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Herb Montgomery



“To Christians today who want to use political power to make it much more dangerous to be a woman, what can the life-giving Jesus of our reading this week say? It would do us well to pause and sit for a time with these stories.”

Jesus, Jairus, and Respect for the Bodily Autonomy of Women

by Herb Montgomery

Our reading this week is from the gospel of Matthew:

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

While he was saying this, a synagogue leader came and knelt before him and said, “My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live.” Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples. Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.” Jesus turned and saw her. “Take

heart, daughter,” he said, “your faith has healed you.” And the woman was healed at that moment.

When Jesus entered the synagogue leader’s house and saw the noisy crowd and people playing pipes, he said, “Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep.” But they laughed at him. After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. News of this spread through all that region. (Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26)

Having spent a lot of time in John in the lectionary this year so far, we are used to Jesus calling his listeners to “know.” In the synoptics, Jesus’ call is a little different: it’s always, “Follow me.” This is a call to action. It’s a call to emulate Jesus’ model of a life of love and justice. The Synoptics call is to follow (See Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27-28).

What I also love in the first part of our reading this week is that Jesus seems to be looking at people through the lens of healing and restoration, of making them whole. He doesn’t use a lens of obedience with punitive punishments or rewards. Instead of punishing those judged morally inferior and withholding his association from them, Jesus sees all the people in the story through a much more dynamic set of lenses.

Jesus is well aware that tax collectors are part of the privileged social class of his day. And he knows the harm they have done. Yet he sees these as symptoms, signs that they’ve been harmed themselves. His ministry of restoring the humanity of the excluded and marginalized also extends to those harming them. They, too, need healing.

Hurt people, as the saying goes, hurt people. Jesus seeks to heal the hurt and restore people’s relationships with themselves and with others. It’s a holistic view of the economic and social harms as well as those responsible for those harms. If we follow Jesus, we will also ask, what is broken and needs healing in a person that causes them to want to harm others politically, economically, or socially (see also Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31-32)?

Next the gospels introduce us to Jairus and his daughter. To the best of our knowledge, Matthew and Luke both take this story from Mark (Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56). Then, in the middle of the story of Jairus’ daughter is a different story of a woman and her healing (see also Mark 5:24-34; Luke 8:42-48).

One thing that bothers me about these stories is that they focus on a woman and little girl, yet only the male involved is named. We know Jairus by name, but not the woman nor the girl. This speaks to me, once again, of the patriarchal context in which these stories were passed down. Both the girl and the woman had names. I imagine that when the stories were originally told, their names were used. What caused these characters to become nameless objects playing a narrative role rather than the human beings their names originally communicated? I wish their names had been preserved alongside of Jairus’ name.

So what lessons can we glean for our justice work today from these two stories?

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“...Women...” continued from page 2

I’m deeply indebted to the work of Rita Nakishima Brock for how I read the stories of this woman and this little girl. I recommend her book *Journeys By Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power*, especially Chapter 4, for a fuller treatment of these stories. Brock demonstrates how, whereas exorcism stories in the gospels are often addressing political domination and subjugation, the healing stories are often addressing social structures of injustice.

The story of the woman with the bleeding has a strong social dimension. Her illness was a sentence of social death due to the purity codes that her bleeding continually violated. In male-dominated cultures, female sexuality and reproduction are controlled by men. Women’s reproductive ability is not their choice but governed by men to meet patriarchal needs.

Also, within these patriarchal cultures, control of a woman’s sexual activity is coupled with labelling women’s bodies, bleeding, birthing, and genitalia as unclean. In the context of our patriarchal society today, this woman’s story represents a social reality that women still experience.

The narrative placement of this story is also important. The story of the woman who has been bleeding for 12 years is right in the middle of the story

of a little girl who is 12, just beginning menstruation and so starting to be defined as a woman by her patriarchal culture. Both are in or entering a kind of social death, and are considered inferior to the men around her. These are all signals that we are to read these stories together.

As Brock writes, “Both females are afflicted with crises associated with the status of women in Greco-Roman and Hebraic society” (p. 83). Within these cultures, the woman is “plagued” with a disease connected to having an adult female body, while the little girl is on the threshold of puberty. The woman has already suffered for the same length of time it has taken the girl to reach puberty. Both women are suffering because they are female.

In Matthew’s version of this story, Jairus says, “My daughter has just died.” The juxtaposition of the bleeding woman gives us another hint of what connects them. By coming of age, Jairus’ daughter has just socially died in the patriarchy, but both she and the older woman are about to encounter the life-giving and healing Jesus represented and that the early Jesus community envisioned for women.

This story screams to me of the injustices many women suffer today for simply being a woman. Simply because their anatomy is different from men’s, they suffer in a society that privileges one kind of anatomy

over another. As binary as this is, it doesn’t even begin to address the struggle so many trans folk have today in a society that privileges cisgender men above all else.

