



One of the joys of working in a psychiatric hospital is coming to expect the unexpected.

A few months ago I was leading a spiritual reflection group with patients, exploring the theme of blessing. I was sharing a story about a man called Jacob who wrestled with God throughout the night and at daybreak, was blessed. As the story goes, after being blessed he limped away, because his hip had been dislocated.

One young woman in the group, with a directness and clarity that is often only found in places cut-off from the everyday business of society, asked "If he's blessed, then why is he hurt?"

The man sitting next to was the psych hospital's patient representative. He has been admitted to psychiatric hospitals eighteen times, and lives with the on-going struggle to remain well. He knows what it is to walk with a limp. And he answered her this way, "Faith is a hero's quest. Heroes face many battles. In battles we are often injured."

Amidst all the anxious suffering in this world, heroes have clarity of purpose and identity; they know who they are; they know their purpose in this life. They are committed to something greater than themselves; something worth living and dying for. You can meet them in prisons and psych wards and queuing up for meals in soup kitchens.

Our culture is hungry for heroes. The cinemas are filled with such stories. Let's take Frodo Baggins in Lord of the Rings: a very ordinary hobbit who reluctantly accepts the task of returning the ring to the fires of Mordor. The quest will involve both external threats and personal temptations; forces of good and evil; loss, doubt, disillusionment. The endeavor will not be measured by 'units of support' but by a commitment of the whole person (or 'whole hobbit' as the case may be). For all the defeats and victories, and wounds and suffering, the quest remains 'good' only while meaning and purpose remain intact; only while the quest remains a hero's quest.

Many people supported by EACH face epic battles unarmed, with no framework for meaning and purpose. It seems to me that an important part of our role at EACH, as we seek to offer a 'whole of person' response, is to help each other discover and daily recommit to the meaning and purpose of our lives. It is there that we discover the foundation of our hope.

When we do this battles become not merely a struggle to survive, but a hero's quest.

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