

RENEWED  
HEART  
MINISTRIES



# αwakenings

∴ THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES ∴ JUNE 2023 ∴



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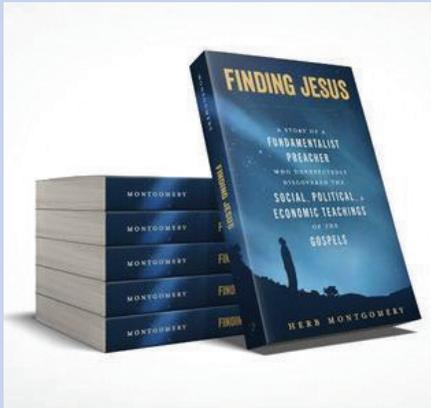
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Herb Montgomery



## *Finding Jesus is Here!*

It's here! Herb's new book, *Finding Jesus: A story of a Fundamentalist preacher who unexpectedly discovered the social, political, and economic teachings of the Gospels*, is now available at [renewedheartministries.com](http://renewedheartministries.com)!

Here is what one reader wrote:

**"Your book is everything that I have been looking for! I need four more copies to share. I have some people I really need to give this to. I want them to read it, too!"**

*Pages: 210; Price: \$14.95 (USD)*



## Upcoming Events

**JUNE 24, 2023**

**Good News Fellowship**  
Toronto, Ontario Canada  
304.520.0030

*"Maybe you, too, still feel the pull to spiritualize that list from Isaiah and Luke, as so many Christians have before us. But what if we lean away from a gnostic response to this list and instead interpret it literally and materially? How could taking this list literally affect us? To actively participate in receiving the Spirit of Acts 2 means to care about the concrete well-being of those who are being harmed in our society today."*



## Pentecost and a Spirit of Justice

by Herb Montgomery

Our lectionary gospel readings this week are both from John's gospel. We considered the second reading from John 20 a few weeks ago.

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. (John 7:37-39)

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 Lord. 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." (John 20:19-23)

This coming weekend is Pentecost, the festival commemorating when the Spirit was poured out on the first Jesus followers and they developed the ability to communicate Jesus' teachings in other languages.

Languages are not the only differences among members of our human family. We also have cultural differences, and political, social, and economic differences, as well. What could it mean today for the Spirit to enable us to understand one another, especially as we listen to those our present systems do the most harm?

Let's consider the passage in John 7.

The first thing that jumps out at me in this passage is the Johannine community's proto-Gnostic tendency to devalue the material, concrete, physical realities in which people suffered.

So here, "if anyone is thirsty..." let's not dig a well or find out who is stopping the community from receiving clean drinking water, but let's promise them

*continued on page 3*

*"Pentacost..." continued from page 2*

an ethereal spirit instead.

In John, Jesus' state execution liberated his spirit from his material body. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus was thereby "glorified" or transformed. This was the moment when Jesus' spirit was freed from concrete, lowly embodiment, and was adorned with its inherent splendor.

At this time the community believed the Spirit was given to proto-Gnostic Jesus followers so they too could follow Jesus on this path, on the way to the same kind of spiritual liberation.

As I've said repeatedly over the last few weeks, much of western Christianity today is more gnostic than it realizes when it prioritizes the afterlife over the here and now, or prioritizes the spiritual (i.e. saving a person's "soul") over setting them free from material harm they are working to survive from social, political, economic, or interpersonal systems.

I want to contrast this with the Jesus we find in the synoptic gospels. Mark's, Matthew's, and Luke's version of Jesus is much more concerned with the material experience of people in his society.

In Mark 8, for example, when the multitude was hungry, the synoptic Jesus did not offer them spiritual food or use food as a metaphor for his teachings. He stopped teaching and fed them literal loaves and fish. In Mark 10, seeing the wealth disparity in his community and noticing the poor suffer in a system that created winners and losers, he told an affluent man to literally sell his superfluous possessions and give the proceeds to the poor. Jesus didn't simply point the poor toward the spiritual wealth of knowing him (gnosis).