In both these stories, Jesus represents liberation and restoration of life for a woman and little girl whose patriarchal culture was death-dealing.

What does this say to us today? What does it say to a faith-based community that still has yet to offer equality to women, refusing to ordain women as ministers alongside men, some of whom have proven to be less qualified but have their job because they happen to be men.

And what does this story say to those Christians who in our larger society are seeking to control women’s sexuality, reproductive rights, bodily autonomy, and access to needed health care? The movement to deny women rights to control their own bodies and health is the direct result of a certain group of Christians who have not allowed the Jesus of this week’s stories to confront their own biases and misogyny.

To Christians today who want to use political power to make it much more dangerous to be a woman, what can the life-giving Jesus of our reading this week say?

It would do us well to pause and sit for a time with these stories. Let’s allow them to confront and challenge us. Is our pro-life stance really life-giving? Or could respecting a woman’s bodily autonomy and healthcare decisions be more in line with the Jesus we encounter in this week’s stories? If we can’t see the connections yet, let’s sit with our assumptions until we can.

HeartGroup Application

1. Share something that spoke to you from this week’s eSight/Podcast episode with your HeartGroup.
2. Share one insight you gain from interpreting these stories in the context of social injustice for women? Discuss with your group.
3. What can you do this week, big or

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July's Recommended Reading

I Have Something to Tell You—For Young Adults: A Memoir
by Chasten Buttigieg

The young adult adaptation of the hopeful and refreshingly candid bestselling memoir by the husband of a former Democratic presidential candidate about growing up gay in his small Midwestern town. Completely rewritten with new stories, including resources for readers, parents, and teachers.

Growing up, Chasten Glezman Buttigieg didn't always fit in. He felt different from his father and brothers, who loved to hunt and go camping, and out of place in the rural, conservative small town where he lived. Back then, blending in was more important than feeling seen.

So, when Chasten realized he was gay, he kept that part of himself hidden away for a long, painful time. With incredible bravery, and the support of his loved ones, Chasten eventually came out—and when he did, he learned that being true to himself was the most rewarding journey of all.

Finding acceptance and self-love can seem like a tremendous challenge, but it's never impossible. With honesty, courage, and warmth, Chasten relays his experience of growing up in America and embracing his identity, while inspiring young people across the country to do the same.



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



New Weekly YouTube Show!

Just Talking
with Herb and Todd

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

Please Like, Subscribe, hit the Notification button, and leave us a comment. This will help us get this new YouTube channel off the ground. Thanks in advance for watching!

SOCIAL JESUS

A Blog Exploring the Intersection of Faith and Societal Justice



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



Dependency, Part 1 of Our Dependence on One Another

It begins with a knock at the door. On the stoop stand two itinerant beggars...set only for dependence.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/06/our-dependence-on-one-another-part1/

Connected, Part 2 of Our Dependence on One Another

We live in a culture of independence, isolation, and self-sufficiency that ignores the reality that whether we like it or not, we are all connected.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/06/our-dependence-on-one-another-part2/

Care, Part 3 of Our Dependence on One Another

And rather than developing stalwart, privatized systems of self-sufficiency, this points toward building community committed to care.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/06/our-dependence-on-one-another-part3/



Gehenna, Part 1 of Refusing to Be Silent About Injustice

Let's try to hear this language about Gehenna in its original Jewish context rather than in a modern Christian one.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/06/gehenna-refusing-silent-about-injustice-part1/

Gehenna, Part 2 of Refusing to Be Silent About Injustice

This language about Gehenna in its original Jewish context, rather than in a modern Christian one, had a rich history.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/06/gehenna-refusing-silent-about-injustice-part2/

Sustainable, Part 3 of Refusing to Be Silent About Injustice

"What does this passage have to say about how sustainable our system today is, both environmentally and economically?"

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/06/sustainable-refusing-to-be-silent-about-injustice-part3/



A Harvest, Part 1 of A Different Iteration of our Present World

A harvest metaphor makes a lot more sense given that context. In the Hebrew scriptures, the harvest was associated with justice.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/06/harvest-different-iteration-present-world-part1/

Justice, Part 2 of A Different Iteration of our Present World

The harvest was associated with justice, a vision of a world where no one had too much while others didn't have enough.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/06/justice-different-iteration-present-world-part2/

A Kingdom, Part 3 of A Different Iteration of our Present World

Whatever we call it, this was about a world that is compassionate, safe, just home for all, prioritizing the marginalized and vulnerable.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/06/kingdom-different-iteration-present-world-part3/



Healing, Part 1 of Jesus and the Bodily Autonomy of Women

What is broken and needs healing in a person that causes them to want to harm others politically, economically, or socially?

