



Inside This Issue:

Page 2

*To Loose or Bind, To
Forgive or not Forgive*

Page 4

Book of the Month
for May

Weekly Zoom
HeartGroup

Page 5

RHM's *Social Jesus*
Blog on Patheos

Page 6

New Weekly
YouTube Show

Page 7

Budget Thermometer

Jesus for Everyone
Podcast

Page 8

Upcoming Events

Finding Jesus is Here!

RHM's Free Resources

RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES

P.O. Box 1211, Lewisburg, WV 24901

Phone: 304.520.0030

Email: info@renewedheartministries.com

Follow RHM!



@RenewedHeartMin



Renewed Heart Ministries

Follow Herb!



@HerbMontgomery



Herb Montgomery

"Forgiveness can be life-giving or death-dealing. Not forgiving, can be death-dealing or life-giving, too. I'm thinking of restorative justice practices where not forgiving a wrong, but the practice of having restitution made is more life-giving. Loosing can be life-giving or death-dealing. Lastly, binding can be life-giving or death-dealing. It is the job of each of us to practice informed wisdom that finds the most life-giving practice for the situations we find ourselves in."



To Loose or Bind, To Forgive or not Forgive

by Herb Montgomery

Our reading this week is from the book of John.

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."

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here;

see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:19-31)

The first thing to consider as we read this week's passage is that this is a commission story about the disciples. Mark's gospel originally had no story where the disciples were commissioned: the last half of Mark 16 is a much later addition.

Matthew's commission story is found in Matthew 28:18-20:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go [beginning in Galilee] and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Luke's and Acts' commission stories can be found in Luke 24:47-48 and Acts 1:8.

"And repentance for the forgiveness of

sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Each of these commission stories are separate. They are not three different versions of the same story with minor differences; they are three completely different stories in different settings, each told for the distinct purposes of the communities they were written for.

Our reading this week is a disciple-commissioning story that was told in the Johannine community before John 21, a redundant and later addition written by other authors.

Another thing to name about John's narratives is that, once again, the gospel takes an anti-Jewish approach. In our story this week, the disciples are in hiding in fear of the Jewish leaders. In our current political anti-Semitic climate, our first priority as Jesus followers should be to do no harm to our Jewish friends and neighbors. In the other gospels, Mark, Matthew and Luke, the tension between the narrative and Jesus' Jewish society is much more a matter of class than ethnicity. It is, to begin with, an in-house debate within Judaism, between Jews.

But by the time of the much-later-written gospel of John, conflicts are characterized much more as the early

continued on page 3

"...Forgive or not..." continued from page 2

Christian community versus "the Jews." This characterization of Jewish people in John's gospel has repeatedly inspired Christians to harm the Jewish community throughout history, including during the Holocaust.

Every time our sacred writings speak in ways that have harmed people or communities, it is important that we name, repent of, and seek to repair that harm. This responsibility definitely applies to Christians and our Jewish neighbors. Many Christians still mislabel and mischaracterize Jewish people today. Yet the reality is that our Jesus was Jewish and raised in the Jewish wisdom tradition. We, as Jesus followers, could learn a lot from that Jewish wisdom. We don't have to demonize Jewish people or Jewish wisdom to lift up Jesus today. Jewish people are not our enemy.

In our story this week, Jesus "breathes" the Spirit on the disciples. This description may seem odd to us today, but it would have been meaningful in the Johannine community, and it became especially meaningful for later Christian Gnostic communities.

Out of Jesus' breathing of the spirit, the disciples gain the ability to "loose" or "bind," the ability to forgive or not forgive.

Matthew describes this ability being commissioned to the disciples with some similar language:

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:19)

"Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 18:18)

We can read the version in John's gospel prescriptively or descriptively.