I believe we don't have to choose the spiritual over the material. I believe we can and must have a healthy balance of both. We need a holistic, life-giving interpretation of what it means to follow Jesus, one where people's spiritual wellbeing is connected to their physical, material, emotional, psychological, economic, political,

and social wellbeing. We don't have to emphasize any of these to the exclusion of others. A more Jewish view of Jesus would have preserved his concern with liberating the whole person in whatever aspect of their lives they experienced harm.

As Jesus followers today, we must guard against the notion that only saving a person's soul for eternity is important. That is not what Jesus teaches in our sacred stories. Yet our Christian history is littered with examples of a religion about Jesus that has cared more about saving people for eternity than creating a better world in the here and now where people are saved from the hell they are already enduring.

But like the water in the story of the woman at the well in John 4, the verses in this week's reading have a gnostic bent to them. The water of life or of the Spirit is the special gnosis or knowledge that sets the believer on a path that will culminate in their own spirit being glorified once it is released from this fleshly housing at death. I understand where the Johannine community was coming from on this, but today we need a much more balanced understanding of what it means to follow Jesus or live in him.

One way to redeem this passage is, as the lectionary does, to connect it to John 20, where Jesus breathes

*continued on page 6*

***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](http://renewedheartministries.com/Podcasts)**



# RHM's Recommended Reading for June

***Journeys by Heart: A  
Christology of Erotic Power***

by Rita Nakashima Brock

**Winner of the 1988 Crossroad  
Women's Studies Award**

An emotionally provocative book, *Journeys by Heart* places the 'theology of the abused child' at the center of feminist theory. A revisioning of Christianity, it stretches traditional concepts and sheds new light on the fact that through our acts of love and lovelessness we create one another.

– The Award Advisory Committee

Brock's Asian and American experiences seem to have given her some remarkable insights... the epilogue 'Journeying by Heart' is a veritable Fodor's of feminism and femininity.

– Publishers Weekly

Brock, as a Christian theologian, is both insightful and inciting.... What I find most powerful in this book's approach to the gospel is its emphasis on the need to break out of death-dealing, hierarchical patterns of life in our families and communities.

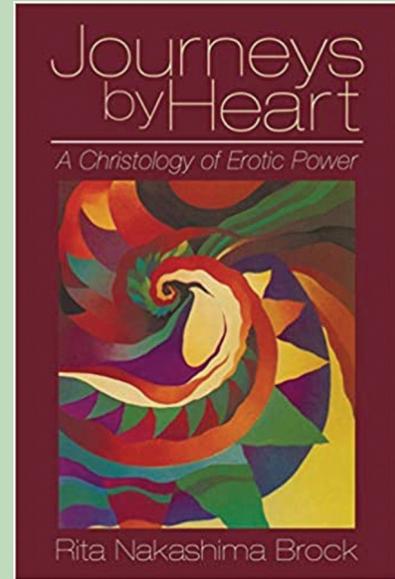
– Daughters of Sarah

Brock's vision is compelling, original, and tantalizing. Her thesis is bold, and right as rain. Furthermore, it is indeed 'emotionally provocative'... Brock has given us an important and exciting work in this volume. We can hope to hear more from this intriguing and tantalizing young theologian.

– St. Luke's Journal of Theology

A fresh perspective on the standard problems in feminist theology.... This book will have broad appeal. Brock presents her ideas in an accessible way, and her theology of child abuse should interest anyone – lay person, cleric, or academic – who wants to know more about relationship of religion to feminism.

– Theology Today



Rita Nakashima Brock is Associate Professor in the Endowed Chair in the Humanities, Hamline University, former director of the Women's Studies Program at Stephens College, and serves on the boards of several feminist, religious, and peace organizations, including the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence and the editorial board of the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*.



