



I recently discovered the world of the 'fitbit'; something that will not only measure time but also the steps I take, the distance I travel, the floors I've climbed, the calories I've burnt, the hours I've slept and the number of times my heart beats (but I doubt it can measure the amount of anxiety having all this information will cause me!).

We live in a culture of measurement. Whether it's calories, or waistlines or steps or heartbeats for almost all things there is a unit of measurement; all things must be measured and accounted for. As we know, the community health sector is not exempt. But trying to provide a 'whole of person' response in a culture of measurement creates some tension. The power of being truly present to another human being does not translate well into 'units of support'.

Last week I met with a colleague who is frustrated by the demands to measure the work he does with his clients. He spoke of how these requirements are making it increasingly difficult to be fully present to the power of the person's humanity - to know if they have a music collection and what kind it is; a passion for films, or an interest in gardening. To see their enthusiasm for welcoming the stranger, their love for going to the beach, that they can't stand vegemite, that they used to work on oil rigs and love going to the op-shop - all these immeasurable things that make up our humanity; that make us *us*, unique and sacred. Indeed, in this approach to healing and restoration there are no big picture solutions, no silver bullet, just a persevering love for the person who is before us.

As I listened I was struck by how important it is for us to hear the call to see the humanity of the person before us. And that this is an especially important voice to hear in a culture of measurement. As we sat and lamented and reflected, we wondered if maybe this was his role; to advocate for the immeasurable, to name the heart, not as something that beats but as the symbolic center of who we are. But this would mean challenging the culture a little, offering an alternative voice, being a bit inconvenient. And although most of us shrink from doing this the presence of the alternative voice is essential to a healthy culture.

The prophets of the scriptures played a crucial role in the health of nations. In some cases they were revered and in other instances executed. But they spoke the truth that captivated their hearts and minds and in this way reminded their community of what really mattered. Often this involved speaking a jarring word, something awkward, challenging, critical.

There is a wonderful story that illustrates this. A nun goes to the Mother Superior of her convent to complain about one of the other sisters. She says to the Mother Superior, "this other sister, I just can't bear her. Everything she does annoys me. She's thoughtless, selfish, arrogant and determined to have her own way. When I try to forgive her I just feel more angry"

The Mother Superior replies, "My dear sister, you know how an oyster requires sand to create a pearl?"

"Yes"

"Well, she's the sand".

We all have something to offer. Thank God for sand.