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Finding Jesus
Now Available on
Audible


Special Episode of
Just Talking


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justice, compassion, and healing. Your support is the bedrock of our efforts to promote love and justice. It empowers us to offer connection and inspiration to individuals as we collaboratively strive for justice in today's world. At a time when ministries like ours are being asked to achieve more with fewer resources, your support is incredibly important, and we want to simply say thank you. Whether in our larger society or within our local faith communities, Renewed Heart Ministries remains committed to advocating for change, working towards a world that is inclusive, just, and safe for everyone. Your support is integral to our work. From all of us at Renewed Heart Ministries, thank you for your generous support. We deeply appreciate each and every one of our supporters. And if you'd like to join them in supporting our work, we need your support now more than ever.

Please consider making a donation today at renewedheartministries.com and clicking on "Donate."

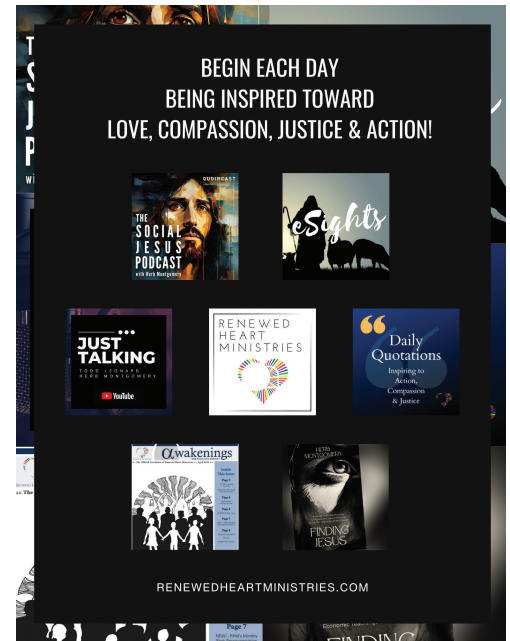
Upcoming Events

MAY 25, 2023

**Good News Fellowship
Toronto, Ontario Canada**

For more info or the Zoom link, email us at:

**info@renewedheartministries.com
or call: 304.520.0030**



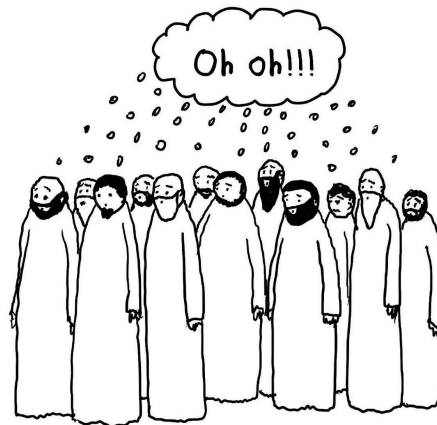
Are you receiving all of RHM's free resources each week?

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Visit renewedheartministries.com and click "Sign Up!"

Okay boys let's go out there and love those they call "sinners" by respecting their freedom and treating them with dignity!



@nakedpastor.com



The Good Shepherd and a Socially Just World

by Herb Montgomery

Our reading this fourth weekend of Easter is from the gospel of John:

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again.

No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father." (John 10:11-18)

This reading lands in the center of what Jesus scholars have labelled the "I am statements" in John's gospel. Jesus is:

The bread of life (John 6)

The light of the world (John 8)

The pre-existent "I am" (John 8)

The good shepherd (John 10)

The resurrection and life (John 11)

The way, the truth, and the life (John 14)

The true vine (John 15)

Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker do an excellent job of documenting how, before the Christian faith tradition wedded the Roman Empire and while it was still socially oppressed by the Roman Empire, a very common image of Jesus in Christian art was Jesus as the shepherd. Our world was a pastoral landscape that Jesus the shepherd was restoring to paradise.

Before Jesus is enthroned in imperial Christian theology, art, and the Christian imagination as imperial ruler or as a tortured victim of the crucifix, he was shepherd, teacher, and healer. We find this image in the canonical gospels.

