

**LIVE TOMORROW'S LIFE TODAY**  
**PENTECOST 4 – PROPER 8 – JUNE 28, 2020**  
BECKY ROBBINS-PENNIMAN  
CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD, DUNEDIN, FL

Which one is true: *Out of sight, out of mind* or *Absence makes the heart grow fonder*?

Which one is true: *Birds of a feather flock together* or *Variety is the spice of life*?

How about this: *Don't worry about tomorrow* or *Store up treasures in heaven*?

The older I get, the more I see that either/or statements like these describe a range of human experiences rather than statements of fact.

Or, more elegantly said by Thomas Mann,

*A great truth is a truth whose opposite is also a truth.*<sup>1</sup>

I have come to live in a world where I see things in terms of both/and rather than either/or.

With all of these possibilities in front of us, how, then, shall we live?

Will we live by default, or by design?

Living by default means

we take what we were taught growing up and never examine it for ourselves.

The best example I can think of for this is food. By the time we are just a few years old,

we have been taught by our families, our cultures, TV, or somebody

what is considered to be good food, what is bad food, and what isn't even food at all.

Insects – fried or ground into flour – are staples in many countries, and even treats when dipped in chocolate.<sup>2</sup>

If I find a worm in my salad, I'm going to feel queasy

because I was taught that worms are gross, not an excellent source of protein.

So many of our assumptions about the supposed truths of life are like that:

we're taught something, and that's our default forever.

This is a great time-saver and necessary a foundation of civilization –

every baby can't be expected to discover everything all over again.

We need to teach each new generation the wisdom gathered over the years.

But the opposite is true: if we never examine our default settings, there is no change, either positive or negative.

Right now, Americans are being challenged to examine our default settings in major ways.

The way things have "always been" are not working for many, for millions.

There is great opportunity and great danger in this challenging time.

How do we navigate it?

The first is to be aware of our fears. Be very honest about those feelings:

Fear of change. Fear of loss. Fear of not knowing what we're doing.

This whole year has been one long – opportunity – to name our fears,

fear of contracting a new disease, fear that our social fabric is unraveling.

After the awareness and the honesty with ourselves about the fears

and the discomfort and confusion those cause,

I have a word of reassurance: human beings are very adaptable.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Thomas\\_Mann](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Thomas_Mann)

<sup>2</sup> <https://proactivepestga.com/what-countries-eat-bugs/>

One of the reasons there are people on every continent on the globe, and in tin cans in space, is because of our astonishing capacity to get to a new normal, given time and some level of awareness of our own powers.

I still remember watching an episode of *Bewitched* 50 years ago.

I think it was Aunt Agnes, the goofy witch, that conjured up, from the past, George Washington.

He got loose from the house and went out on the sidewalk.

The cars startled him enough, but when a bus stopped in front of him and opened its doors, he thought he was being eaten by a dragon.

Now, we all know what to do with a bus – they are normal for us.

But, not for George Washington! He was scared to death.

It's amazing what we have gotten used to in our lives.

As Carolyn Hax put it yesterday in the paper, *Whatever is novel in our lives eventually becomes old, familiar, normal. . . .*

*Tell your truth, possibly have some [confusion], and then just keep going. . . .*

*[Confusion] is just the byproduct of an uncomfortable change, and this change, like any other, will wear into something familiar, eventually.* <sup>3</sup>

What does “eventually” look like? How long is it?

That's where we have important choices to make as we face the future because every choice we make shapes the future we are going to live in.

Some choices we make with great intention, and others done out of our defaults, or at least without much thought. Either way, all of our choices shape our future.

Stephen R. Covey, the author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*,<sup>4</sup>

– book which was all the rage when I was in management in the 80s

and which is still a really good book – explores this in his second habit: *Begin with the end in mind.*

He asks, “What do you want? What future do you want to design?”

If you don't design it intentionally, you'll create it through your defaults, but either way, your choices will shape your future, as well as the future of those whose lives you touch.

A drunk driver who hits someone else has shaped not only his life, but the life of the person in the other car.

The same is true for someone who stops to help another.

Choices made a person in Wuhan, China, have touched millions of lives!