Photo by Alexander Grey on Pexels.com

# SOCIAL JESUS

*A Blog Exploring the Intersection of Faith and Societal Justice*



## Last Month's "Social Jesus" Blog Posts on Patheos



### **The Ethereal, Part 1 of Pentecost and a Spirit of Justice**

There is a tendency here to devalue the material, concrete, physical realities in which people suffered and offer instead something ethereal.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/ethereal-pentecost-and-a-spirit-of-justice-part1/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/ethereal-pentecost-and-a-spirit-of-justice-part1/)

### **The Material, Part 2 of Pentecost and a Spirit of Justice**

We need a holistic interpretation where people's spiritual wellbeing is connected to their material economic, political, and social wellbeing.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/material-pentecost-and-a-spirit-of-justice-part2/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/material-pentecost-and-a-spirit-of-justice-part2/)

### **Justice, Part 3 of Pentecost and a Spirit of Justice**

One way to redeem this passage is to connect it to John 20. To inhale this Spirit means to exhale justice.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/justice-pentecost-and-a-spirit-of-justice-part3/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/justice-pentecost-and-a-spirit-of-justice-part3/)



### **Farewell, Part 1 of A Unity That's Big Enough**

Our reading this week is John's version of Jesus' farewell prayer. This passage deeply influenced Christians during the fourth and

fifth centuries C.E.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/farewell-unity-thats-big-enough-part1/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/farewell-unity-thats-big-enough-part1/)

### **Knowing, Part 2 of A Unity That's Big Enough**

I resonate much more with working to make our concrete world, here and now, a safer, more compassionate, just home for everyone.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/knowing-unity-thats-big-enough-part2/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/knowing-unity-thats-big-enough-part2/)

### **Justice,, Part 3 of A Unity That's Big Enough**

Unity that walks arm and arm with justice. Unity that's big enough to wrap its arms around all our varied differences and call them "good."

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/justice-unity-thats-big-enough-part3/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/justice-unity-thats-big-enough-part3/)



### **Advocate, Part 1 of Loving What Jesus Taught**

I grew up hearing Christians interpret the Advocate as an intermediary interposing between sinful humans and a holy God. Today, I reject that.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/advocate-loving-what-jesus-taught-part1/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/advocate-loving-what-jesus-taught-part1/)

### **Advocacy, Part 2 of Loving What Jesus Taught**

For the original audiences of the synoptics, "advocate" would have called to mind a deep need of advocacy socially, politically, and economically.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/advocacy-loving-what-jesus-taught-part2/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/advocacy-loving-what-jesus-taught-part2/)

### **Ethics and Values, Part 3 of Loving What Jesus Taught**

Considering the ethics and values within the Jesus story, loving Jesus means actually loving the things he taught and following them.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/ethics-values-loving-what-jesus-taught-part3/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/ethics-values-loving-what-jesus-taught-part3/)



### **Exclusivity, Part 1 of Gendering God**

Every faith tradition has teachings that are life-giving and those that are not. The goal that makes more sense to me is not exclusivity but to collect the good in each.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/exclusivity-gendering-god-part1/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/exclusivity-gendering-god-part1/)

### **Gender Functions, Part 2 of Gendering God**

The gender we use for God can work inclusively when we use symbols to lift up those our present system pushes to the edges of our communities.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/gender-functions-gendering-god-part2/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/gender-functions-gendering-god-part2/)

### **Dear Mama God, Part 3 of Gendering God**

After two millennia of exclusively gendering God as male, we don't get to jump immediately to God being gender-less. Mama God imagery helps.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/dear-mama-god-gendering-god-part3/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/dear-mama-god-gendering-god-part3/)

**“Pentacost...” continued from page 3**

the Spirit onto the apostles after resurrection. Today we too can inhale this Spirit and exhale justice, liberation, and life. Consider how in Luke’s gospel, the Spirit that Jesus is imparting to his followers in John was manifested on Jesus himself:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me to  
proclaim good news to the poor.  
He 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 Lord’s  
favor.” (Luke 4:18-19)

We must be careful here not to spiritualize away the above passage. The poor here are economically poor. In both Isaiah and Luke, the writers spoke of those who were actually poor in the economic systems of their day. The prisoners are those who were literally, not merely metaphorically, in need of liberation and justice. The blind were those who were in a Roman cell, a hole dug in the ground that was so dark they physically could not see their hands in front of their faces. The oppressed are not experiencing mystical, spiritual oppression but marginalization, subjugation, and oppression in their daily lives. And, finally, the year of the Lord’s favor was not someone’s warm and fuzzy assurance deep inside that God liked them. “The year of the Lord’s favor” was a Jewish reference to the literal year of Jubilee, when all economic debts would be forgiven and cancelled.

