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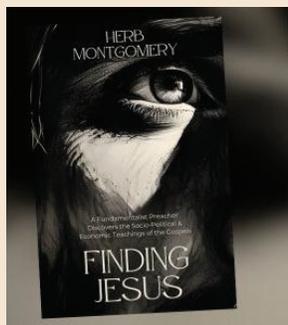
***Finding Jesus:
A Fundamentalist
Preacher Discovers the
Socio-Political & Economic
Teachings of the Gospels***

by Herb Montgomery

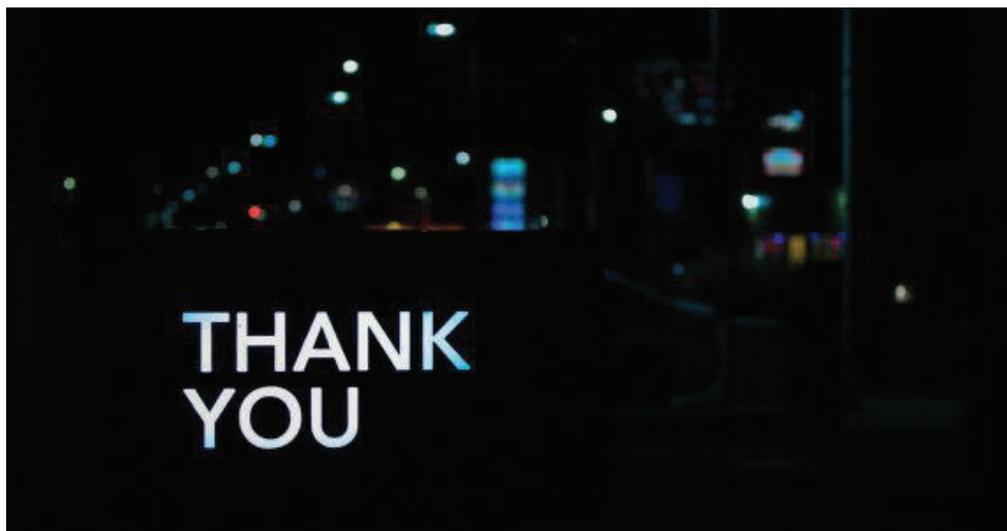
Available on Amazon!

In *Finding Jesus*, author Herb Montgomery delves into the profound and often overlooked political dimensions of the gospels. Through meticulous analysis of biblical texts, historical context, and social discourse, this thought-provoking book unveils the gospels' socio-political, economic teachings as rooted in a profound concern for justice, compassion, and the well-being of the marginalized. The book navigates the intersections between faith and societal justice, presenting a compelling argument for a more socially engaged and transformative Christianity.

Finding Jesus is not just a scholarly exploration; it is a call to action. It challenges readers to reevaluate their understanding of Christianity's role in public life and to consider how the radical teachings of the gospels can inspire a renewed commitment to justice, equality, and compassion. This book is a must-read for those seeking a deeper understanding of the social implications of Christian faith and a blueprint for building a more just and inclusive society.



Front cover artwork by Ali Montgomery.



Dear Friend of Renewed Heart Ministries,

Thank You for Your Support of Renewed Heart Ministries in 2025.

As 2025 has come to a close, I want to personally thank you for your generous support of Renewed Heart Ministries this year. Your commitment and generosity make our work possible, and we are deeply grateful for the trust you place in this mission.

Because of you, Renewed Heart Ministries continues to challenge injustice, amplify voices too often ignored, and encourage people of faith to follow Jesus in ways that are courageous, compassionate, and transformative. Your support allows us to create resources, foster conversations, and nurture communities committed to love, dignity, and liberation for all, especially those pushed to the margins.

In a time when injustice can feel overwhelming and hope fragile, your partnership reminds us that meaningful change is built together. Every gift, large or small, is a tangible act of solidarity and a powerful statement that justice, mercy, and radical love still matter.

As we look ahead to the coming year, your support gives us the strength to continue this work with clarity and resolve. We are excited about what lies ahead and honored to walk this journey with you.

Thank you for standing with Renewed Heart Ministries in 2025. Your generosity truly makes a difference.

