

To hear those three little words, that's all I'd live for the rest of my days . . .  
(as sung by the Rhythm Boys)

Are you the same person you were twenty or forty years ago? Yes and no! Frankly the person I was in 1970 was not the person I was in 1955 nor was the person I was in 1995 the person I am today. Changes happen that make one conclude you won't be exactly who you presently are this time next year. I mean will we ever again be the persons we were before this pandemic took over – will Sonoma as a town be the same? Things change.

Saint Paul says as much in today's second reading. Using the biblical character Adam as his example – Adam starts out as a "living being" but ends up "a life-giving spirit" – transitions from earthly to heavenly. Time after time things happen which can transform us into ever more knowledgeable, even expansive human beings.

Sometimes it takes a shock for such a change to happen. After I had finished my long training – from age fifteen to twenty-seven – to become ordained, I was sent on to graduate school; three more years of study! Naturally I dragged my feet. I handed in at the start of my first semester a shoddy term paper on a biblical topic.

Next day I received a phone call from my professor, Ed Siegman, a very strict fellow to whom I will forever be indebted. His message was brief: "If this is the effort you intend to make in my class, then why don't you just drop out and stop wasting my time and yours!" To be brief: I changed on the spot. It's not that I changed in any radical way but I was embarrassed enough to become a serious student. See what I mean?

My guess is that today's first reading may have been selected from the Hebrew Testament to set up the David of old as merciful in sparing the life of his pursuer King Saul. Actually that would be quite a change in David considering that he had no hesitancy to kill while fighting the Philistines or his rivals. I mean, people used to sing: "Saul has killed his thousands, but David his tens of thousands." Also, was it mercy that motivated David or his hope that Saul would return the favor and allow David to return – no longer outlawed – but a favored son-in-law? Self interest?

In Luke's reading today Christ would have us love in terms of the Greek term *agape* – not so much *eros* (sheer passion) or *philia* (mere friendship) but, as one scholar defines *agape*: a gracious, determined, and active interest in the true welfare of others, which is not deterred even when it gets responses like hatred, cursing and abuse. Nor is it limited by any calculation on the lover's part of any deserts or results he or she may expect in return but radiates out of the very nature of God as lover of all creation – with no exceptions. Nor does even that do the term justice. And it seems hard to find nowadays – at least in the media – where public life is a perpetual tennis match of potentially lethal consequences between the yeas and nays.

**Geoff Wood**