

## **Tuesday Reflection 09 February 2021**

Let us return to last week's story of the boy and the starfish. Here it is again:

*One day an old man was taking his daily walk along the beach, which was covered in starfish stranded by the spring tide. As he walked, he saw a young boy bending down, picking something up and carrying it to the water's edge, and then going back and picking something else up, which he also carried down to the water's edge. As the man drew closer, he saw that the boy was picking up starfish and putting them back in the sea, one by one.*

*Puzzled, the man approached the boy and asked what he was doing. Without looking up, the boy replied "I'm saving these starfish."*

*The old man chuckled out loud, "Son, there are thousands of starfish, and only one of you. What difference can you make?"*

*The boy picked up another starfish, carried it down to the water and gently tossed it into the sea. He turned to the man and said "I made a difference to that one."*

This story is by way of being a modern parable, so let us reflect on it and see what some of the lessons are that can be drawn from it.

The first thing that strikes me is the contrast between 'heart' (the boy) and 'head' (the old man). The man applies rationality to the situation, the boy sees fellow creatures in distress and tries to help.

The second thing is the contrast between convention and creativity. The man is stuck in his everyday routine; he walks with blinkers, and although he sees the beach and the starfish, they make no impression on him.

The boy, on the other hand, approaches the situation with fresh eyes and responds spontaneously. This is perhaps what Jesus meant, when he admonished his followers to 'be like little children'. Incidentally, if on each of his daily walks the old man had thrown one starfish back into the sea, in a year he would have made a difference to the lives of 365 starfish.

The third point is that the story presents intergenerational conflict (the 'old man' versus the 'young boy').

How much better it would have been if the old man had allowed himself to be taught by the boy and joined him in the starfish rescue action, turning a potential intergenerational conflict into a model of intergenerational collaboration

**Michael Townson**