Please do not confuse “shaping” with “controlling.”

No one who has lived through the first 6 months of 2020

is going to be claim that anyone can control everything that happens to them.

Even when we don't have control, though, our choices matter for our tomorrows.

What values are you going to use as you begin with the end in mind?

How about Wallis Simpson's: *You can never be too rich or too thin.*

If that's the end you have in mind when you begin,

the future you shape will be centered on money and appearances.

How about Adolph Hitler's values, that your religion and skin color

determine whether you are fully human or a subhuman to be exterminated?

If that's the end you have in mind when you begin,

the future you shape will be centered on racial purity and status.

<sup>3</sup> Carolyn Hax, *Tell Me About It*, “I've Developed Feelings,” Tampa Bay Times, June 27, 2020, p. F1. Hax used the word “awkwardness,” which I changed to “confusion” for my purposes in the sermon.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic*. Fireside, 1989.

What values do Christians have? The obvious answer is, of course, the values of the Reign of God. Those values, from today's readings, are truth, righteousness, justice, love, hospitality, compassion, healing, life, peace, and generosity.

Very specific examples are given with regard to strangers, prisoners, and those who suffer. That's the easy part.

What's not so easy is how to put them into practice in our actual lives.

We may not even agree on how to do it, and that's actually OK.

The life of discipleship is not about being right, but being intentional in the face of our fears and insecurities, choosing the Way of Jesus over the default priorities taught by our culture.

As we shape our own future by our choices, and as we touch others' lives, we must constantly put ourselves in the other person's shoes to ask whether what we're about to do, or not do (because not acting IS an action), will make that person think they've been touched a bit of heaven, or experienced a moment of hell.

This may seem like a silly example, but it has shaped my life for 20 years.

Not long after I was ordained, while I was still living in Ohio, I was coming home from a Diocesan Convention and decided to stop by the Whetstone Library to renew a book, an Anthony Trollope book, that I had been slogging away at for months.

It was a good book, but slow reading. I had about a quarter of it left.

Gus and I were coming down to Florida on a vacation and I thought *now* I could finish the book.

I went to the counter to renew it one last time, and the clerk said

I could NOT renew the book because I'd already renewed it 4 times.

"Is someone waiting for it?" I asked.

"No, but the rule is you can renew a book only 4 times," the clerk said.

"But I've only got a few chapters left," I protested.

"4 times is the limit," he said.

This was back when the checkout dates were still stamped in the book.

I glared at the clerk and said, "Before me, NO ONE had checked out this book SINCE 1973, the Nixon Administration. I think you can give it to me ONE MORE TIME."

Now, remember, as I'm glaring and shouting at the library clerk,

I'm all collared up because I'm on the way home from a church convention.

I could have handled this several other ways that didn't involve the clerk breaking the rules,

I could have taken it home and pay the late fee, or had Gus come back and check it out.

But, NO. I yelled at a poor clerk who was just doing his job.

"Oh, FINE." he gulped as he renewed the book.

This priest had given that clerk an experience of hell over a book.

I've remembered that ever since, especially when dealing with folks like clerks, people who are just doing their job, and tried to be more heaven than hell.

Here's what I think I know: God's project for creation is to restore it, repair it, so that everything is just and righteous, as God created it to be.

That is God's future, God's tomorrow – in fact, it's God's Eternal Life NOW, where God already lives, and God is calling us and all Creation into that healed future.

Jesus, God with skin on, came to live among us to show us that future, and show us how to live tomorrow's life today as we, like he, live in the midst of war, disaster, and disease, and in doing so, we are given a glimpse of what it's supposed to be like.

Striving to bring the Reign of God close to people, to bring the Kingdom of Heaven near, is not a "safe" way to live. It wasn't for Jesus, yet fear and death did not stop Jesus.

Following him, we might not always be safe from the world either. Yet, with him as our helper, we can risk being agents of heaven, practicing truth, righteousness, justice, love, hospitality, compassion, healing, life, peace, and generosity as best as we understand them.

We must realize that people may question, criticize, or even hate us,  
because that's what happens when values clash,

when humans want to shape very different futures for themselves and others.

