

This is how the Bible starts: *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”*

This is how the Bible ends: *“And he who sat upon the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’”*

From first to last, the Bible says God creates and makes new.

Jeremiah learned this lesson when he stopped by the potter’s shop in old Jerusalem one day. He tells us about it, how the clay kept crumbling in the potter’s hands, probably some grit in the clay, something not right.

So, smashing the clay down into some formless lump, “the potter would simply start over and use the same clay to make another pot.”

The point is this. The potter could have pitched out the crumbly clay and begun with fresh, started from scratch.

But instead, the potter said, “Stubborn though this lump may be, I intend to make something beautiful of it yet.”

And with that he began again putting moistened hands to the task, the potter’s transforming touch!

God is the patient potter forever reworking our gritty clay.

Instead of the same old same old, God is shaping the same old into something new.

You see, rearranging life’s furniture, adjusting your geography, changing channels on our emotional system is just a matter of old continuings: same old same old!

It has nothing to do with new beginnings.

No, the biblical story shows how God takes off in a different direction. Beginning again doesn’t mean trashing the old, it means transforming it.

God promises to begin again, not simply with us, but within us, cleansing and reshaping our bent lives, our misshapen motives, our faltering faith.

You know how we recycle paper or glass or plastic or aluminum; we take what is used and broken and crushed and make something valuable and useful, even beautiful out of it.

Now let me be clear. You can’t recycle yourself or anybody else for that matter. All the self-help books to the contrary, all by yourself you cannot perform that miracle.

God alone can rework the gritty, fallen apart, pick-it-up-off-the-floor clay of your life, to make all things new.

Transformation is God’s work!

It is God’s patience, faithfulness, and determination, the redemptive power of God’s love that makes of us a new creation.

Paul was telling the church centuries ago about this experience of God’s love, how God had opened a door of faith for people to enter this potter’s shop of new creation: a place, a people, a way of life.

That’s what Paul wrote about to the church in Rome: *“Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand...”*

Access to this grace...that is, God has opened the door, and the word for access refers to ‘freedom.’ The word for doors refers to ‘opportunity.’

God's church: a church of all doors for everyone to be free to find their way to God's love, to have an opportunity for God to shape the same old into something new.

As Richard Rohr says, "This biblically infused vision, from Genesis to Revelation, pictures a world made whole, with people living in a beloved community, where no one is despised or forgotten, peace reigns, and the goodness of God's creation is treasured and protected as a gift."

I know that sometimes it doesn't feel that way...like on the cover of Rob Bell's book "Love Wins' for Teens": "If God threw a party, would everyone be invited? Would you?"

We sometimes feel like asking God, "Am I in or out?"

Because it seems to be how our world works.

Doors get slammed in our face, or we put up signs for special entry: White/Black, Male/Female, Rich/Poor, Liberal/Conservative, Young/Old, Live This Way/Live That Way and more often than not My Way or the Highway!

The question has plagued the church from the beginning: Who is it we in the church want to shut the door on and not allow in?

Who is it that we have decided is beyond the redemptive power of God's love and should not be allowed in God's church?

Remember, it was the poor, marginalized shepherds who came through the door of the stable to see the good news of great joy as the angels had proclaimed, the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes.

It was the mystical strangers from a foreign land who came through the door in Bethlehem and worshipped at the feet of the newborn king.

And what doors were opened when Joseph and Mary fled the murderous Herod for safety across the border to Egypt?

Listen to this from Ernest Gordon, who served as Dean of the Chapel at Princeton University, but during World War II, he was a prisoner of war in the Japanese camp of Chungkai.

You know of this camp through the movie *Bridge on the River Kwai*. Ernest Gordon was one of the prisoners who built that bridge.

"I do not know," this Presbyterian minister says, "when the church at Chungkai was built. Perhaps 'built' is not the right word, for it was no more than a clearing in the jungle. It had for a roof the great vault of the firmament and for its walls the forest of bamboo. There were no doors. One could enter at any point. It was all door."

A church of all doors: the architecture of a faithful church that provides "*access to this grace in which we stand.*"

Of being true to the Biblical story of God's creating, making all things new, to make something beautiful, reworking the grit and grime of our lives.

God opens the door of new life for you, and God will never ever, never ever, never ever shut the door on you.

God loves you.
Always has.
Always will.

As this church begins again with a new minister, I pray the world will hear you say, "Come on in, the door's wide open!"

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.