

Highland

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months. What and where is true freedom?

Wisdom isn't always about words. Wise nonverbal lessons are available for anyone with eyes to see and ears to hear. One afternoon I drove a van load of "street folk" (unhoused neighbors) into San Francisco. Parking along the waterfront, the group scattered in various directions to enjoy the beauty of a summer weekday. Robert, a Native American man, headed straight for the middle of a wide open field of grass and laid down to sleep. Like many of our "outside congregation," Robert was weary from another night seeking rest in an alleyway, doorway or under the freeway. Gazing across the field I saw a large, black stretch Hummer driving down the avenue. Startled by the contrast of wealth and poverty, I clicked a photo, and stood reflecting.

In more recent days, listening to a frustrated store owner complaining about the "bums" stealing from his store, I tried to focus on the humanity of people "having a difficult time." He wouldn't hear it. Having some sympathy for his frustration, I thought of my former congregation of the streets, while feeling that never-ending tension between human compassion and "keeping the peace." We could use more

wisdom.

- "The opposite of EVIL is LIVE." Malcolm spoke these words to me crouched under a freeway overpass. A quiet, gentle poet, Malcolm became one of our "resident" philosophers.

- "Here, this drawing is for you." The young man handed the ink drawing on a napkin to the seminary student walking with me. Afterward, the student asked me what kind of work the man could do to contribute to society. I pointed to the napkin image of stars and planets.

- "Walk in the Light." Frank was another one of our gifted musicians. A prolific songwriter, he joined the circle in the free dining room one evening and sang his new composition: "Walk in the Light." Those who spent so much time in dark places, trying to stay invisible, sang along.

- "I wish I had a job so I could take a vacation." Wisdom can be humorous too. Fresh out of jail – released to the streets – Ben said this after I told him I'd been on vacation.

- "I can only get so lost, before I find my way back here." Mike sat down heavily in a chair, disheveled and discouraged. We hadn't seen him for a while. He felt lost, then found his way back to a place of belonging.

Wisdom appears in the most unexpected ways.

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