

Reflections with Sharon

Touch the one next to you

Read Galatians 6:1-10

If you're like me, there are times when you feel totally helpless and bewildered at the staggering needs of the world around you: Millions are suffering from HIV/AIDS; poverty; hunger; crime; homelessness; human trafficking; unemployment; sickness; wars; injustice. You want to do; you want to give; you want to impact; you want to heal; you want to touch; you want to reach out; you want to make a difference; you want to save the world! You wish you could erase all hurt and pain and sickness and suffering, but where do you start?

I heard a story years ago that made an indelible impression on me. While strolling along a starfish-strewn beach one day, a man noticed a young boy doing something he considered to be quite odd. The boy kept picking up starfish one by one and tossing them into the sea. Overcome by curiosity, the man asked the boy why he was doing this. The boy explained that the starfish would dry up and die shortly if he didn't save them by throwing them into the water. Thoroughly puzzled, the man remarked that the boy couldn't possibly make a difference to the thousands of stranded starfish. Unperturbed, the boy picked up another starfish, threw it into the sea and said, "It made a difference to that one."

That boy knew something we must all take to heart: When it comes to tackling the problems of our world, the place to start is with the person right next to you. We can become so obsessed with the desire to do extravagant things for everyone that we end up frustrating ourselves. We wear ourselves out to such a degree that we become indifferent to the needs of others and find that we have gone from one extreme to another. Like one who is immune to another's pain, we could hear the saddest story and yet remain unaffected, even though we're able to help tangibly.

But while an attitude of nonchalance is not the answer, neither must we frantically set out to help everyone in need. Often when we try to be everything to everyone, we find ourselves unable to help anyone in particular. We make people's problems so overwhelm us that little by little we begin to see our well-intentioned efforts as a useless, insignificant contribution; and discouragement sets in.

When we realize there is value in helping one, we will take advantage of every opportunity to use our voice, money, influence, energy, creativity and whatever we have, to alleviate the suffering of the person right next to us.

I read these words on a coffee mug, "To the world you may be one person, but to one person you may be the world." How true! And the first step to becoming someone's world is to touch the life of the one right next to you.