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P.O. Box 1211, Lewisburg, WV 24901

Phone: 304.520.0030

Email: info@renewedheartministries.com

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Herb Montgomery



“The crowds of people found hope and resonance in these the teachings of reversal: the elite and powerful would have the reins of society taken away from them and given to the marginalized and excluded. And if this parable did teach that power and resources would be taken away from the powerful, propertied and privileged, and given to the masses, then it makes sense that when those in power heard this, they sought to kill Jesus. It also makes sense that they had to be ever so careful because they knew the people heard something in this parable in the long line of justice prophets that made them love Jesus all the more.”

Unheeded Calls for Justice in the Parable of the Vineyard

by Herb Montgomery

Our reading this week is from the gospel of Matthew:

“Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said. But when the tenants saw the son,

they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”

Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’

“Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.” When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he

was a prophet.” (Matthew 21:33-46*)

The last sentence in this week’s reading from Matthew is the most important sentence. It holds a tension with the rest of the reading that can potentially keep us from harmful interpretations about ourselves and others.

The crowds, the masses, the people, consider Jesus to be “a prophet.” This is because out of all the forms Jesus could have emerged in within his own Jewish society, he is squarely in the Hebrew prophetic justice tradition. He’s spearheading a Jewish renewal movement and calling his community back to the justice of the Torah and the Hebrew prophets. His teachings emphasized the portions of the law and the prophets that were about social and economic justice, making our communities a safe, compassionate home for everyone.

The parable in this week’s reading is about a landowner who rented out his vineyard to other farmers. The crowds around Jesus would have heard this parable differently than the elites and powerful. Jesus’ society had no middle class. There were only the rich and those struggling to scratch out an existence in one difficult way or another. There were only the haves and the have nots. Only the upper class and the lower class, and only a few belonging to the upper class aristocracy were connected to the temple state in Jerusalem.

The elites would have seen themselves in the parables as the farmers renting the vineyard from the landowner who was away. The people would have viewed themselves as the indentured workers who daily witnessed the elites enriching themselves with worker exploitation. And with the elites becoming so attached to their enrichment at the expense of the masses, the crowd would have perceived the beaten, killed, and stoned vineyard servants in the parable as symbols of the Hebrew prophets. There is precedent for this imagery. Consider Isaiah 5:1-7:

“I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and

planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briars and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it." The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress."

There are differences between Isaiah's use of the vineyard imagery and Matthew's. In Isaiah the vineyard is destroyed, whereas in Matthew the vineyard is taken away and given to others. In Isaiah the vineyard represents the nation of Israel; in Matthew it represents "the Kingdom," which is Jesus' vision for a just, inclusive, compassionate human community. There are also similarities between Isaiah and Matthew: the vineyard owner comes to the vineyard looking for justice and finds only exploitation, marginalization, oppression, and bloodshed.

Let's now talk about what the kingdom being taken away and given to others would have meant.

First—and this is very important—this parable is not about the Kingdom being taken away from the Jewish people and given to Christians. The last two sentences state: "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.")

The Jewish crowds would not have supported Jesus if this parable taught



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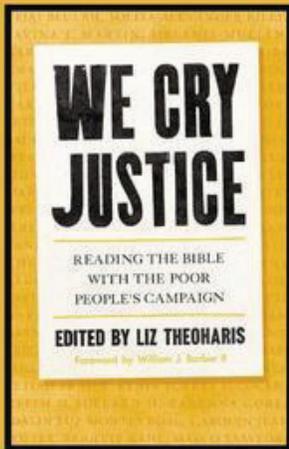
that they were being replaced. This parable is about "the kingdom." It's about the elite in society losing positions of power and that power being given to the masses. The crowds of people found hope and resonance in these the teachings of reversal: the elite and powerful would have the reins of society taken away from them and given to the marginalized and excluded. And if this parable did teach that power and resources would be taken away from the powerful, propertied and privileged, and given to the masses, then it makes sense that when those in power heard this, they sought to kill Jesus. It also makes sense that they had to be ever so careful because they knew the people heard something in this parable in the long line of justice prophets that made them love Jesus all the more.

What might this parable be saying to us today? What would a reversal look like in our society? What would it look like for the control in our society to be taken from wealthy corporation owners who have bought democracy and politicians, leaving the masses with little say in how society functions and whom it benefits? What would it look like for each person to have a voice? Can you imagine it?

Originally, Thomas Paine called for this kind of democracy, but his calls were ultimately rejected by the aristocratic founding fathers, who called Paine's ideas "radical democracy." He called for the end of slavery and a vote for women, but in their revolutionary decision to declare independence from Britain, the founding fathers created a democracy that only gave a vote to propertied, White men. We still have yet to witness America living up to its high ideals. When we consider who is left out today, economically, socially, politically, what would it look like for control in our society to be taken from the powerful, the elite, and given, genuinely, to the masses.