Maybe you, too, still feel the pull to spiritualize that list from Isaiah and Luke, as so many Christians have before us. But what if we lean away from a gnostic response to the list and instead interpret it literally and materially? How could taking Luke 4’s Spirit literally affect us?

To actively participate in receiving the Spirit of Acts 2 means to care

about the concrete well-being of those who are being harmed in our society today. It means to care about LGBTQ people still being marginalized within and outside of our faith-based communities. It means to proclaim in solidarity that Black lives really do matter. That trans kids’ lives matter. That the children in our schools are of greater value to us than our freedom to own an AR-15. That the well-being of people migrating across our borders and coasts is a priority.

Who else would be included if Luke 4 were rewritten in our social context today?

On this year’s Pentecost, what can it mean for us in our context to inhale the same Spirit being breathed on disciples in our gospel readings this week? How will that spirit be exhaled? What will it look like for us to breathe in and breathe out Jesus’ gift of the Spirit: a love that manifests itself in a faith that works justice, and an exhaling that is life-giving to those around us.

This Pentecost, may this same Spirit that blew on the primordial waters of our sacred creation stories blow once again today, spawning life and life-giving things into our relationships with ourselves, with others, and with the Divine.

## HeartGroup Application

1. Share something that spoke to you from this week’s eSight/Podcast episode with your HeartGroup.
2. What does the Spirit showing up and manifesting itself as activity in justice work mean for you? Share 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.

You can find Renewed Heart Ministries on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. If you haven’t done so already, please

follow us on your chosen social media platforms for our daily posts. Also, if you enjoy listening to the *Jesus for Everyone* podcast, please like and subscribe to the JFE podcast through the podcast platform you use and consider taking some time to give us a review. This helps others find our podcast as well.

Also I want to share that we are partnering in a new weekly YouTube show called “Just Talking.” Each week, Todd Leonard and I will be talking about the gospel lectionary reading for the upcoming weekend. We’ll be talking about each reading in the context of love, inclusion, and societal justice. Our hope is that our talking will be just talking (as in justice) and that during our brief conversations each week you’ll be inspired to also do more than just talking.

If you teach from the lectionary each week, or if you’re just looking for some thoughts on the Jesus story from a more progressive perspective within the context of social justice, check it out, you might like it. You can find **JustTalking** each week on YouTube at [youtube.com/@herbandtoddjusttalking](https://www.youtube.com/@herbandtoddjusttalking). Please like, subscribe, hit the notification button, and leave us a comment.

And if you’d like to reach us here at Renewed Heart Ministries through email, you can reach us at [info@renewedheartministries.com](mailto:info@renewedheartministries.com).

My new book, *Finding Jesus: A story of a fundamentalist preacher who unexpectedly discovered the social, political, and economic teachings of the Gospels* is now also available at [renewedheartministries.com](https://renewedheartministries.com).

Right where you are, keep living in love, choosing compassion, taking action, and working toward justice.

I love each of you dearly. ■

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The work of helping people find life-giving ways to live out their faith through love, compassion, and justice are needed now more than ever. At Renewed Heart Ministries, we provide resources of faith and healing with the aim of renewing hope and inspiring action as we allow the Jesus story to inform each of us as we work together to shape our world into a compassionate, just and safe home for everyone.

Renewed Heart Ministries is a 501(c)3, grassroots ministry on the margins that prioritizes the needs of marginalized communities, especially those who have been the recipients of misinformed, faith-based harm. Your support enables us to be a life-giving, healing light in our faith communities and continue to be a voice for desperately needed change.