A prescriptive read means that Jesus is giving the prerogative to forgive some things and not forgive other things to the church. Historically, especially in the Western Christian tradition, this reading has placed too much power in the

hands of religious authorities. To put fallible humans in a position where they can claim to administer or withhold divine forgiveness within a religious community has come with mixed results. Some have found nourishment in the idea that the Church actually does have spiritual authority and can speak into the material world and among Christians for justice in a way that helps re-order this world in meaningful and practical ways. The Church's binding and loosing capacity is nourishing to them. And this has been abused, too, resulting in some problematic and destructive consequences. Marginalized communities have both been harmed and helped within church history here, and so we must tread carefully. Religious people, of all faiths, have a clear moral responsibility and role to play in shaping our world into a safe home for all. Forgiveness can be life-giving or death-dealing. Not forgiving, can be death-dealing or life-giving, too. I'm thinking of restorative justice practices where not forgiving a wrong, but the practice of having restitution made is more life-giving. Loosing can be life-giving or death-dealing. Lastly, binding can be life-giving or death-dealing. It is the job of each of us to practice informed wisdom that finds the most life-giving practice for the situations we find ourselves in.

Looking at this phrase descriptively should also give us pause. If Jesus is just describing what these disciples who will tell the initial Jesus story will mean for others, and why it is so important for them to get that story right, then this passage makes more sense for me but doesn't feel much better. There are Christians today who are still binding and loosing, forgiving and not forgiving. Some-times they represent a God of love in life-giving ways, and at other times they represent God in very death-dealing ways.

As just one example, many Christians still harmfully interpret the handful of passages in the Bible that have been used against LGBTQ people. Countless LGBTQ young people have been raised in Christian homes, taught to be ashamed and scared of what they're encouraged to believe is "wrong" with them. They come to believe they are sinful, broken, or have an orientation that is a by-product of sin rather than an example of the beautiful diversity and variation of humanity. Christians have bound these youth with feelings of inferiority and the fear of rejection if they share their truth with their families. Parents, too, are still encouraged and even commanded to reject their children simply because of whom they are attracted to or love.

Whether I like it or not, whether I am comfortable with it or not, the power to loose or bind, to make someone feel forgiven or not forgiven, accepted or rejected, included or marginalized, is intrinsically in the hands of every Jesus follower. How we take on the name of Jesus and how we represent Jesus and relate to the people around us matters. It matters whether we are Jesus followers or not, but it matters even more when we are. This should give us pause and inspire us to use gentle care when relating to everyone. We will make mistakes, for sure, but when we do err, we should be erring on the side of compassion.

This week's reading is also a good reminder that all theology has political, economic, and social functions. As we assess any particular theology, it's helpful to understand the political,



Photo by Jon Tyson on Unsplash

continued on page 6

RHM's Recommended Reading for May

Resurrecting Easter: How the West Lost and the East Kept the Original Easter Vision

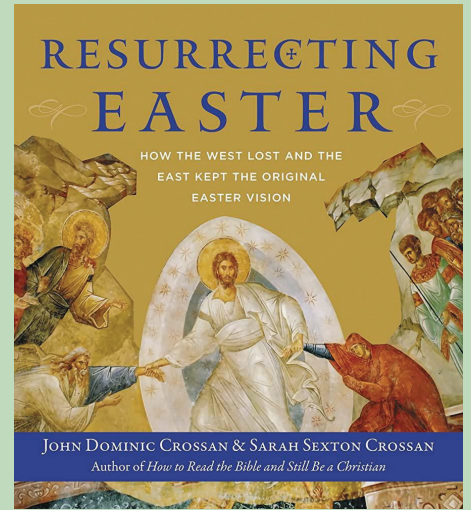
by John Dominic Crossan and Sarah Crossan

In this four-color illustrated journey that is part travelogue and part theological investigation, bestselling author and acclaimed Bible scholar John Dominic Crossan and his wife Sarah painstakingly travel throughout the ancient Eastern church, documenting through text and image a completely different model for understanding Easter's resurrection story, one that provides promise and hope for us today.

