

I saw an interesting thing this week.

I was at Family Dollar, waiting in line to pay. I started talking with the man waiting behind me, and he explained to me that he was buying food for a hitchhiker that he had picked up on Highway 30. He was buying bread and peanut butter and stuff. He said he wasn't sure if the man would prefer regular Pepsi or diet Pepsi, so he took a chance and bought the regular Pepsi. As I was loading my stuff into the back of my car, I saw him walk to his car and hand the groceries over to the man, including the plastic bottle of Pepsi. The hitchhiker exploded in a tirade of swearing, clearly indicating the kind of man he had chosen poorly, and proceeded to throw the bottle onto the sidewalk, which caused it to explode all over the man who had bought it.

The hitchhiker then got out of the car, threw the bag of food onto the ground, stomped on it and left. The man looked at me, stunned. All I could think to do was help him clean up the mess, and I told him, "You did the right thing."

This illustration is not intended to solve the age-old dilemma of "do we give to the poor or not," but rather it is used as an example of the disconnect between those who love and those who cannot be loved. And this is the major human malfunction in human existence. There are those who want to love, and then there are those who, for any number of reasons, simply cannot be loved. And never the twain shall meet.

It is not enough to love someone who will not be loved. It's like throwing a perfect pitch to the world's worst catcher. It's like painting a masterpiece for someone who is blind. It's like baking a perfect pie for someone who cannot taste a thing. It's like composing a perfect symphony if you are deaf...

but wait a minute...

does this mean we do not paint or compose or bake or try?

After all, Beethoven was deaf and never heard a perfect performance of his own Ninth Symphony. Vincent Van Gogh was color blind. Sigmund Freud was depressed. Albert Einstein was a terrible father. Who, then, do we do good things for? Do we do good things only for the sake of others? No, because if we only do good things for the sake of others, it crushes us when they boo at our symphony, if they despise the perfect painting, if they spit out the perfect pastry, if they reject the scientific theory. Doing good things only for the sake of others is crushing when they throw a Pepsi bottle at us and smash the food we just bought them, even though they are hungry and thirsty.

So why do we do good things, and why does Jesus ask us to?

Why do we even care at all, when there is such a striking disconnect between those who love and those who cannot be loved?

It is because in loving others that we learn about God's love for us.

An example.

The boys went to a birthday party last Sunday at Lake Malone. They got fried in

the sun, and the skin is peeling off their backs and shoulders in sheets. As I have been rubbing aloe vera on them, they wince and shrink away from me. And as I hug them, they pull away from me because it hurts them. It's hard to hug someone when they won't be hugged, even if the reason is legitimate.

The hugger still wants to hug.

The healer still wants to heal.

The redeemer still wants to redeem.

The savior still wants to die.

Jesus loves us even though we will not be loved, even if our reasons are legitimate—fear of intimacy, fear of abandonment, whatever. It's not like Jesus is somehow surprised by the state of the human heart in all it's brokenness and absurdity.

Jesus loves us, knowing we will not love him back.

And so he asks us to love each other, knowing that others will not return the favor, but that's not the point. Loving other people, especially those who will not love back, draws us closer to the selfless love that God has for us in giving his son Jesus to die for us.

We are, then, the burnt ones who wince at the healing touch, who shrink away from the loving embrace. We want to be better, but we just don't know how. And so we rarely respond as we should, with proper gratitude and so on. There is a disconnect between the lover and the ones who cannot be loved.

This is what Saint Paul is talking about, this groaning that the entire creation has to be loved. We hope for this elusive thing we cannot see, and it is called love. But all because we can't see it doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

Helen Keller, born both blind and deaf way back in 1880, said, The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched - they must be felt with the heart. And she should know what it means to grasp with the heart a hope that the eyes can't see and the ears can't hear. Jesus tells us, "Whoever has ears, listen! And whoever has eyes, look!" But he knows we won't hear and we won't see, because we can't.

But he loves us all the same, and asks us to love each other, knowing it's not going to work out like we might predict. And he does this not to illustrate what jerks people are or how failed our government is or how ungrateful beggars are, but to allow our imperfect love to draw us closer to the perfect love that Jesus has for each and every one of us.