**You get to decide what shape our faith communities take and what voices get to be heard.**

You can support Renewed Heart Ministries with a one-time gift or by becoming one of our monthly contributors. Your donation can be made online at: [renewedheartministries.com](http://renewedheartministries.com) or by mail at:

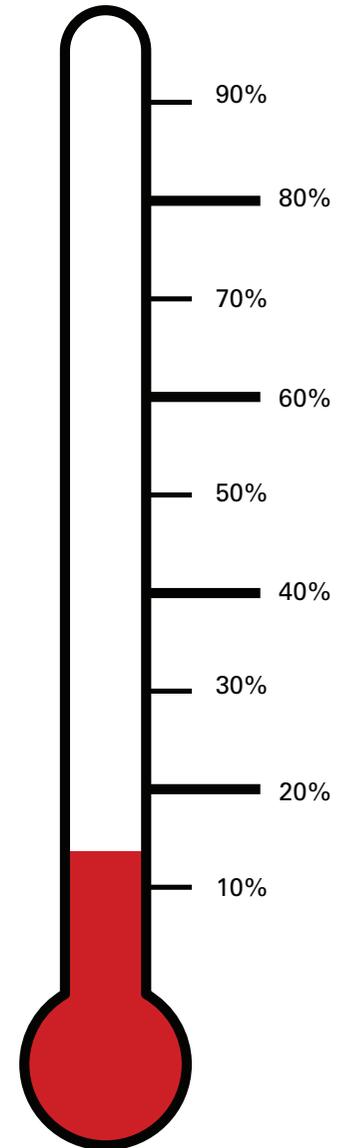
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And **THANK YOU** for reading, listening to, sharing and supporting RHM's work. Thank you for the decisions you make every day to make our world a safer, compassionate, just home for everyone. Thank you for your dedication to engaging our world and the care you demonstrate, and for being such an important part of our community.

**2023 Projected Budget  
Goal: \$150,000.00**

**Donations Received  
Thru April 2023:  
\$20,366.13**



**Together, we are making a difference.**



## New Weekly YouTube Show!

Each week, we'll be talking about the gospel lectionary reading for the upcoming weekend. We'll be talking about each reading in the context of love, inclusion, and societal justice. Our hope is that our talking will be *just* talking (as in justice) and that during our brief conversations each week you'll be inspired to also do more than just talking.

If you teach from the lectionary each week, or if you're just looking for some thoughts on the Jesus story from a more progressive perspective within the context of social justice, check it out, you might like it.

You can find the latest show on YouTube at: [@herbandtoddjusttalking](https://www.youtube.com/@herbandtoddjusttalking)

Please Like, Subscribe, hit the Notification button, and leave us a comment. All of this will help us get this new YouTube channel off the ground.

Thanks in advance for watching!

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



## Weekly HeartGroup on Zoom Every Wednesday Night!

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.

Each Zoom session will be on Wednesdays at 7pm Pacific/10pm Eastern.

To receive the link for the Zoom meeting, email us at [info@renewedheartministries.com](mailto:info@renewedheartministries.com).



From all of us here at RHM, we want to wish all our LGBTQ friends, family, and community members a happy and safe Pride month. We are grateful that you are here.



## Are you receiving all of RHM's free resources each week?

You can find Renewed Heart Ministries on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram for our daily posts. Our *JFE* podcast can be subscribed to through the podcast platform you use. And you can even get messages from RHM delivered to you email inbox every day. (Or weekly if you prefer.)

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

Go to [renewedheartministries.com](http://renewedheartministries.com) and click "Sign Up!"

Following the Jesus who loved those others mislabelled as sinners means to care about LGBTQ people still being marginalized within and outside of our faith-based communities. Following the Jesus who rejected bigotry toward Samaritans means White Christians proclaiming in solidarity that Black lives really do matter. Following the Jesus in the gospels means that trans kids' lives matter. Following the Jesus who told us to put our swords away means that the children in our schools are of greater value than our freedom to own an AR-15. Following the Jesus who prioritized the wellbeing of women means protecting women's bodily autonomy and access to needed health care. Following the Jesus who loved the stranger means that the well-being of people migrating across our borders and coasts is a priority.



*Front cover artwork by Ali Montgomery.*