

THE STEWARDSHIP PAPERS

Freedom

After visiting, and rejecting, my initial idea of parking as close as I could to my place of work, I now park 15 minutes (walk time) away in order that I might get a little exercise and fresh air twice a day. It's amazing how much calmer I feel after just a little time outside. Before I started doing this, my week days seemed to consist of leaving one enclosure (home), sitting in another enclosure (my car) while driving to work, entering another enclosure (an office building), remaining inside all day, entering the car, again, to drive home, and then spending the evening indoors. And I wonder why I often feel trapped.

Prisons come in many different forms. Some of us are even trapped in our own ways of thinking. New ideas, then, can either be like a breath of fresh air...or...like a wind that messes up a neatly combed head of hair.

On this morning's walk, for example, I noticed the leaves on a tree being moved by the wind, and I realized for the first time that each tree was telling me something about itself. I recognized the oaks, the maples, the evergreens, and the crab trees. I stopped to look at the flowers. Each of these also had its own name, it's own identity; and the ability to see this uniqueness surprised me.

When I was a child, all trees looked the same to me (except, of course, for Christmas trees). I had locked each of them away, in my mind, as a picture that I

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might have drawn at that age...a brown trunk with a ball of green at the top. For what ever reason, that safely structured picture had remained unchanged throughout lo these many years.

Perhaps this seems a bit inconsequential; it certainly isn't among the "great thoughts" of the world. But even if it is "one of the very least," it is still a part of who I am. By stepping out of my prison-like enclosures, by simply taking a walk, I was able to visit an idea that had been help captive all these years. Not a wrong idea, mind you. Simply an incomplete one, held safely within the confines of my mind.

And then the Wind came, again...and, like the leaves, my thoughts were moved. First one...and then another...

"When did I see you, Lord?"

"When you visited me."

"But, when did I visit you, Lord?"

"When you visited the least of these in prison."

And, yet another captive was set free.

(September 8, 1997)