Traveling the world, the Crossans noticed a surprising difference in how the Eastern Church considers Jesus' resurrection—an event not described in the Bible. At Saint Barbara's Church in Cairo, they

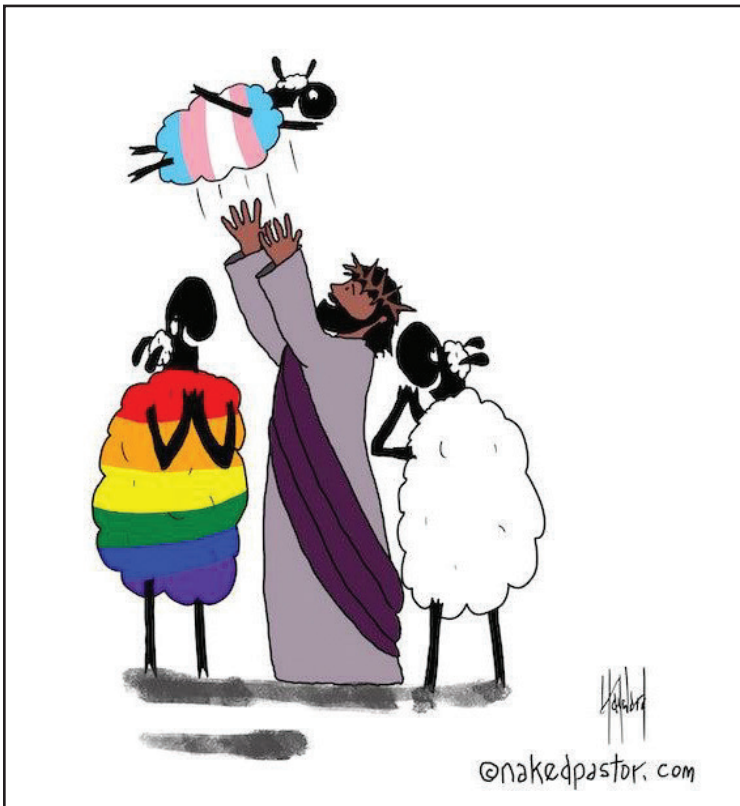
found a painting in which the risen Jesus grasps the hands of other figures around him. Unlike the Western image of a solitary Jesus rising from an empty tomb that he viewed across Eastern Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, the Crossans saw images of the resurrection depicting a Jesus grasping the hands of figures around him, or lifting Adam and Eve to heaven from Hades or hell, or carrying the old and sick to the afterlife. They discovered that the standard image for the Resurrection in Eastern Christianity is communal and collective, something unique from the solitary depiction of the resurrection in Western Christianity.

Fifteen years in the making, *Resurrecting Easter* reflects on this divide in how the Western and Eastern churches depict the resurrection and its implications. The Crossans argue that the West has gutted the heart of Christianity's understanding of the resurrection by rejecting that once-common communal iconography in favor of an individualistic vision. As they examine the ubiquitous Eastern



imagery of Jesus freeing Eve from Hades while ascending to heaven, the Crossans suggest that this iconography raises profound questions about Christian morality and forgiveness.

A fundamentally different way of understand the story of Jesus' rebirth illustrated with 130 images, *Resurrecting Easter* introduces an inclusive, traditional community-based ideal that offers renewed hope and possibilities for our fractured modern society.



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.

SOCIAL JESUS

A Blog Exploring the Intersection of Faith and Societal Justice



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



A Shepherd, Part 1 of Fulness of Life for Everyone

The shepherd was not a private, individual, or spiritual image in the Jewish tradition as it has become in the Christian tradition.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/04/fulness-of-life-for-everyone-part1/

A Sheep Gate, Part 2 of Fulness of Life for Everyone

It symbolizes their version of Jesus as a "sheep gate" through which legitimate shepherds would have led people to knowledge (gnosis).

