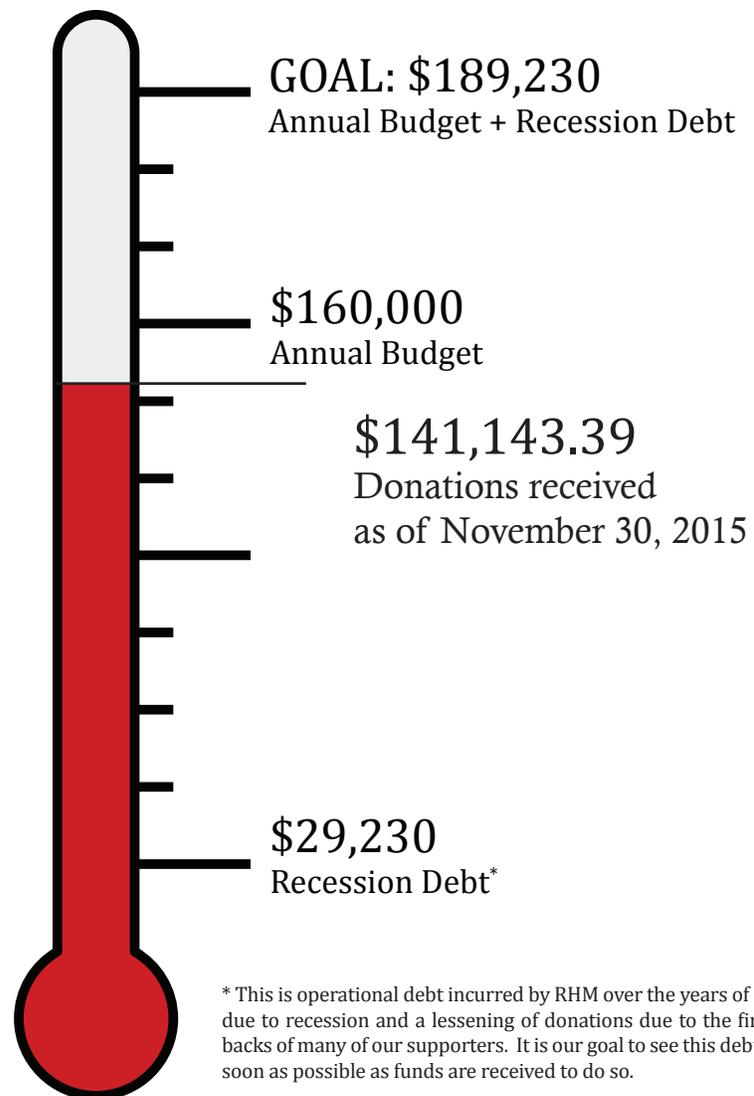
Edmonds Adventist Church  
Edmonds, WA  
United States  
425.771.5302

### FEBRUARY 19 - 21, 2016

Enterprise Adventist Church  
Enterprise, KS  
United States  
785.263.8922

### FEBRUARY 26 - 28, 2016

Raymond Adventist Church  
Franksville, WI  
United States  
262.878.5133



# Featured Presentation

## The Unstoppable Revolution

The early, first-century followers of Jesus proclaimed the good news of an empty tomb. Their “gospel” was this Jesus, whom they crucified, God had brought back to life! The execution of Jesus had been reversed and undone. The values that Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, had not failed. They saw themselves as part of something they



believed was unstoppable, and that would, ultimately, heal the world. (see John 3.17)

They announced a Jesus who was still out there, still recruiting, still calling “Follow Me.” As 2015 closes, we would like to feature the final presentation in the new *Revolutionary Jesus* series – **An Unstoppable Revolution** by Herb Montgomery. It is our hope that, as you listen, your heart will be renewed and inspired to embody the teachings of “this Jesus.” (Acts 2:32)



Renewed Heart Ministries provides its resources free of charge. Jesus instructed us, “*Freely you have received, freely give.*” We at RHM take this command very seriously. Philosophically we have a difficult time charging money to people for things Jesus taught us for free.

In order to do this, we are entirely dependent on the contributions of our supporters. If you would like to make a one-time gift or offer monthly support, please send your contributions to the following address:

**Renewed Heart Ministries  
P.O. Box 1211  
Lewisburg, WV 24901**

Contributions can also be made online at:  
[www.renewedheartministries.com](http://www.renewedheartministries.com)

\*All donations receive a tax-deductible receipt.

Be sure to check out RHM’s **FREE** resources at:  
[www.renewedheartministries.com](http://www.renewedheartministries.com)

*As always, all proceeds received above and beyond our budgeted needs are passed on to other proven and charitable, non-profit organizations who are making significant changes in the lives of the poor.*

