

The Healing Gesture

Nancy Blanning

In this time of Covid, everyone is wounded, everyone is anxious, everyone is suffering some level of trauma. This struck me like a lightning-bolt after attending a discussion about supporting anxious children. At this time of our world-wide distress, we are all anxious children. What helps us feel secure and oriented is rhythm, routine, and predictability with which we can anchor ourselves in space and time. Even for those who have secure housing, food, and access to basic life necessities, we all have moments of disorientation and uncertainty. If this is true for our privileged selves, how can we even imagine the distress and pain of communities of color and all other marginalized groups who are ignored, subjugated, denigrated and denied access—even in “good times”—to the basic necessities and human rights of life? How can we enter into their lives in authentic ways?

We are also accumulating tiny shocks, little traumas, with all the disruptions and erasure of “normal.” What we could count on as our daily markers and reassurances are unavailable. And there is no ground yet upon which to create a “new normal” that will not change as soon as we have figured out a plan. We can see how this affects our children through their expressions of insecurity and meltdowns because so much is in flux. We adults are also experiencing the same inner disorientation. It is important to acknowledge this for ourselves. What the whole world is going through is painful and makes us sad. Human beings are meant to feel in our three-fold nature. It is healthy to not deny this part of our humanness. It is good to acknowledge this state, and pause and reflect. But this should be only a respite, not a dwelling place.

Yet in the midst of this enormity, there is a healing gesture, something we can do for and with one another.

The story of the Grail has been an enduring interest for as long as I can remember. I had read only of the Round Table knights’ search for it through the Arthurian stories and then encountered the Parzival story through Waldorf education. Some rediscovered, old cassette tapes of a Joseph Campbell lecture on the Grail legend recently brought the story to life anew. Parzival is destined to become the new Grail king, but he must prove himself worthy of this exalted role. He is not ill-willed but “clueless” and responds to things superficially and literally without any sense of feeling for the condition of the other human being. Through years of wandering, searching, trials, and travails he finally awakens to the other and takes compassionate interest in the wounded Amfortas. He asks at last, “What ails thee, brother?” This was the question upon which the future of the Grail and of all humanity waited. It was the question that opened the possibility for healing.

A puzzling Rudolf Steiner aphorism that I encountered years ago is, “Interest is more powerful than love.” This seems a startling statement. What can be more powerful than love? Sincere interest is a gateway to love is true caring, not just sentiment. To extend true interest toward the other human being is a focused and intentional spiritual deed of will. In our current world

situation, we are warned to not reach out with physical touch toward others, yet we can reach out with our warm interest. Our spatial distancing requirements afford the opportunity to reach out with our interest to know the other. “What is your life? What is your pain? I want to feel with you so that I can understand, so we can be companions.” This opens the door to compassion, an essential step toward love.

In his personal rendering of the Lord’s Prayer, Rudolf Steiner offered, “May our mercy toward others make up for the sins done to our being.” May our compassionate interest in others be a healing gesture toward them and the doing of it be a healing for ourselves. This is a therapeutic, healing gesture for our time. May it become a soul habit toward establishing our “new normal” in times to come.