



There's an old story of a child walking in a forest, surrounded by sun-dappled oak trees. He climbs through the brambles and plays in the fallen leaves, mesmerized by spiderwebs and mossy rocks until the moment he realizes he's completely lost. He tries to find his way out, but each path seems to lead him deeper into the forest. As the sun begins to set, he grows increasingly afraid, wondering if he'll ever make it home. But just then, he sees another child approaching in the distance.

He excitedly cries out to her, "I'm so relieved to see you. I'm lost. Can you point me to the way out of here?" "I wish I could," she says. "I'm lost too. But take my hand—we'll find our way through this forest together."

(Attributed to the early nineteenth-century Rabbi Hayyim Halberstam of Zans)

We all know feeling lost. Or, untethered, or in the midst of life disagreeable, or circumstances unfriendly, or grief all-encompassing.

And it is real. And easy to focus only there, on the lost part. Forgetting that we are on this journey together.

It is why I embrace Ram Dass' reminder, "We're all just walking each other home." And so grateful for those in my life who have said, "Take my hand, we'll find our way together."

I came upon a doctor who appeared in quite poor health. I said, "There's nothing that I can do for you that you can't do for

yourself." He said, "Oh yes you can. Just hold my hand. I think that that would help." So, I sat with him a while then I asked him how he felt. He said, "I think I'm cured."

(Thank you Dotti Ferenchak)

So. Let us begin here: we need a paradigm shift from solutions (or requiring a fix), to the healing power of presence.

Of course, we wonder if we have what it takes. As if hand holding and presence is a gift given to the special anointed few. But what if...

It reminds me of Irvin Yalom's story about a friend's final days in her horrible fight with cancer, and the news that her surgeon informed her, "he had nothing more to offer."

"What is wrong with doctors?" she said.

"Why don't they understand the importance of sheer presence? Why can't they realize that the very moment they have nothing else to offer is the moment they are most needed?"

Presence does not distinguish.

Or judge.

Presence just is.

Or mostly... presence makes space for healing and restoration and grounding. And I do know this: presence is surely not easy in a world where we have to be "on." Or in a world that worships at the altar of the superlative.

Sometimes we need stories more than food... and one of my favorite go-to stories. A little boy was having nightmares. The kind that require a momma's reassurance. (Dads, from my own experience, are typically not wired for nightmare duty.) So, to his momma's room the boy went, "Momma, momma, I'm having nightmares."

"It's okay honey," she told him, "here's

what I want you to do. Go back to your room, kneel down by your bed, pray to Jesus and he'll fix it."

Back to his room, the boy knelt by his bed, prayed to Jesus, hopped back in bed, and... more nightmares. All mommas know this story. Back and forth to momma's room, throughout the night. On the sixth visit, "Momma, I know, I know, I'm going to go back to my room. I'm going to kneel down by my bed and pray to Jesus and he'll fix it. But before I do that, can I just lay in bed with you and have you hold me?"

"Sure honey, why?"

"Because sometimes I need Jesus with skin on it."

To that I say, Amen.

Spiritual rewiring—presence—enables us to see one another, with skin on it. As we train our hearts to see that we are all bound up in on another.

Rabbi Sharon Brous' reminder, "That very human longing for connection—in our most intimate relationships, in community, with strangers, perhaps with God—is what I call the amen effect. It is a spiritual strategy, a sacred call to the faithful and the cynical, the believe and the atheist, perhaps especially to those alienated by religious certainties, but still yearning to find meaning in moments both sacred and mundane."

If you are like me, there is a good deal of comfort in identifying life as a series of problems to be solved (or messes to be tidied up).

If there's a pill, I'll take it.

If there's a clever book, I'll buy it. (You can't beat, *How to fix everything, for dummies.*)

If there's a can't-miss-prayer, I'll pray it.

After all, Jesus will fix it.

Don't get me wrong. I have nothing

against problem solving. More often than not, I'm for it. But here's the thing... life—wellbeing, wholeness—is not just about the fixing. Or finding the right answer. Because here's the deal: The little boy knew the secret. Life is to be found in the embrace. In the presence of the other. In the touch, we can be present. As our southern kin might say, "That'll preach." Yes... that'll preach regardless of your faith or creed. That'll preach even if you are not a member of any particular faith group. That'll preach even if you don't believe.

Because in the touch, we can be present.

In the touch, we create heart space.

In the touch, we're in the mending business.

I write because some weeks I need a hug.

Not answers. A hug. And I know I am

reluctant to ask. And I see so many

people in our world who are famished in their spirit, undone by life's calamities.

They need to be seen and held.

Our new word for the week—because of the total solar eclipse, the Sun, Moon and Earth are in *syzygy* (or near-perfect alignment), with the Moon moving between the Sun and the Earth. And I love this: Members of the Navajo Nation traditionally treat the solar eclipse as a sacred time to stay inside and quietly meditate.

See you in church! KD+