

“Lost without a Map”

‘They’re lost, and without a map’ said the Islamic Chaplain at the prison yesterday. ‘My job is to help them make meaning; to help them discover something greater than themselves’.

We had been talking about a prisoner who is lost, who knows he’s lost but is seeking a map. He attends all the religious services: Catholic, Islamic, Christian, Buddhist, and if he gets a chance, the Jewish services too. That’s what you call ‘covering all bases’. I saw him in the yard yesterday and he stopped me for a chat. “I’m looking for something that’s going to makes sense of being inside for the next six months, some kind of wisdom, strength. Something that will give me courage. Some kind of peace”. No one could accuse this man of not looking!

Earlier in the week I was speaking with one of EACH’s dieticians: “I feel like I’m just treating the symptoms”. For the particular man she was speaking of, feelings of worthlessness, guilt, and loneliness were inseparable from his physical symptoms. She could see that nothing less than a ‘whole of person response’ would work. “He wants change, but just can’t work out how to get there. He’s so lost”.

A friend of mine has written and directed a short film. It tells the story of ordinary people facing ordinary struggles but seeking something more; trying to find their way in and through and out of the thickets of life; finding something greater than themselves. It begins with this reflection: We were once. But when we turned toward ourselves, we were lost.

The thickets of life, the places where we walk in circles, take many forms: the death of a loved one, the anticipation of our own dying, unemployment, addiction, relationship break-downs, workplace bullying, hospitalization, imprisonment, mental illness, physical injury. In these places we will empty our bags and turn our pockets inside out and face what is actually there. In thickets, and sometimes on the edge of them, we will have to stand in our truth, to test it, to discover what is possible.

When life has led you into a thicket, where trails have disappeared and night-time is closing in, what is the map that you will reach for? In what map will you place your trust?

- James

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