"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'" (Luke 15:4-6)

"What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look

for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish. (Matthew 18:12-14)

In Matthew's gospel, the son of man of the apocalyptic book of Daniel also comes as a shepherd.

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. (Matthew 25:31-33)

The gospels repeatedly imagine the people Jesus ministers to as healer and teacher as sheep without a shepherd too:

"When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd." (Mark 6:34) "...the lost sheep of Israel." (Matthew 10:6) "...the lost sheep of Israel." (Matthew 15:24)

The image of a shepherd and sheep also has deep roots in the Jewish wisdom and justice tradition of the Hebrew prophets:

"I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken. I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of savage beasts so that they may live in the wilderness and sleep in the forests in safety. I will make them and the places surrounding my hill a blessing. I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing. The trees will yield their fruit and the ground will yield its crops; the people will be secure in their land. They will know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke and rescue them from the hands of those who enslaved them. They will no longer be plundered by the

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...*Shepherd...* continued from page 3

nations, nor will wild animals devour them. They will live in safety, and no one will make them afraid. I will provide for them a land renowned for its crops, and they will no longer be victims of famine in the land or bear the scorn of the nations. Then they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them and that they, the Israelites, are my people, declares the Sovereign LORD. You are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign LORD." (Ezekiel 34:23-31)

Here in Ezekiel, this imagery is used to convey the ethics of a distributive justice for a society where the threat of violence, injustice, and oppression are no more and there is enough for everyone to thrive. The imagery of a Shepherd is used to portray our world as a paradise restored and a safe, compassionate, just home for everyone.

Micah also uses this imagery for a similar purpose:

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,

though you are small among the clans of Judah,

out of you will come for me

one who will be ruler over Israel,

whose origins are from of old,

from ancient times...He will stand and *shepherd his flock*

in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.

And they will live securely, for then his greatness

will reach to the *ends of the earth*.

And he will be *our peace...*" (Micah 5:2-5, italics added for emphasis)

The shepherd brings social healing and teaches us the way of life: the path of love for one another where each of us makes sure we all have what we need.

In our reading this week, John's gospel describes Jesus as a shepherd who is personally invested in the well-being of the sheep, more than a "hired worker" would be.

This Jesus also names "sheep of other folds" who are part of the restoration of paradise. I think the immediate meaning of this label is other Jesus communities that existed at the time the gospel was written, not just the Jesus community that recognized the apostleship of John, but also those who honored the apostleships of Mary Magdalene, Peter, and Thomas. John's gospels does a good job here and in chapter 20 of making the Jesus movement tent big enough for each community. It was a time of development in the early church when some communities were competing with others for power, deeming themselves as the genuine Jesus community and other Jesus communities as less-than. Some churches today similarly claim to be the true church with other churches being some kind of counterfeit. And some religions seek to establish themselves as the only legitimate way to access the Divine rather than looking for the universal wisdom or the unique life-giving wisdom faith traditions have to

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RHM's Recommended Reading for May

Dead Man Walking: The Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty That Sparked a National Debate

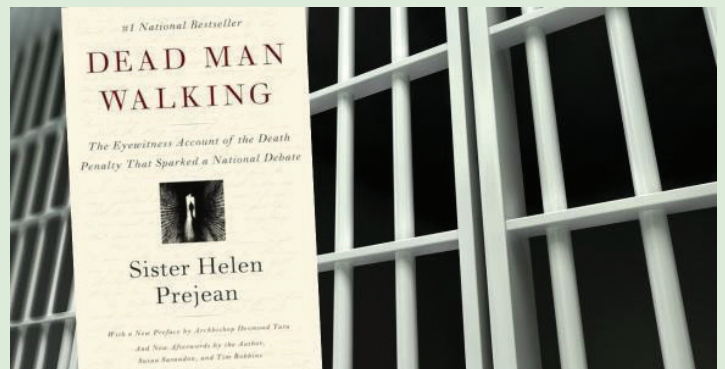
by Sister Helen Prejean

#1 NATIONAL BEST-SELLER

"Stunning moral clarity." *—The Washington Post Book World*

"Sister Prejean is an excellent writer, direct and honest and unsentimental...She almost palpably extends a hand to her readers." *—The New York Times Book Review*

