

Life Outside the Box

“We live in a box. We get up in the morning in the box we live in. We walk a few feet to our car which is a box on wheel, to go to the box where we work. In the evening we repeat the process.” This simple description is a rough paraphrase from a discussion in the movie **2012**. If you have not seen it, **2012** is a science-fiction tale about the end of the world and how man contrives to survive it. The movie addresses the important issues of global warming and how we have almost ruined this wonderful planet that God gave us to live on. It also makes some none-too-subtle commentary about our elitist society.

Anyway... the last several weeks of spring weather got me thinking about this statement a lot. I would come out of my apartment and feel the briskness in the air and wish I had something to do outside and would consider playing hooky from work. I would feel the compulsion to be anywhere but work when I walked across campus in the morning to get a cup of coffee. I wanted to be anywhere but boxed up inside.

But I feel the duty and obligation to go back into the box and fulfill my responsibilities at work. The Protestant work ethic has been firmly established in my bones no matter how many vacation and leave days I have available to me.

We hear as Christians about not putting God in a box, but rarely do we hear about putting ourselves in a box. We box ourselves in with thoughts: “What would So-and-So think?” or “I have never done anything like that and I won’t start now.” or “That is just not me; I am too scared to do that; I have duties and responsibilities.” All of those are perfectly valid excuses to stay in our boxes.

I have to admit boxes are safe. They give definition to the world and set limits. Inside the box we know exactly what we can and cannot do. The world is ordered and predictable. Boxes can be labeled and categorized.

Then something happens to the walls of the box. A crack opens, something new enters the box. It may be a sound, a new light, a new idea. Maybe it is a couple of simple words like, “Come on. Walk with me.”

The disciples heard this call and left their old lives with all the duties, responsibilities, and yeah, even safeties that went along with the old lives. Jesus’ call to the disciples was definitely outside the box. Fishermen were not “of the learned and respectable class.” But that didn’t matter much to Jesus. His message to the sinners and outcasts was out the box as well. Way out of the box. The greatest gifts which Jesus preached were from outside the box—grace and mercy.

When we walk outside and think about how nice it would be to play hooky from work and our responsibilities, chances are we will walk back inside. But inside our boxes we can push back

our walls by practicing grace and mercy because that is really escaping the confines of how the world expects people to act.

Robert Arndt