What could a safe, just, compassionate society look like? How would it differ from our present system? Take some time this week to imagine how a just society would be shaped and whom it would take care of? Before we can work for it, we have to first imagine it. Then we can name it. And then, we can roll up our sleeves and work toward it. ■

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RHM Book of the Month

RHM's Recommended Reading for October

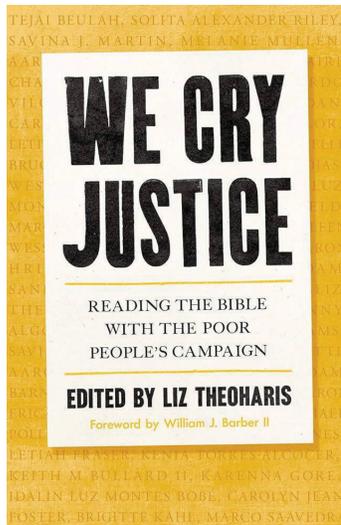
We Cry Justice: Reading the Bible with the Poor People's Campaign
Edited by Liz Theoharis

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible proclaims justice and abundance for the poor. Yet these powerful passages about poverty are frequently overlooked and misinterpreted.

Enter the Poor People's Campaign, a movement against racism, poverty, ecological devastation, militarism, and religious nationalism. In *We Cry Justice*, Liz Theoharis, co-chair of the campaign, is joined by pastors, community organizers, scholars, low-wage workers, lay leaders, and people in poverty to interpret sacred stories about the poor seeking healing, equity, and freedom. In a world roiled by poverty and injustice, Scripture still speaks.

Organized into fifty-two chapters, each focusing on a key Scripture passage, *We Cry Justice* offers comfort and challenge from the many stories of the poor taking action together. Read anew the story of the exodus that frees people from debt and slavery, the prophets who denounce the rich and ruling classes, the stories of Jesus's healing and parables about fair wages, and the early church's sharing of goods. Reflection questions and a short prayer at the end of each chapter offer the opportunity to use the book devotionally through a year.

The Bible cries for justice, and we do too. It's time to act on God's persistent call to repair the breach and fight poverty, not the poor.



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)**

Testimonies

"I continue to be inspired and empowered by your messages. The shoe leather that you place on the directives given by Jesus are equally relevant and critical here in Canada. Blessings to you as you continue to challenge each person who is committed to following Jesus." – D, Toronto

"Thanks for spreading the truth of Jesus' teachings. Your perspectives have changed my world view and I am so grateful." – SB

SOCIAL JESUS

A Blog Exploring the Intersection of Faith and Societal Justice



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



What Gives You The Right to Call for Change? Part 1

We glean wisdom here as we stand in solidarity with the those in underprivileged social locations in our own society and call for change.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/09/what-gives-you-the-right-to-call-for-change-part1/

What Gives You The Right to Call for Change? Part 2

He doesn't waste time defending his right to speak out or his right to exist. He dismisses their challenges and gets back to work.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/09/what-gives-you-the-right-to-call-for-change-part2/

What Gives You The Right to Call for Change? Part 3

The lesson from these two sons tell is that professions matter little. It was their actions that mattered.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/09/what-gives-you-the-right-to-call-for-change-part3/



Equality, Generosity and Concern for Workers' Needs, Part 1

Ruskin lifts this parable out of religious interpretations created by privileged, propertied, and powerful religious apologists.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/09/equality-generosity-and-concern-for-workers-needs-part1/

Equality, Generosity and Concern for Workers' Needs, Part 2

Equality is a theme, not only in the gospels, but also in the economic teachings of the Torah and the larger Christian scriptures.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/09/equality-generosity-and-concern-for-workers-needs-part2/

Equality, Generosity and Concern for Workers' Needs, Part 3

"The foundational concern, the priority of highest value, is ensuring these workers have their needs met."

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/09/equality-generosity-and-concern-for-workers-needs-part3/



Debt Forgiveness, Part 1 of Seventy Times Seven

This was not a call for the indebted to forgive their abusive creditors, but for creditors to extend debt forgiveness to those who owed them.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/09/debt-forgiveness-seventy-times-seven-part1/

Debt Forgiveness, Part 2 of Seventy Times Seven

What once involved the debt forgiveness toward poor debtors became universalized. Social location was no longer the focus.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/09/debt-forgiveness-seventy-times-seven-part2/

Debt Forgiveness, Part 3 of Seventy Times Seven

I've heard many Christians voices over the last two years weigh in on the subject of debt forgiveness, seemingly uniformed by this parable.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/09/debt-forgiveness-seventy-times-seven-part3/



Relating to Those with Whom We Disagree, Part 1

They were grappling with how to relate to fellow community members making choices with which they may disagree.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/09/relating-to-those-with-whom-we-disagree-part1/

Relating to Those with Whom We Disagree, Part 2

Regardless of its origins, our reading this week does contain a nugget of wisdom within the procedure that still can be applied to us today.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/09/relating-to-those-with-whom-we-disagree-part2/

Relating to Those with Whom We Disagree, Part 3

How do we relate to those with whom we have significant differences and which whom we disagree? Not all disagreements are the same.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/09/relating-to-those-with-whom-we-disagree-part3/



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](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!