With gratitude and hope,

Herb Montgomery
Director

Renewed Heart Ministries
renewedheartministries.com

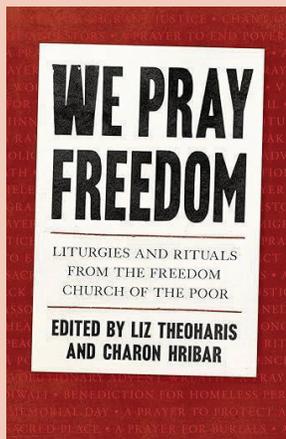
January's Recommended Reading

We Pray Freedom: Liturgies and Rituals from the Freedom Church of the Poor

by Liz Theoharis (Editor)
& Charon Hribar (Editor)

A book of prayers, rituals, and liturgies that grows out of communities committed to abolishing poverty.

Prayer has long sustained movements for social change. Ritual gives shape to our desire for justice, and liturgy lends power to our work. In *We Pray Freedom*, we learn from activists and movement builders the songs, stories, and ritual practices that keep them going for the long haul. The Freedom Church of the Poor, called for by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., has existed in many forms; today it includes laborers, poor folks, pastors, organizers, and others bound together by a conviction: It does not have to be this way.



Edited by Liz Theoharis, theologian, pastor, anti-poverty activist, and editor of *We Cry Justice*, and Charon Hribar, song leader, cultural organizer, and social ethicist, this book guides readers through a journey of remembering, healing, mourning, action, and celebration. It is a collection of prayers, resources, and stories from the communities in which they arose, including:

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New Year, Same Work continued from page 3

As the social location of Christianity changed and it ultimately became united with the empire (a collusion with empire that John spent his ministry condemning) the meaning of Jesus' baptism as solidarity with John's anti-Imperialism became lost. Before the fourth century, Christianity existed largely as a marginal and often persecuted movement within the Roman Empire. Its identity was shaped by small, decentralized communities that emphasized following Jesus in ways that implicitly challenged imperial claims of ultimate authority. This situation changed dramatically under Emperor Constantine in the early fourth century.

After Constantine's conversion and the Edict of Milan in 313 CE, Christianity moved from persecution to imperial favor. The church gained legal status, imperial patronage, and material support, including land, buildings, and financial resources. Bishops increasingly assumed roles resembling imperial administrators, and ecclesial structures began to mirror Roman political hierarchies. This was a kind of collusion that the elites of the Temple State also chose in John the Baptist's time.

As Christianity aligned with empire, its theology and practices adapted accordingly. The cross, once a symbol of Rome's crushing violent response to any social uprising, became a sign of Christian victory. Jesus was increasingly portrayed by Imperial Christianity in regal and triumphant imagery that resonated with Roman ideals of power. The church's earlier resistance to violence softened as justifications for imperial warfare and coercion emerged. Unity of belief was no longer merely a theological concern but a matter of imperial stability. Constantine's involvement in the Council of Nicaea (325 CE) illustrates this shift: doctrinal disputes were addressed with the emperor acting as convener and enforcer. Constantine bound orthodoxy to imperial authority.

This union brought undeniable benefits such as security, growth, and cultural influence for Christianity, but it also marked a profound transformation. Christianity moved from a counter-cultural movement shaped by the margins to a religion intertwined with state power. The Constantinian shift continues to shape Christian theology, ethics, and politics, raising enduring questions about what it means to be a follower of Jesus today.

Along with all of these changes, the way the Jesus story was interpreted changed, too. And interpretations of Jesus' baptism were not exempt. Jesus' baptism became problematic for the church. Christianity no longer interpreted the baptism of Jesus by John as political alignment with rejection of empire and a return to the Torah's social justice teachings. Jesus' baptism by John rather began to be interpreted as more about personal piety than a movement for social change. For example, Jerome, an ecclesiastical author who lived in the fourth and fifth centuries, quotes the Gospel of the Nazoreans:

Note that the Lord's mother and his brothers said to him, "John the Baptist practiced baptism for the remission of sins. We should go and be baptized by him." To this Jesus replied, "What sin have I committed that I should go and be baptized by him? Unless, of course, what I just said is itself a sin of ignorance."

The facts that Jesus had been baptized by John at all and that John was Jesus' mentor for a time became a source of tension for the Christian community because of their high claims for Jesus. The Church developed various apologetic ploys to explain Jesus' connection to John as well as to Jewish religion itself.