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/04/sheep-gate-fulness-of-life-for-everyone-part2/

Life Abundant, Part 3 of Fulness of Life for Everyone

It is important to remember that this abundant living doesn't come at the expense of others. Life isn't "life" for any of us unless it is life for us all.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/04/life-abundant-fulness-life-everyone-part3/



Reversal, Part 1 of Resurrection as the Good News

For the early Jesus followers, the good news was not that Jesus had died, or that Jesus had died for them, but that Jesus was alive!

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/04/resurrection-as-the-good-news-part1/

Undoing, Part 2 of Resurrection as the Good News

Many who live in or stand in solidarity with oppressed communities have seen how destructive traditional explanations of Jesus' death can be.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/04/resurrection-as-the-good-news-part2/

Good News, Part 3 of Resurrection as the Good News

They may interrupt our work of shaping our world into a safe home for all, but if we keep at it, they will just be interruptions.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/04/resurrection-as-the-good-news-part3/



Commission Stories, Part 1 of To Loose or Bind, To Forgive or not Forgive

Each of these commission stories are separate, each told for the distinct purposes of the communities they were written for.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/04/loose-bind-forgive-part1/

Loosing and Binding, Part 2 of To Loose or Bind, To Forgive or not Forgive

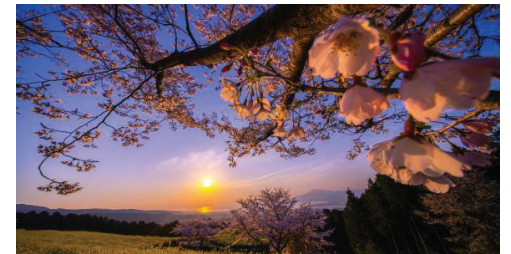
Both loosing and binding can be life-giving or death-dealing. We must practice informed wisdom that finds the most life-giving practice

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/04/loosing-binding-loose-bind-forgive-part2/

That Which is Life Giving, Part 3 of To Loose or Bind, To Forgive or not Forgive

This week's reading is also a good reminder to choose that which is life giving because all theologies have a function.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/04/life-giving-loose-bind-forgive-part3/



Good News, Part 1 of Resurrection and Listening to Those on the Margins

For many early Christians, the good news was not that Jesus had died, but that Jesus, whom Rome crucified, had been brought back to life.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/04/resurrection-listening-margins-part1/

Resurrection, Part 2 of Resurrection and Listening to Those on the Margins

The resurrection is the good news in the book of Acts, not that someone had died but that this specific one had been brought back to life.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/04/resurrection-listening-margins-part2/

Mary at the Tomb, Part 3 of Resurrection and Listening to Those on the Margins

This Easter story of Mary is about prioritizing all the voices that our practices push to the margins and undersides of our society.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/04/resurrection-listening-margins-part3/

“...Forgive or not...” *continued from page 3*

economic and social implications that rise from it and to also know that all theologies come with underlying biases and motives at work. Some motives are more obvious, and others less so. Regardless, all theologies are political, with economic implications and social outcomes.

The last part of our reading this week is about Thomas. The scholarly evidence points to this story being a late tradition to the text. Thomas’ reference to Jesus as God is also unique in the four canonical gospels. No other disciple refers to Jesus as “God” in any of the gospel narratives. This story therefore serves to establish the authority of Thomas for the Christian communities that grew up around his apostleship. That authority would have been important for later Gnostic Christians and others reading the gospel of Thomas.

This week, let’s take this week’s passage as our guide and choose to relate to others in ways that are

liberating, not oppressive, loosening and binding. Let’s follow Jesus in whatever way is life-giving for the given moment and situation. And remember, that when we claim to follow Jesus, for better or for worse, we will be viewed as representing that Jesus and we can in those moments hold in our hands life or death. Let’s be sources of healing, and life, and justice and inclusion.

HeartGroup Application

1. Share something that spoke to you from this week’s eSight/Podcast episode with your HeartGroup.
2. In what ways have you experienced the above authority in our reading practiced in life-giving ways? In what ways has it been destructive? 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.