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/06/jesus-bodily-autonomy-of-women-part1/

Jairus' Daughter, Part 2 of Jesus and the Bodily Autonomy of Women

In this story, women's reproductive ability is not their choice but governed by men to meet patriarchal needs.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/06/jairus-daughter-jesus-and-the-bodily-autonomy-of-women-part2/

The Woman, Part 3 of Jesus and the Bodily Autonomy of Women

To Christians today who want to use political power to make it much more dangerous to be a woman, what does this story say?

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/06/woman-jesus-and-the-bodily-autonomy-of-women-part3/

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“...Women...” *continued from page 3*

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.

I want to say a special thank you to all of our supporters out there. And if you would like to join them in supporting Renewed Heart Ministries work you can do so by going to renewedheartministries.com and clicking **donate**.

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. 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

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.

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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Upcoming Events

JULY 22, 2023

Good News Fellowship
Toronto, Ontario Canada
304.520.0030

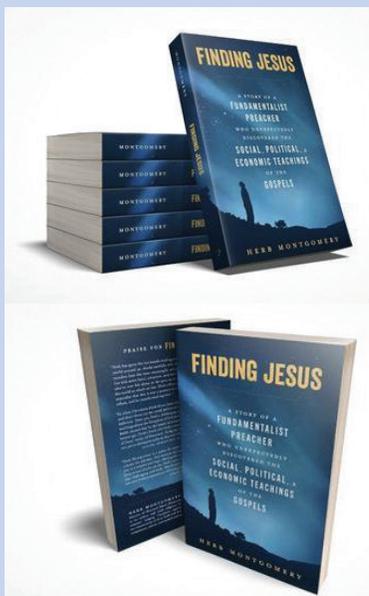


Weekly HeartGroup on Zoom Every Wednesday Night!

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.



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!

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)

Available now at renewedheartministries.com!



The Great Commission, Part 1 of Obeying What Jesus Taught

We must be honest about how the great commission has been coopted by colonialism that has harmed Indigenous populations around the globe.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/colonialism-missions-obeying-what-jesus-taught-part1/

An Exchange, Part 2 of Obeying What Jesus Taught

Change is a two way street, an exchange. Those we meet, share with, and listen to leave us forever changed as well.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/exchange-obeying-what-jesus-taught-part2/

The Sermon on the Mount, Part 3 of Obeying What Jesus Taught

What are some of these commands that Matthew's Jesus tells us to obey? The lion share of them are found in Jesus' sermon on the mount.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/06/sermon-on-mountain-what-jesus-taught-part3/

Quotable Quotes

"Women are equally created in the image and likeness of God, equally redeemed by Christ, equally sanctified by the Holy Spirit; women are equally involved in the on-going tragedy of sin and the mystery of grace, equally called to mission in this world, equally destined for life with God in glory."

– Elizabeth A. Johnson;
She Who Is

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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 or by mail at:

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PO Box 1211
Lewisburg, WV 24901

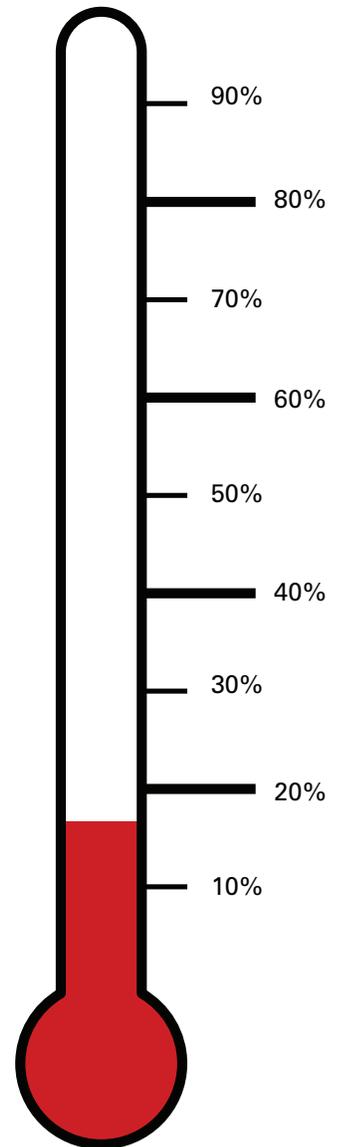
Please make sure you are receiving all of RHM's free resources by going to our website and clicking "sign up."

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 May 2023: \$25,538.42

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



Together, we *are* making a difference.



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 and click "Sign Up!"

Quotable Quotes

"The feminist vision of healing, wholeness, and spirituality must save Christianity from its patriarchy—if Christian theology is to remain true to its claims that all human beings are created in the divine image, that divine power is love in its fullness, and that the community of divine power is one of justice and peace"

— Rita Nakashima Brock;
Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power, p.50

Front cover artwork by Ali Montgomery.

"The work of Christian grace and love is now, and not just later. In facing squarely the suffering in our world, the social gospel, liberation, black, and feminist movements have swept in winds of change unparalleled in Christian theology since the Reformation."

Rita Nakashima Brock

Journeys by Heart

A Christology of Erotic Power

p.xi