Yet, the Gospels consistently present Jesus as emerging from the movement begun by John the Baptist, and this connection is best understood not merely as a ritual or personal association but as their participation in a broader social justice movement. John's ministry in the wilderness was a prophetic critique of the political, economic, and religious systems of his day. By calling people to repentance in the Jordan, John was challenging the Temple-state alliance that mediated forgiveness through expensive sacrifice, taxation, and elite control. His baptism offered an alternative vision of communal renewal apart from institutional power.

John's message also had explicit social and economic dimensions. In Luke's Gospel, John instructs the crowds to share clothing and food, demands that tax collectors stop exploiting others, and tells soldiers to reject extortion and violence. These directives confronted systemic injustice rather than focusing solely on private morality. John announced God's

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Social Jesus

Recent Social Jesus Blog Posts on Patheos:



New Beginnings and the Word Becoming Flesh

(Part 1 of *New Beginnings and Our Justice Work Today*)

New beginnings require responsible interpretations that take into account historical contexts and courageously reject harmful applications.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/12/new-beginnings-word-becoming-flesh/



The Gospel of John and the Continuity of Justice

(Part 2 of *New Beginnings and Our Justice Work Today*)

Healthy interpretations emphasize continuity: the synoptic gospels continue and intensify the Hebrew prophetic societal justice tradition.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/12/gospel-john-continuity-justice/



New Year, Same Work

(Part 3 of *New Beginnings and Our Justice Work Today*)

A new year calls for a continuing of our commitment to a justice work that is sacred, necessary, and, ultimately, life-giving.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2026/01/new-year-same-work/



Christmas As Theological Critique of Empire (Part 1 of *When Christianity Becomes Complicit with Societal Injustice*)

The use of familiar forms of imperial birth legends and filling them with radically different content is a theological critique of empire.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/12/christmas-theological-critique-empire/



Virgin Birth as Critique of Complicity with Empire

(Part 2 of *When Christianity Becomes Complicit with Societal Injustice*)

The scientific impossibility of a virgin birth often distracts us from the political point that the author of Matthew's gospel was making.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/12/virgin-birth-critique-complicity-empire/



Christmas as Critique of Complicity with Injustice

(Part 3 of *When Christianity Becomes Complicit with Societal Injustice*)

Christmas stories, when understood in their political and social context, are a critique of complicity with empire and injustice.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/12/christmas-critique-complicity-injustice/



Advent and a Path Toward Justice (Part 1 of *Clearing a Path for Justice*)

This story reminds us of what Advent is about. A path that moves us further toward a world that is a just home for everyone.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/12/advent-path-justice/



John's Repentance and Societal Justice (Part 2 of *Clearing a Path for Justice*)

It was rooted in a call to repentance, and the repentance he demanded was profoundly societal and economic at its core.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/12/johns-repentance-societal-justice/



Repairing the Moral Fabric Begins With Justice

(Part 3 of *Clearing a Path for Justice*)

Repairing our moral fabric is about preparing a societal landscape where love, justice, and peace encounter the fewest obstacles.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/12/repairing-moral-fabric-justice/

January's Reading continued from page 4

- A Prayer to Protect a Sacred Place
- A Prayer for Burials
- A Black Friday Prayer for Workers' Justice
- Passover Seder
- Vigil for the Detained
- Healthcare Vigil
- A Shinnecock Song of Peace
- Earth Liturgy
- A Ramadan Ritual
- A Poem in the Wake of Police Violence
- A Revolutionary Advent Wreath
- A Prayer for Diwali
- Benediction for Homeless Persons' Memorial Day

Join Chaplains on the Harbor on their Stations of the Cross, Iglesia del Pueblo for Día de los Muertos, Domestic Workers United in their community garden ritual, and an encampment of unhoused residents in Alabama for their communion service. With more than fifty resources from eighty contributors, *We Pray Freedom* is useful for individual reflection, corporate worship, and protest and action. Through liturgies of liberation, join a movement that bears witness to the justice of God and to human faith, suffering, protest, and love.

