

Allow love to grow

1 John 4:11- 12 (The Message)

“My dear, dear friends, if God loved us like this, we certainly ought to love each other. No one has seen God, ever. But if we love one another, God dwells deeply within us, and his love becomes complete in us - perfect love!”

God sent his Son to live and die for us. Everyone is included in his all-encompassing love. As we grasp this we cannot help but respond in love to him. Yet the truth is we often struggle to love each other, and one of the reasons we have difficulty is that we don't understand each other. It's certainly possible for us to show love to other people without comprehending anything very much about them, but for relationships to grow, it certainly helps to understand. When we don't, we tend to make assumptions and misjudgements, which become obstacles to loving one another.

Let me tell you about two minutes of my life that remind me to stop for a moment when I'm faced with something I don't understand: We were driving through Ireland from the Rosslare ferry to a business appointment in Dublin. Rounding a bend I saw a long stretch of straight road ahead of us that sloped gently down to a valley and rose up to another hill. Near the stream at the bottom, I looked up at the brow of the hill. Suddenly a man stepped out from the left and stood in the middle of the road, his arms stretched out high as if to stop the traffic.

As I wondered what calamity had occurred, a car coming from the opposite direction swooped past the man and sped down the hill towards us. The driver had ignored him. I know this can be a callous society, but this was appalling. I thought people in the country usually had more time for each other, and the man clearly needed help.

Happily for me there was no chance for me to express my opinion of the driver as we passed each other at a combined speed of 100 miles an hour, because as I pronounced a silent sentence on him for his heartless behaviour, the man in the road put his hands down to his side and walked off. As he disappeared from sight, a small shaggy dog emerged from the left and stepped out into the road. To my astonishment it was followed closely by a very large fat pig. Silhouetted against the sky, the pair crossed the road and vanished from sight. This had not been an emergency at all. For all I knew, every day this scruffy hound escorted pigs, sheep, cows, ducks and other assorted farm animals across the road under the watchful eye of this traffic director in wellington boots. I had completely misunderstood the signals.

So when I'm faced with someone doing something I don't understand, I do have to ask myself a question: Am I as unaware of the facts as I was of the unspoken language of this country area? God made us all different and there is no avoiding the fact that God didn't give us automatic understanding of each other. I could be about to make a horrible misjudgement. After all, in this case I was just plain pig-ignorant!