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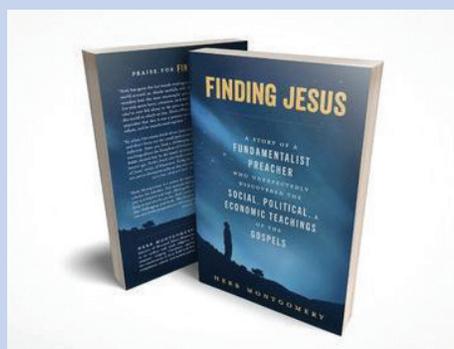
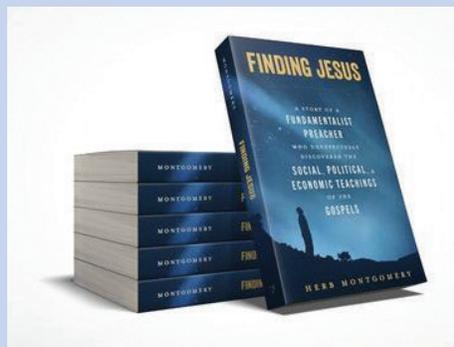
Finding Jesus is Here!

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!



Testimonies

"Very thought-provoking! This approach leads us to a different, deeper kind of Christianity. This is the kind of stuff that is allowing me to reshape my view of GOD, and reclaim it from years of abuse and misunderstanding." – KD

Quotable Quotes

"I intended to show that nonviolence will be effective, but not until it has achieved the massive dimensions, the disciplined planning, and the intense commitment of a sustained, direct-action movement of civil disobedience on the national scale. The dispossessed of this nation — the poor, both white and black — live in a cruelly unjust society. They must organize a revolution against that injustice, not against the lives of the persons who are their fellow citizens, but against the structures through which the society is refusing to take means which have been called for, and which are at hand, to lift the load of poverty."

— Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.;
The Trumpet of Conscience

"[Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.] connected the dots between what he called the 'giant triplets' of racism, militarism, and poverty and then challenged us to take back the world from those 'who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight.'"

— Ched Myers;
Binding the Strong Man

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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:

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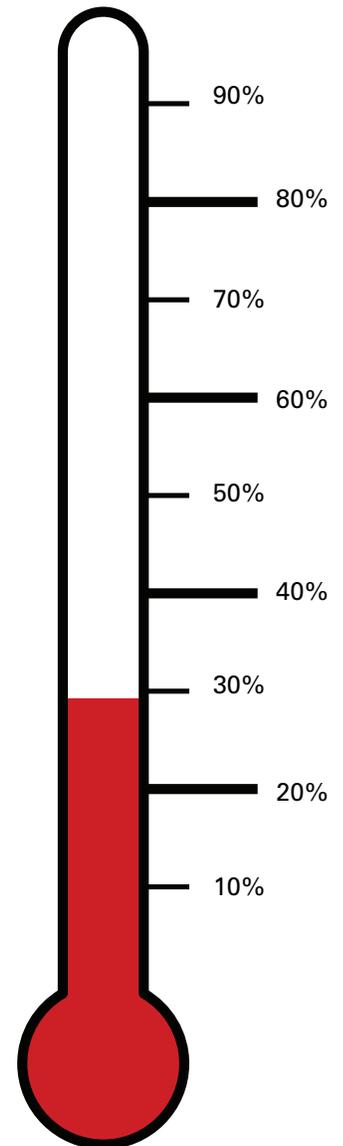
And **THANK YOU** for reading, listening to, sharing and supporting RHM's work. Thank you for the decisions you make every day to make our world a safer, compassionate, just home for everyone. Thank you for your dedication to engaging our world and the care you demonstrate, and for being such an important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

2023 Projected Budget

Goal: \$150,000.00

**Donations Received
Thru August 2023:**

\$44,365.01





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.

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There is enough here. Share it. Take only what you need, and care for one another.

Daniel Jones
We Cry Justice (p. 23)

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Upcoming Events

OCTOBER 28, 2023

Good News Fellowship
Toronto, Ontario Canada

For More Information:
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