Testimonies

“So grateful someone is verbalizing these things. Thanks for the teachings Herb.” –CD

“You have helped start a fire!” –LC

“I love you and what you are doing! Thank you for speaking up.” –KB

“I love Herb and the way he puts things and ideas into a perspective you really haven't heard before. And is really quite eye opening and refreshing.” –S

“Justice work
is sacred work.
The needs of
the people are
holy.”



New Year, Same Work continued from page 4

imminent reign as a reordering of society, one that threatened both Roman authority and its local collaborators. His execution by Herod Antipas underscores the political danger of his movement.

Jesus' baptism by John signifies his identification with this vision. Rather than distancing himself from John, Jesus begins his ministry proclaiming the same kingdom message as John did, and he gathers a community shaped by similar ethical demands. Jesus expands John's work by centering it on the poor, the sick, and the socially excluded, and by intensifying its critiques of wealth, domination, and religious hypocrisy.

Seen in this light, Jesus' connection to John is not incidental but foundational. Jesus inherits and radicalizes John's social justice movement, transforming prophetic protest into a sustained, embodied challenge to systems that dehumanize, exploit, and exclude. This challenge was an inheritance that ultimately led to Jesus, like John, being executed by the social power they both confronted.

Following Jesus today cannot be separated from a commitment to social justice, because Jesus' life and teachings, like John the Baptist's, consistently confronted systems that harmed the vulnerable and concentrated power in the hands of a few. The Gospels portray Jesus not only as a spiritual teacher but as a public figure whose message of God's reign challenged economic exploitation, social exclusion, and religious complicity with injustice. To follow Jesus, then, is to take seriously the ethical and political implications of his vision.

Jesus announced good news to the poor, release to captives, and freedom for the oppressed. These were not abstract spiritual metaphors but concrete promises that addressed real suffering. He healed the sick, restored those labeled “unclean,” and formed a community that crossed boundaries of class, gender, ethnicity, and socially constructed definitions of moral

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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



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:

Renewed Heart Ministries
PO Box 1211, Lewisburg, WV 24901

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

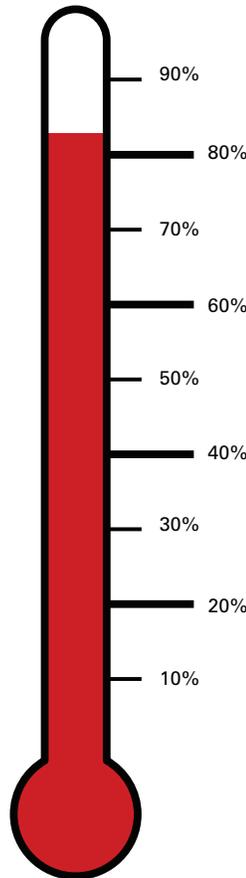
Please make sure you are receiving all of RHM's free resources by going to our website and clicking "sign up."

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.

**2025 Projected Budget Goal:
\$150,000.00**

**2025 Donations Received:
\$122,891.37**

Thank You!



New Year, Same Work continued from page 6

respectability. His teachings on wealth (warning the rich, blessing the poor, and calling for radical generosity) directly confronted economic systems that produced inequality and deprivation.

In today's context, following Jesus means discerning how similar systems operate in modern forms: racism, economic injustice, nationalism, environmental destruction, fear and exclusion of LGBTQ people, and policies that marginalize immigrants, the disabled, and the poor. Faithfulness is not limited to personal piety or charity, important as those are, but extends to challenging structures that perpetuate harm. Jesus' call to love one's neighbor and enemy alike demands resistance to narratives that dehumanize others for political or economic gain.

The end of the Jesus story reminds Christians that confronting injustice is costly. Jesus was executed not for private belief but for embodying a way of life that threatened established power. Resurrection faith, then, is not escapism but hope that justice, compassion, and solidarity can outlast violence and death.

To follow Jesus today is to walk in that same path. It means standing with those on the margins, advocating for systemic change not political dominance, and embodying a love that seeks the restoration of human dignity and the healing of the world. It means we join Jesus in the work of shaping our world into a safe, compassionate, just home for all.

Discussion Group Questions

1. Share something that spoke to you from this week's podcast episode with your discussion group.
2. In this new year, what existing call for justice is presently on your heart? Share and 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?