In 1982, Sister Helen Prejean became the spiritual advisor to Patrick Sonnier, the convicted killer of two teenagers who was sentenced to die in the electric chair of Louisiana's Angola State Prison. In the months before Sonnier's death, the Roman Catholic nun came to know a man who was as terrified as he had once been terrifying. She also came to know the families of the victims and the men whose job it was to execute—men who often harbored doubts about the rightness of what they were doing.



Out of that dreadful intimacy comes a profoundly moving spiritual journey through our system of capital punishment. Here Sister Helen confronts both the plight of the condemned and the rage of the bereaved, the fears of a society shattered by violence and the Christian imperative of love.

On its original publication in 1993, *Dead Man Walking* emerged as an unprecedented look at the human consequences of the death penalty. Now, some two decades later, this story—which has inspired a film, a stage play, an opera and a musical album—is more gut-wrenching than ever, stirring deep and life-changing reflection in all who encounter it.

SOCIAL JESUS

A Blog Exploring the Intersection of Faith and Societal Justice



Last month's "Social Jesus" Blog on Patheos



Love and Social Justice, Part 1

It's much more difficult to preach the gospel that the Jesus in the stories preached, the gospel that teaches us how to love one another.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2024/04/love-and-social-justice-part1/

Love and Social Justice, Part 2

If Christians are going to become peacemakers, we are first going to have to learn how to be less combative within our own faith communities.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/love-and-social-justice-part2/

Love and Social Justice, Part 3

As we work toward making our world a safe for everyone, love of neighbor calls us to love those neighbors who may be different from us, too.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/05/love-and-social-justice-part3/



Different Christianity Different Fruit, Part 1

I would argue that it's about producing a certain kind of fruit rather than the drive to always produce ever-increasing amounts of fruit.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/04/different-christianity-different-fruit-part1/

Different Christianity Different Fruit, Part 2

Textual gymnastics can show almost anything to be Biblical. We have to ask whether our Christianity is producing fruit that is life-giving.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/04/different-christianity-different-fruit-part2/

Different Christianity Different Fruit, Part 3

Today, it is no secret that some forms of Christianity are failing to produce the fruit that makes this world a better place. We can do better.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/04/different-christianity-different-fruit-part3/



The Good Shepherd and a Socially Just World, Part 1

Before he is enthroned in imperial Christian theology, art, and the Christian imagination as imperial ruler, he was shepherd.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/04/good-shepherd-socially-just-world-part1/

The Good Shepherd and a Socially Just World, Part 2

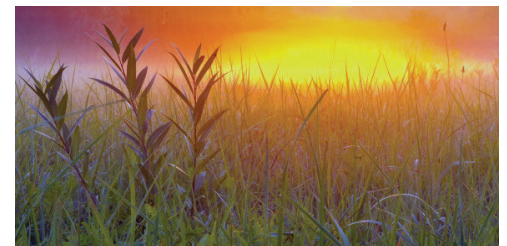
The shepherd metaphor was used by the Hebrew prophets to speak of the ethics of a distributive justice for a society where the threat of violence, injustice, and oppression are no more.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/04/good-shepherd-socially-just-world-part2/

The Good Shepherd and a Socially Just World, Part 3

The shepherd metaphor then speaks to learning to relate to one another in a way in a safe, compassionate, just way for all.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/04/good-shepherd-socially-just-world-part3/



Resurrection as Injustice Undone, Part 1

They did not see their salvation as accomplished through the cross. They saw the resurrection as the restoration of his life-saving work.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/04/resurrection-injustice-undone-part1/

Resurrection as Injustice Undone, Part 2

Resurrection speaks that hate, injustice, bigotry, power and privilege don't have to have the last word in our stories. Justice and love can!

