

“You Want to Be Born Again?” Said the Woman Through the Door”

“Here is the world; beautiful and terrible things will happen.

Be not afraid.

Because this is what we are about:

We hold hope for each other when hope is hard to find.

We plant seeds that will one day grow.

We are prophets of a future not our own.

We cannot do everything,

But we can do something.

So forget your perfect offering.

There is a crack in everything.

That is how the light gets in.”

We begin with a composite of an experience many of us have had at one time

Or another in our lives:

It's a mid-morning Monday, and maybe you're a preacher who has the day off,

or a computer programmer whose office is in Tucson, so you work from home;

or a parent home with babies, feeding them one cheerio at a time...,

And you're still in your pajamas - not the nice ones that look slimming,

But the 100% cotton ones that got shrunk in the dryer and now end half-way up

Your calf and are decorated with Santa penguins even though it's the New Year

and the Christmas Tree has been kicked to the curb...yes, we all have those, don't

we?

Which is to say, we're looking good, and we've drunk all the coffee we should,

And now the caffeine is wearing off...and because we've read the news (that is if you have actually gotten your Globe delivered),
or Tucson won't wake up for another hour still,
or it's come time for the baby's morning nap,
...you're tempted to do something you won't tell anyone about,
because folks can sometimes be a little snobby,
which is...shhh...turn on the TV and watch...shhh...*The Price is Right*.

And so you settle in, and you've pulled the throw blanket up to your neck,
And you're poured another cup of coffee, because why not?
And just as the host says: "*Tammy, come on downnnn!!!*"
The doorbell rings.

Really?

You could ignore it. I mean, who pops by unannounced these days
Accept UPS? So you do ignore it. But the doorbell rings again.

Whoever it is is determined.

Fine. So you go to the door,

But through the narrow window, and through the wreath still hanging there,
You see a woman in a brimmed blue hat you don't know.

What does she want?

But then you see the pamphlets clutched in her left hand,
And cradled in her right arm what looks like a black bible with gold lettering on
the side, and red edges.

Good Lord, you say to yourself.

Which is exactly the point of her visit, you know,
To prove to you just how good the Lord is.

Which, let's be honest, isn't such a terrible thing to be told
To you through the door on a Monday morning in this beautiful,
But broken world...
But your suspicion is high, and you did your religion thing yesterday,
and Tammy is just about to guess what might be behind door #1.

Morning! She says, all bright and cheery against the backdrop of
The gun-metal sky, because now you've cracked open the front
Door, but not the storm door, so there is a pane of glass between you and her.
Nice pants! She says without sarcasm.
I'm from Holy Redeemer such and such.
We're in the neighborhood today to talk with folks about how you're doing,
And about our church.

So now I'm watching us as our eyes roll. Mine too.
Because this is why so many of us get twitchy about religion and telling others
About our own church, because no one likes to be told what to think or believe.
Never mind the notion that talking about your church could be fun
If you believe that what's going on is here is important enough to share.
Hmmm. Maybe this woman has something to teach us.

Thanks, but I'm not....I'm in my pj's...I'm working, my baby is sleeping,
I'm in the middle of something....
I understand, she says, *we're all in the middle of something.*
And you're thinking: so now she's getting existential?
But she's right.
Which is why I'm wondering, she says:

Sometimes don't you just want to start over?

Well no, you think. Well yes, you think.

Many times actually, because who doesn't need a fresh beginning?

And you remember how you're mom called you

On New Year's Eve and said how she couldn't wait

To go out with the Old and ring in the new,

Because, pray, this year no more tragedy will strike the family.

And you remember your friend, who this year will be bringing home a baby,

And they are wondering: how will this possible?

How can I possibly start my new life with this new life?

How can I do this?

And as these and other things flash across your face,

Because so much is said by our eyes and brow and what jaw does

When we're thinking things we often tell no one else....

The woman in the blue-brimmed hat goes on:

Our pastor says tells us how every one of us is called upon to start a new life;

Are you?

Yeah well, you might say, my minister says there is a crack in everything and that's how the light gets in – which doesn't quite have the same ring, does it?

And then you think about your second cousin on your mother's side,

The one who entered the holidays with some scary diagnosis,

Even though he did everything right, and is young and trim and

Eats meat only two days a week and drinks plenty of fluids, just like you –

This week, tomorrow in fact, he starts treatment,

And in the process is called upon to start a new life, wondering
How to move forward now that he is forever changed...