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

I love each of you dearly. ■

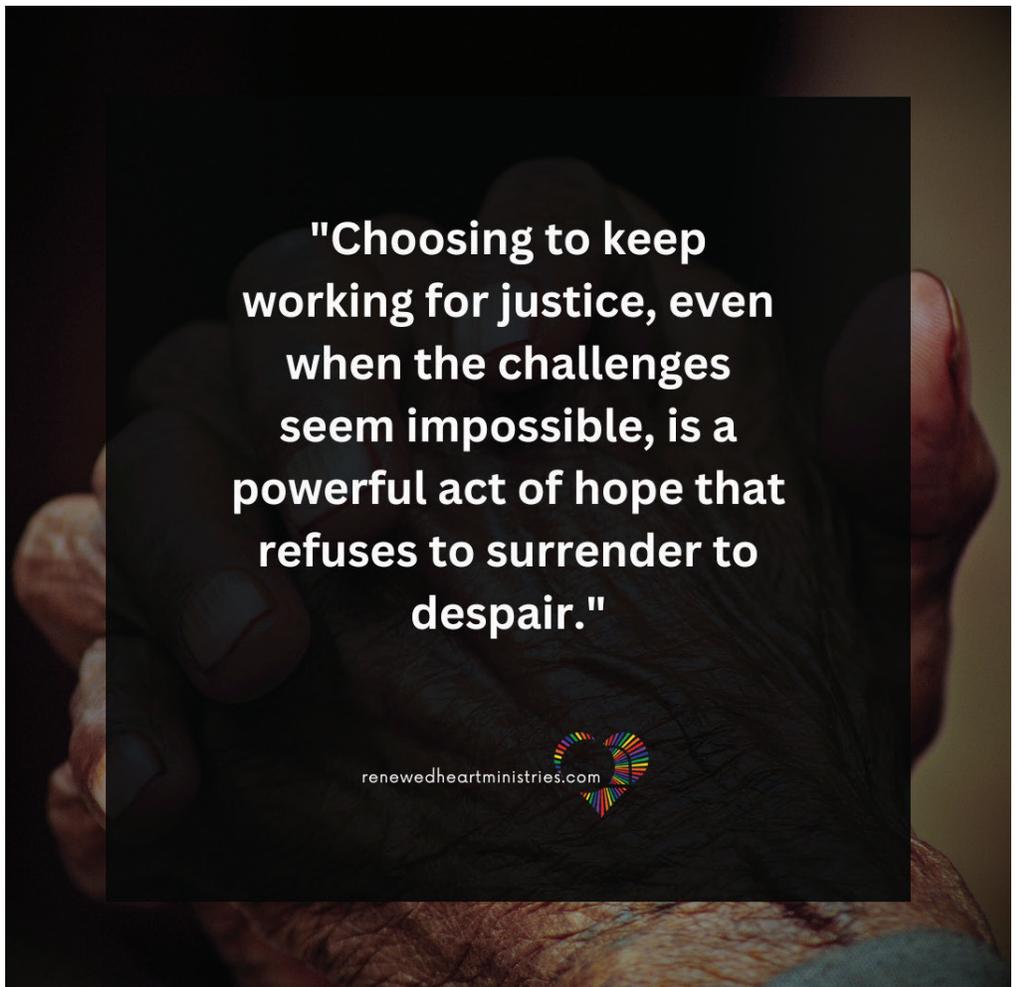


A podcast where we talk about the intersection of faith and social justice, and what a first-century, Jewish, prophet of the poor from Galilee offers us today in our work of love, compassion and justice.

Find The *Social Jesus* Podcast at:
<https://the-social-jesus-podcast.simplecast.com/>



Listen & Subscribe



"Choosing to keep working for justice, even when the challenges seem impossible, is a powerful act of hope that refuses to surrender to despair."



Weekly HeartGroup on Zoom Every Wednesday Night!

Each Wednesday evening, Renewed Heart Ministries hosts a Zoom-HeartGroup led by Herb Montgomery. Our discussion each week will focus on the content in RHM's weekly eSight articles and the *Social Jesus* podcast. The time of each Zoom session will be on Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m. Pacific/10:00 p.m. Eastern.

To receive the link for the Zoom meeting, email us at:
info@renewedheartministries.com



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