

Keeping the Case Open

There are times when we get so in the habit of doing something that we forget the very reason for doing it in the first place! I'm sure that we all have examples of this – in our work, in our relationships; in probably more than one aspect of our lives. If I ask myself every morning – what is the purpose of my life and how can I serve that purpose today? – by lunchtime I have probably forgotten! (For this reason the practice of 'saying grace' or giving thanks before every meal can be helpful as a way of reminding ourselves of who we are, and what is our core business)

Erich Fromm, psychologist and philosopher, claimed that 'Man is the only animal for whom his own existence is a problem which he has to solve. Love is the only sane and satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence'. Even though most of us would probably agree with Fromm's insight, most of us struggle, at least sometimes, to understand what it might mean on a day-to-day basis? How does 'love' reveal itself in the complex issues that arise in the delivery of community health services? It is unlikely that we will ever find a simple, one-word answer! (At least not one that is satisfying) Much of the time, though we seek one word-answers: we want the case closed, and to remain closed; we want the most important aspects of life to be boxed, labeled and put away on the shelf. And what's wrong with that? Well perhaps nothing . . . except that the longer we leave those boxes on the shelf the more terrifying it becomes to open them, because dusty, dark places are scary. Not because they are dangerous in themselves but because they are unknown.

To allow them to remain unknown is a great tragedy, because if we are to honor the desire we all have for wisdom and peace; the desire to accept our own mortality; if we are to live and die with genuine freedom we must take down the boxes, blow off the dust and empty the contents to see what's actually there. And when we empty the contents we almost always do this in dialogue with others - in community. Whether it's the dialogue that happens with a counselor or a partner, in a church or with a close friend, with a mentor or elder or someone else, or all of these, the seeking of wisdom is a communal activity that involves dialogue with one another. And we engage in this dialogue because we know that not one of us can possess the truth in its entirety; each one of us needs the other so that the truth, like an invisible third party to the conversation, can be present.

The reason that I write these reflections is to foster such a conversation. The Values of EACH give us as a framework for developing this dialogue; it commits us to "embrace the differences of people and perspectives" and "make mutual respect the basis of all our interactions". And if it is dialogue that we are practicing we will continue to welcome the perspectives of other witnesses, for it is these other perspectives – and especially those most divergent – that will lead us into an ever fuller experience of wisdom.

To all those who have participated in this dialogue – thank you. To all those who have thought about it, be bold. To any who would like to share this space and make a regular contribution, please let me know. Perhaps together we can ensure that the lid to the box that contains the mystery of life, remains open and the case is never closed . . .

Grace and Peace,

James

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