

**February 20, 2022**  
**7<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**1 Sam 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23**  
**1 Cor 15:45-49**  
**Lk 6:27-38**

Can you remember the most afraid you've ever been? And can you remember how you managed to beat that fear?

I have a friend from California who many years ago went to visit someone at Columbia University on Manhattan's upper west side. He took the subway from his Mid-Town hotel on a Saturday night, but got off at the wrong stop. Instead of staying on the busy well-lit city streets, my friend decided to cut through a city park. A few minutes into the park he realized he had made a mistake, and the rising tide of fear caused him to panic and become disoriented and lost. All of a sudden, a little boy came up to him and grabbed his hand. The boy said: "Mista, what you doin' in this park after dark? People who look like you don't come outta here alive on a Saturday night. Where you goin' anyway?"

My friend said he was trying to get to Columbia University.

The little boy said: "Keep holding my hand and I'll take you there. So long as you're holding my hand, no one will bother you."

My friend did as the boy instructed and it all worked out OK.

I have another friend who was a Congressional Medal of Honor winner. He said combat was the most frightening thing he ever had to do. I asked him how he managed to be so brave in the midst of all the fear. He said bravery had nothing to do with it. He said he just knew that if he did everything and anything his commanding officer told him to do,

and if he relied on his training, he would be OK. So, I asked him why he trusted that officer so much. He said the guy was easy to trust because he so visibly loved all the men under his command.

The little boy and the army officer in these two stories demonstrate perhaps the most perfect love that we humans are capable of. In fact, Matthew calls it perfect love in his gospel. In today's gospel, Luke calls it merciful love. Whatever you call it, the love extended by the little boy and the army officer caused my two friends to place unquestioned trust in them.

The Lord constantly extends this perfect, merciful love to us hoping that we can find a way to reciprocate by placing our trust in Him and by turning outward to show His love to others. Of course, God always extends His love to us directly, but as human beings,

it's difficult for us to recognize it. So, God finds ways to show us His love through agents like the little boy and the army officer, trusting that we in turn will become agents of God's love.

Despite Jesus telling us 15 times in the four gospels not to be afraid, we still harbor fears. I suppose the greatest ultimate fear we have is the fear of death. We may say we're scared of dark parks or combat or falls or spiders or heights or hospitals or public speaking or any one of a thousand other things, but ultimately what we're most afraid of is death. God, of course, doesn't want us to fear death, but most of us still do. So to help us conquer that fear, God sends us His very special agents of love—those who can love us enough to lead us to place our trust in God; to lead us to love enough to bring others to trust God; to ultimately lead us to love as today's gospel tells us to love; to help us transform our fear of death into a longing for the Divine. Love, a word which appears 215 times in the New Testament and 6 times in today's gospel, is the key to conquering our fear. Be not afraid; just love.

Five years ago, this week our Kauai Christian community lost one of God's very special agents of love. Deacon Tom Contrades' departure from this earth has left a hole in our hearts that is difficult to fill. But his spirit is still very much with us, and that spirit would not be too pleased if he were to find us dwelling on his loss. That would be selfish of us.

Tommy loved us all so much that he became for us the ultimate example of how to approach death; how not to fear death. "Be not afraid." Remember that? What greater love can one have than to lay down his life for another? That is the love of which Jesus speaks in today's gospel. That is the love that Deacon Tom tried to teach us. That is the love he showed us. That is the love to which we are called, and which we are called to extend to the world. If you walk into the graveyard outside the old church over at St Raphael's you will be greeted with a large headstone that says in big, bold letters: BE NOT AFRAID. That's Deacon Tom's headstone.

May God grant us all the grace to fear not and to love much, to love as perfectly and as mercifully as we are loved by God and His agents. May we all be given what it takes to become agents of the Lord's love for all the world to see.

Be not afraid. Mahalo, Deacon Tom.