And you think of your brother on your wife's side, so long unemployed,
Whose wife is back to work for the first time in years, starting a new life
As the primary wage earner in the family even though those wages
Are far less than they had coming in when he was working,
The family starting new life of learning to do more with less...

You've heard it before, I'm sure, says the woman, still
Behind the storm door, but now you've lowered half of the glass
So she is talked to you through the screen - filtered, in a way,
So that you don't have to hear everything she is saying –
But what I'm really asking is: You want to be born again?

Enter eye roll, right?

No thank you! We might say. Because I was born right the first time!

Which is true, and a terrific bumper-sticker snarky response...

And also not really the point.

Because even though our religion teaches that there is inherent worth
Born in every person (meaning Original Loveliness instead of Original Sin!)...

What's also true is that each of us is called, many times, to start over,
Start a new life, be born again and again after a marriage, a move,
A graduation, an addiction, a loss of someone we love...

Because here in the new year we've held the stones,
And we've come resolved, you and I, to drop them,

To drop the grudges, the disappointments,
 The little and large frustrations, the pin-wheeling worry that wore
 Us out last year, the fretting,
 The comparisons with others, the self-doubt,
 The cynicism, the snarky Face Book replies,
 The waiting, the suburban comfort that shields us so much,
 And costs us so much,
 the homogenized, segregated journeys through our towns,
 the waiting, the not yet's, the passiveness in response
 to whatever for you is calling for the fierce urgency of NOW....

All so we get can let go of all that, and be born again and again
 To the person we want to be, and not just the person we're settling to be;
 All so we can let go of all that, and be born again and again
 To a world we want to live in, and not just the world we're settling for...

*You want to be born again? Says the woman through the door.
 Well, actually Yes, me might say, but maybe not how you think, and not
 Through the steps your pamphlet is laying for me.
 Here is what being born again means for me, we might say,
 Here are the steps taught in my church.*

Are you ready? Ready to take notes? These coming from Forrest Church,
 Who wrote these after being diagnosed with incurable cancer in his 50's:

1) *Begin here. How deeply you would long for all the things you take for granted
 if you suddenly lost them. So much of what you want you already have. Begin
 here.*

2) *Begin Now: You have everything you need. Everything. Plus the bonus of today, one more day than you will have if you wait until tomorrow. Begin here.*

3) *Begin as you are: At your fingertips is a treasure of memories and dreams. Put one good memory together with one good dream and you are ready to begin. Begin as you are.*

4) *Begin by doing what you can: No more, but also no less. Don't throw yourself against the wall. Walk around it. You can't do everything, but you can do something. The important thing is to begin walking. Begin by doing what you can.*

5) *Begin with those closest to you: They can cheer you on only if you let them. Invite them to give you a hand, remembering that no one can take your hand if you bury it in your pocket. Begin by asking.*

6) *Begin by turning the page: Today you can open a new chapter. If you are trapped in your story, revise your script. Practice a new line. Resist the temptation to wallow over some dark passage. Perfection is not our life's goal. Neither is unnecessary pain. If you are stuck, open a new chapter. Turn the page.*

7) *Begin by cleaning up your slate: Don't erase the past. But don't obsess over it, either. Ticking off a growing list of grievances gets you nothing life's store. And as for the things on your 'to do' list that you'll probably never do, place them under a statute of limitations! When they no longer serve to inspire but only haunt you, x them off. Begin by cleaning up your slate.*

8) *Begin by looking for new questions, not old answers: Answers close doors. Questions open them. Answers lock us in place. Questions lead us in new directions. Socrates boasted himself the most ignorant man in Athens. Each new insight raised a dozen questions, extending the compass of his ignorance. The more questions we have, the farther we can see.*

9) *Begin with little regard for where your path may lead: Destinations are overrated. And never what we imagine. Until life ends, no destination is final. So don't be driven by desire, that empty place within you, never to rest until you reach your goal. Invest your joy in the journey.*

10) *Begin in the middle. The woman at our door was right. Our lives will end mid-story, so why not begin there? Don't wait around for the perfect starting pistol, or until you're ready. You may never be ready. Jump the gun. Enter the race in the middle. Here. Now. As you are. By doing what you can. With those closest to you. By turning the page. Cleaning up your slate. Looking for new questions, not old answers. And with little regard to where the path may lead.*

And as you share all that, and if the woman is still at your door,
Ask her: *Can I tell you more about UUism and my church? I'm from UUAC
At First Parish in Sherborn....*

Amen.