

Autumn Epiphanies

While summer was probably my favorite season as a kid (it's been so long since I was a kid it's hard to remember!), ever since becoming an adult and leaving 5-days-a-week-9 months-of-the-year school behind, autumn has replaced summer as my favorite season. I love the cooler reprieve from summer's oppressive heat and humidity. Even though it's clearly a season of slowing down and dying (for certain things, anyway!), it's also when many institutional programs kick back into high gear so there's a paradoxical sense of birth and new life as well. I enjoy holding those polar opposites in tension with each other, believing that they might not actually be as diametrically opposed as we might think. And then there are the colors. Oh, the glorious, delicious colors!

Yesterday, the stars aligned with blue skies, a comfortably crisp temperature, a day on the calendar very near the peak of fall foliage, and an afternoon free of obligations so I took a long walk, breathing in the refreshing fall air and letting the sun gently kiss my face. I was intentional about appreciating the spectacular visuals Mother Nature had displayed before me, stopping several times to not only admire a particular tree's beauty but to capture its visage on my phone. I've done this many times over the years, but on this particular occasion, I was struck with a new epiphany:

The trees don't all change to their brilliant colors at the same time, nor does any one tree change colors overnight.

This is not earthshattering news. On some level I already knew this, of course. But the metaphorical implications of these truths got me thinking as I ambled along. And I found myself newly appreciative of several things.

- 1) Because of the staggered nature of the fall transformation for each species of tree, spectators are blessed by a stretched-out season of colorful beauty. (It's kind of like how I celebrate my birthday over many weeks, sometimes months, once for an entire year.) Thank you, Mother Nature!
- 2) Because each tree's change of color is gradual, we get to enjoy, over time, a plethora of images from every single tree: mostly green with just a splash of color ... nice mix of green and color ... mostly color with only a hint of the green it had previously been ... vibrant color ... brown starting to blend into the color ... all brown ... no more leaves, just bare branches. Getting to witness the different stages, each one unique, important, and beautiful, might be an instructive mirror for the stages of life through which we humans journey. And the diversity is stunning.
- 3) Speaking of diversity, my favorite trees are the ones that don't just turn one color but, like the sweetgum trees, reveal a variety of colors at the same time—red, orange, yellow—all co-existing brilliantly together on one tree. What a lesson for humans, if we'd only take the time to notice and appreciate this reality in other creations ...

- 4) Some of the trees, like ginkgos, not only haven't started to show their fall colors yet but remain vibrantly green, like it's still the middle of summer. They'll change eventually, but the circumstances aren't right just yet. They're still beautiful, and will continue to be beautiful in a different way next month, but they need more time to get there. Hm ... just like people who, usually for good reasons, are more hesitant to change, hanging on to what they know and what they've been longer than others before progressing to the next stage of development. They can't be hurried. Their timing is their timing. Period. And that's OK.

So, in one day's walk, I observed trees in virtually every stage of transformation, all co-existing beautifully one with another. And they will continue to do so through their individual evolutions, each cycling at its own pace from the verdant life of summer to an eventual, natural wintery death, only to rise once again next spring.

So goes the way of life, for all of God's creatures. May we take notice. And act accordingly.

