

The Speed of Healing



Photograph by Heather Abraham

A friend and I saw the mural pictured above, in the middle of a busy street in SF, while we sat in the car talking. The speed of the cars whooshing by provided quite a contrast to our bodies sitting as we talked about decluttering our living spaces in the midst of our current painful world.

We took the picture, drove onward, but later this insight from my therapist came to mind: thoughts move at the speed of light, our feelings move at the speed of sound and our bodies at the speed of donkeys.

Since hearing that insight I have been more intentional to be more connected to my body. I am allowing my body to catch up to its own speed when I give myself permission to cry unexpectedly. Healing is not a race but in my experience is a movement, internal and external towards wholeness. Such movement can go in a variety of directions: deep, backward, sideways, still, high on top, as many times as necessary.

When I allow myself to cry when I need to, I notice that tears defrost from my facial muscles, perhaps exhausted from having carried them for a good while. I allow myself the permission to cry unexpectedly. Sometimes the tears just have to be released no matter where I'm at.

Other days I bike or run and refuel every cell of my body with the bliss I find through physical activity. Other times I find that laying in a fetal position wrapped in blankets and resting allows my body to re-member that I live in God's womb. Wombs are vulnerable to pain but my body rests knowing in its primal cells that at the end of the night, I belong to God.

We are not just stories, ideas and feelings. We are bodies too. The speed of our healing may sometimes be in allowing our body to catch up to our feelings and ideas. Syncing our thoughts and feelings to our bodies may teach us that healing happens when we attend to the most vulnerable part of us.

In my curiosity about the speed of healing for both myself as a client, as a therapist, and a caregiver I turned to Jesus Christ with this question, the God who had a physical human body for 33yrs.

Jesus cried, laughed, ate, moved around, suffered, died and resurrected and did other basic bodily activities. He models for me how to be human and in doing so how to return to wholeness. He spent 40 days in the desert and experienced temptation through his body. His 40 days in the desert point the way for our physical, mental and spiritual bodies to align themselves so that our donkeys (bodies) aren't so far behind.

Ascetical practices such as abstaining from meat, sweets or other cravings helps us to pay attention: what does my body really want at this moment? Do I really crave that dessert or am I craving a way to feel good for a few minutes? Do I really want to watch that show right now or do I need to numb myself? What am I really hungry for? What is this impulse made out of? What wound needs tending?

Some of us have been living in a survival mode for so long that we have not had the privilege to ask, much less answer these questions. We binge on a TV show or numb out with food because the pain we may unknowingly carry asks for soothing or the loneliness is too cruel.

For some of us introspection feels too overwhelming or too painful when we feel our deepest needs can't be met; it feels like it requires too much effort, while bills need to be paid, mouths fed, covid and other dangers/injustices everywhere, we just can't afford to pause.

But, what if pausing isn't the only connection to wholeness? What if in the midst of our ongoing stories and day to day tasks, we could experience we are already connected with others who may have similar pain?

In times when I have been in excruciating physical or emotional pain I tend to isolate. I have no energy to tend to anyone else. I go into a cave. Some people in my community stand by the edge of the cave and say: let me know what you need, I'm here for you! But I have no capacity to delegate or let them know how they can help me. Then there are others who come into my cave and sit next to me and ask: what would you like for lunch? Or simply sit and offer their presence, or a silent hug.

Return to wholeness is re-connection. Constant reconnection to self, connection with God, connection to others in these times can be as simple as an: **I am here with you.**

The speed of healing in these times can be linked to the way we are attuned to each other and to the most vulnerable among us. Nourishment in these times perhaps is holding a tired head upon tired hands and waiting in silent prayer, attuning our bodies to each other's needs, and re-memembering that we are not just ideas, thoughts and feelings, we are one Body too.