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

I love each of you dearly. ■

* Scriptures taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™



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!

RENEWED
HEART
MINISTRIES



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:

Renewed Heart Ministries
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."

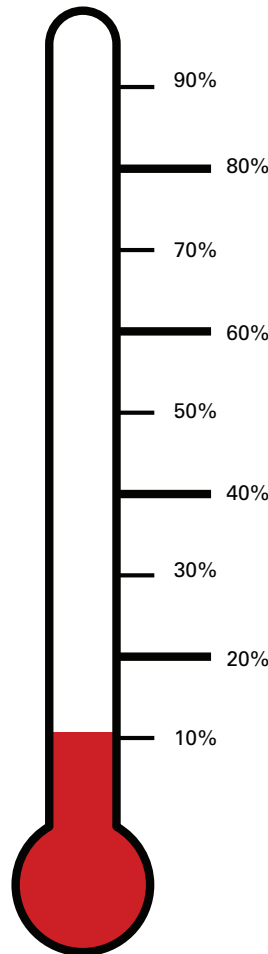
And **THANK YOU** for reading, listening to, sharing and supporting RHM's work. Thank you for

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.

Together, we are making a difference.

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

**Donations Received
Thru March 2023:
\$16,883.77**



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



Podcast

WWW.RENEWEDHEARTMINISTRIES.COM

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)**

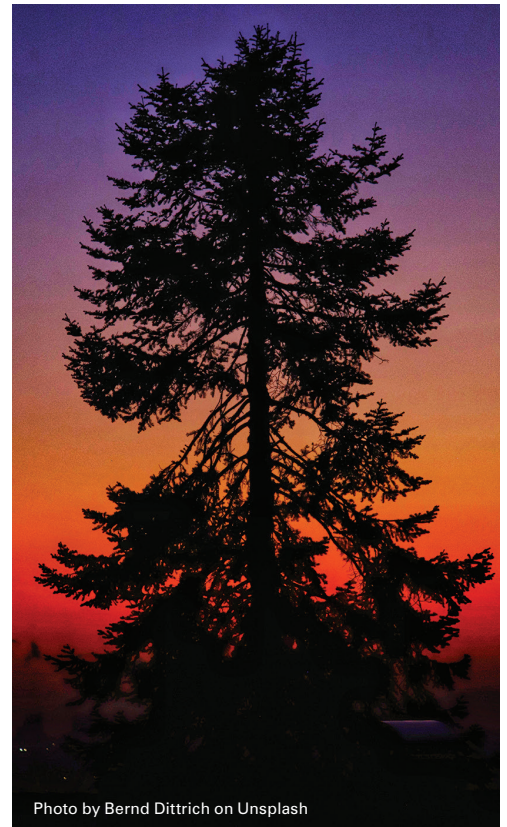
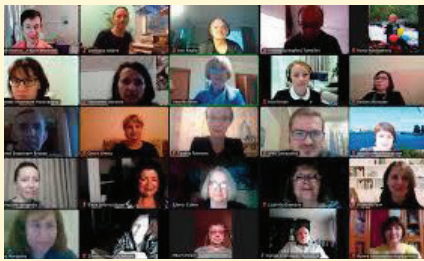


Photo by Bernd Dittrich on Unsplash



Upcoming Events

MAY 13, 2023

Good News Fellowship
Toronto, Ontario Canada
304.520.0030



MAY 27, 2023

Glendale City Church
Glendale, CA
(818) 244-7241



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 in:

"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)

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!"



"History says, Don't hope on this side of the grave. But then, once in a lifetime, the longed-for tidal wave of justice can rise up And hope and history rhyme."

Seamus Heaney,
The Cure at Troy: A Version of Sophocles' Philoctetes, 77.

renewedheartministries.com

Front cover artwork by Ali Montgomery.