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/04/resurrection-injustice-undone-part2/

Resurrection as Injustice Undone, Part 3

Whatever we make of the resurrection stories today, resurrection speaks of stories not over yet. Resurrection speaks of injustice undone.

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2023/04/resurrection-injustice-undone-part3/

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offer to all of us. "Other sheep not of this fold" who belong just as much as us and to whom we are connected is a much more life-giving way to look at others in our world.

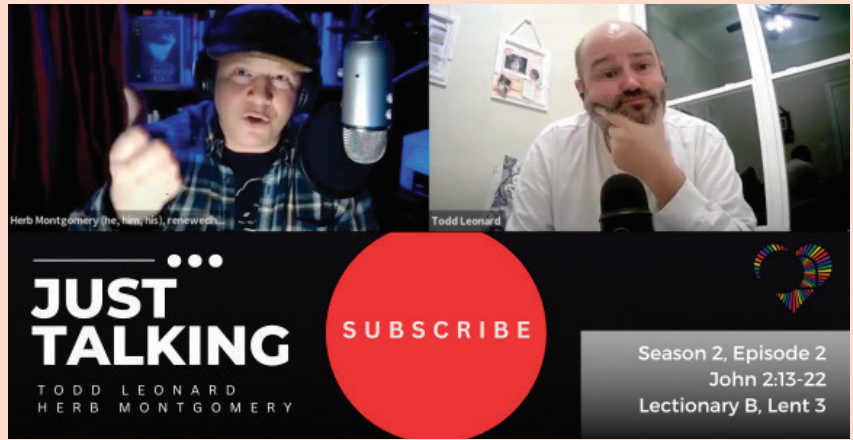
But John's imagery of Jesus as shepherd still ends with a cross. In true Johannine fashion, the death of Jesus is not characterized as we read in Mark, Matthew, Luke and Acts, as an unjust state execution that is overcome by the resurrection. Here it is a mere portal to life that no one forces on Jesus but that he embraces freely so he might take his life back up again.

I've spent a lot of time this Easter critiquing John's version of the death of Jesus as contrasted with the synoptic gospels and the book of Acts. Here let me just say that the Johannine community's interpretation of Jesus' death, like most of the rest of John's version of the Jesus story, is different than the synoptics' version. (For a more detailed critique of interpretations of Jesus' death that focus on his dying rather than the good news of the resurrection, see *For God So Loved the World?*)

We may all interpret the events of the Jesus story differently today. But what binds us together is commitment to the way of love, life, and justice as we perceive in the golden rule, the sermon on the mount, and the other ethical teachings and values of the Jesus of our stories. In the end, it's not about how we read or interpret the supernatural or metaphysical elements of these ancient Jesus stories. The point of all these stories is that we learn again to relate to one another in a way that shapes our shared world into a safe, compassionate, just home for us all.

Discussion Group Questions

1. Share something that spoke to you from this week's eSight/Podcast episode with your HeartGroup.
2. How does the imagery of Jesus as shepherd and this world as his pasture inform your own justice work today? Share and discuss with your group.



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!

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.

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*.

I want to also say a special thank you to Quoir Publishing, Keith Giles, who wrote the foreword to my latest book, all the special people on our launch team, and all of you who made this release a success.

Finding Jesus: A Fundamentalist Preacher Discovers the Socio-Political and Economic Teachings of the

Gospels is available now on Amazon in paperback, Kindle and now on Audible in audio book format.

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. ■

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Announcing a NEW Podcast!

