



**“Whether we Live or
Die, we are the Lord’s”**

A Sermon By
The Reverend Stephanie Jenkins

November 10, 2019
The Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost

Saint Andrew’s Episcopal Church
Lawton, Oklahoma

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“Whether we Live or Die, we are the Lord’s”¹

Luke 20: 27-38

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There is an interesting Easter theme of resurrection into today’s readings that I see parallels between the communities in Scripture and Saint Andrew’s. Because I’m an American product of the 21st century, the famous scene in Frank Darabont and Stephen King’s 1994 perennial classic, “Shawshank Redemption,” jumped to mind as I pondered these parallels.

It’s the scene where after coming out of solo confinement, we see Andy Dufrense, the one innocent inmate at the prison, (played by Tim Robbins) talking to Red (played by Morgan Freeman), an inmate who is wise beyond his years, about how he, Andy, can keep hope alive, which for Andy is escaping from their prison in Maine and living on the beach in Mexico ...

to which **Red** cautions him his dream or hope is unrealistic ... “Mexico is way down there, and you’re in here, and that’s the way it is.”

Andy: “Yeah. Right. That’s the way it is. It’s down there and I’m in here. I guess it comes down to a simple choice really. Get busy living or get busy dying. I guess it comes down to a simple choice really...”

This is a choice we still required of us today, one hundred years ago, one - two thousand years ago ... you get the picture. It is often an active choice to choose to live. What does it mean to “get busy living” to the communities we catch a glimpse into with this morning’s readings?

Each of our readings have an apocalyptic sense about them; they are waiting, often in the minority, trying to figure out what’s next and usually not in the best of conditions. What they are waiting for is the promised return of the Lord that will bring a new and redefining shape in their community.

¹ Episcopal Church. 1979. *The Book of Common Prayer and administration of the Sacraments and other rites and Ceremonies of the Church: Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David according to the use of the Episcopal Church.* New York: Church Hymnal Corp.

The minor prophet Haggai was speaking to the remnant of the Israelite community that had returned to Judah after exile in Babylon. They'd been living without the Temple, destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, and things hadn't been going to well ... there just didn't seem to be enough collective energy to do the job. By then it's likely that hardly anyone remembered what it looked like, but with Haggai's prophetic witness and encouragement this small group took courage and choose to live and restructure their world with a place for the Holy One to dwell.

They heard the LORD say, "take courage all of you people of the land, ... for I am with you ... remember the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear." They took courage and began to live in a new way.

Now, our New Testament reading from Paul or someone who new Paul quite well, could offer and entire teaching sermon ... there isn't time for that, but if you like to follow clues and research and put that information into the bigger teachings of Paul, then 2 Thessalonians is for you! See me after church!

What I will offer that I think in order to make sense of our selected reading today, one has to listen to what seems like a disjointed letter within the setting and themes offered by our other readings. Here is this new community of Christ followers, what we today call the early church, but believe me it was not an organized effort like we know the Church to be today.

It was difficult to know exactly who and what to believe and what to practice. They were waiting and looking for clarity with lots of questions (and likely with lots of distractions). Paul's preaching and teaching was a salient and compelling figure in all of this – "stand firm" he says, give thanks for your "sanctification by the Spirit," "hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter." Choose life ... be not persuaded by distractions or false hopes.

Luke's gospel gives us another example of Jesus' interactions with the religious authority of the time. It's important to understand that the Sadducee's and the Pharisee's didn't view look at Scripture from the same perspective.

The Sadducee's didn't find any account in the TORAH of resurrection and where as the Pharisee's valued both the written TORAH and the oral traditions that were handed down word for word that included new beliefs found in the prophetic books that came after the TORAH --- again, so much to consider about these two views of applying God's Word that are relevant today ... see me after Church.

I'll jump to the end game here, Jesus teaches from both the written and oral traditions, which is how we hear his response at the end of today's Gospel about whose wife will this woman be in heaven? To which he replies, the dead are already like angels who are children of God, pretty much reframing the entire question. He goes onto say, that for God the dead are not dead, but are living ... all of them are alive.

I mentioned parallels between the readings this morning and Saint Andrew's in my opening comments a few minutes ago. While we are not exactly what I would describe as an apocalyptic community, in the sense the communities in our Scriptures this morning, we are a community at the precipice of the next chapter of Saint Andrew's going Forward.

Our faith is renewed and ready for a future that is a bit unknown, much like our biblical forbearers – which to me is a good thing, as in my experience this can help us be open to new possibilities. And it is possible that along the way there will be distractions and a little bit of confusion, and I'm quite convinced plenty of willingness ... what I'd like to encourage each of us, in all ways possible, is to remember that we are an Easter people, a people of unbounding hope and life, new life ... full of possibility because we are alive in the Lord.

While I love the movie "Shawshank Redemption" and Andy's response to the simple choice to the statement - Get busy living or get busy dying, nothing to me offers sets us free to live a full life of hope like the opening hymn found at the beginning of our Burial Liturgy ...

*"I am Resurrection and I am life, says the Lord.
Whoever has faith in me shall have life,
Even though he die.
And everyone who has life,
And has committed himself to me in faith, shall not die for ever.*

*As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives
And that at the last he will stand up on the earth.
After my awaking, he will raise me up;
And in my body I shall see God.
I myself shall see, and my eyes behold him
Who is my fiend and not a stranger.*

*For none of us has life in himself,
And none becomes his own master when he dies.
For if we have life, we are alive in the Lord,
And if we die, we die in the Lord.
So, then, whether we live or die,
We are the Lord's possession." ²*

As much as the ancient Israelites and the committed, and at times fledging Christ followers of Paul's communities, we too are the Lord's possession ... whether we live or die ... AND because of this, may we, as the community of Saint Andrew's trust and find deep comfort in this sure and certain knowledge and with it may we be set free to live, love, and boldly share Christ's unconditional love that knows no boundaries --- may it first be received within ourselves and in turn shared with all we meet. Amen.

² *Ibid*, 491.