Find the *Social Jesus* podcast now at:
the-social-jesus-podcast.simplecast.com/



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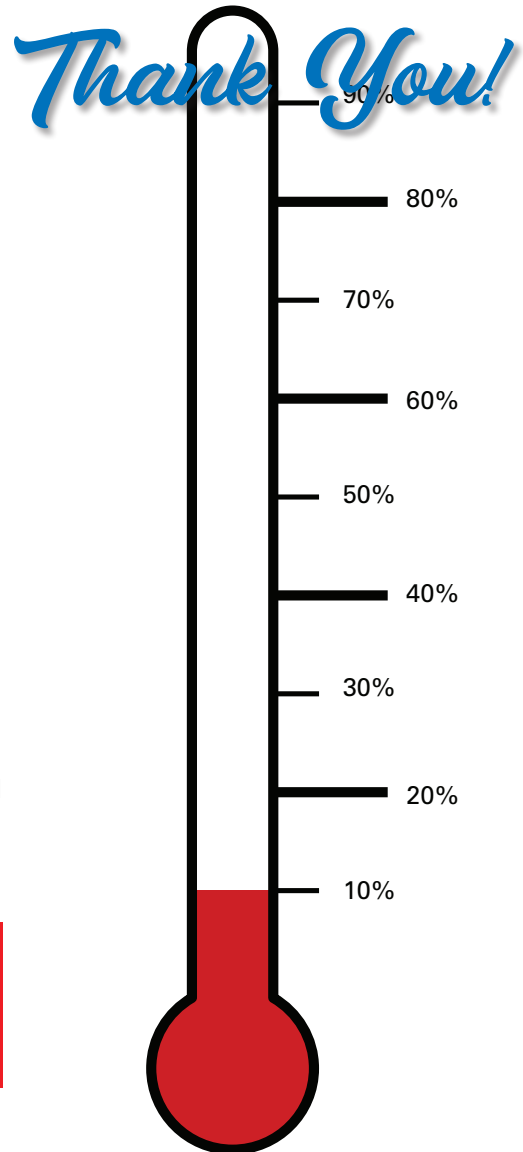
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Whether you give \$5 or \$5,000, every amount helps us to continue our work.


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.

2024 Projected Budget Goal: \$150,000.00


Donations Received as of April 30, 2024:
\$16,145.64




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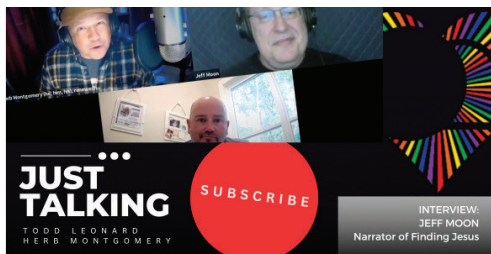
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A Special Episode of *Just Talking!*

Todd and Herb talk with Jeff Moon, the narrator of the new audiobook version of *Finding Jesus* available on Audible.

Find it at: youtube.com/@herbandtoddjusttalking

Season 2, Episode 10: Interview with Jeff Moon, Audiobook Narrator of FINDING JESUS

Please Like, Subscribe, hit the Notification button, and leave us a comment.

Thanks in advance for watching!

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Front cover artwork by Ali Montgomery.

“This imagery was used to convey the ethics of a distributive justice for a society where the threat of violence, injustice, and oppression are no more. Where there is enough for everyone to thrive, a world that is safe for everyone. Before Jesus was the Crucified in Christian theology he was the Shepherd. And this early shepherd imagery calls us to check the kind of world we are choosing to create for each other.”

renewedheartministries.com

Audiobook Available Now on Audible

***Finding Jesus: A Fundamentalist Preacher Discovers the Socio-Political & Economic Teachings of the Gospels* (2nd Edition)**

by Herb Montgomery

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. Readers will journey through the Gospel narratives, discovering the ways in which the Jesus of these stories challenged the political and religious establishments of his time. Herb Montgomery draws parallels between the societal issues faced by the people of Jesus' era and the challenges of the present day, sparking reflection on the role of faith in addressing contemporary political and social issues. *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.