So, be intentional: begin each day God's end in mind as best as you understand it;  
but do not worry. Don't worry. Just strive to live tomorrow's life today.

That's how Christ is in the world now: when his disciples are striving to live tomorrow's life today;  
making this wounded world and a better place.

Trying to touch people with a bit of heaven every day should be OUR normal way of living.

Our reward for doing this is truly God's Eternal Life not only tomorrow, but today.

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#### **COLLECT OF THE DAY:**

O God, you are the source of life and the ground of our being. By the power of your Spirit bring healing to this wounded world, and raise us to the new life of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

#### **JEREMIAH 28:5-9**

Then the prophet Jeremiah responded to Hananiah in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the LORD's temple. The prophet Jeremiah said: "Indeed. May the LORD do just as you have said! May the LORD fulfill the words that you have prophesied and bring back from Babylon the equipment of the LORD's temple and all the exiles to this place. However, listen closely to what I have to say to you and all the people: The prophets who came before you and me long ago prophesied war, disaster, and disease against many lands and great kingdoms. So the prophet who prophesies peace is recognized as one who is actually sent by the LORD only when that prophet's message is fulfilled."

#### **PSALM 89:1-4,15-18**

Your love, O LORD, for ever will I sing; from age to age my mouth will proclaim your faithfulness.

**For I am persuaded that your love is established for ever;  
you have set your faithfulness firmly in the heavens.**

"I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn an oath to David my servant:

**'I will establish your line for ever, and preserve your throne for all generations.'**"

Happy are the people who know the festal shout! they walk, O LORD, in the light of your presence.

**They rejoice daily in your Name; they are jubilant in your righteousness.**

For you are the glory of their strength, and by your favor our might is exalted.

**Truly, the LORD is our ruler; The Holy One of Israel is our King**

#### **HEBREWS 13:1-7**

Keep loving each other like family. Don't neglect to open up your homes to guests, because by doing this some have been hosts to angels without knowing it. Remember prisoners as if you were in prison with them, and people who are mistreated as if you were in their place. Marriage must be honored in every respect, with no cheating on the relationship, because God will judge the sexually immoral person and the person who commits adultery. Your way of life should be free from the love of money, and you should be content with what you have. After all, he has said, *I will never leave you or abandon you*. This is why we can confidently say, *The Lord is my helper, and I won't be afraid. What can people do to me?*

Remember your leaders who spoke God's word to you. Imitate their faith as you consider the way their lives turned out.

#### **MATTHEW 10:5-14, 40-42**

Jesus sent these twelve out and commanded them, "Don't go among the Gentiles or into a Samaritan city. Go instead to the lost sheep, the people of Israel. As you go, make this announcement: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with skin diseases, and throw out demons. You received without having to pay. Therefore, give without demanding payment. Workers deserve to be fed, so don't gather gold or silver or copper coins for your money belts to take on your trips. Don't take a backpack for the road or two shirts or sandals or a walking stick. Whatever city or village you go into, find somebody in it who is worthy and stay there until you go on your way. When you go into a house, say, 'Peace!' If the house is worthy, give it your blessing of peace. But if the house isn't worthy, take back your

blessing. If anyone refuses to welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet as you leave that house or city.

“Those who receive you are also receiving me, and those who receive me are receiving the one who sent me. Those who receive a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward. Those who receive a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. I assure you that everybody who gives even a cup of cold water to these little ones because they are my disciples will certainly be rewarded.”

**SERMON HYMN:** *There’s a Spirit in the Air* Tune: *Come, Ye Thankful People*H. 290

*There's a spirit in the air, telling Christians ev'rywhere:  
"Praise the love that Christ revealed, living, working in our world!"  
Lose your shyness, find your tongue, tell the world what God has done:  
God in Christ has come to stay. Live tomorrow's life today!*

*When believers break the bread, when a hungry child is fed,  
when a cup of water is giv'n, we are near the reign of heaven.  
Still the Spirit gives us light, seeing wrong and setting right:  
God in Christ has come to stay. Live tomorrow's life today!*

*When a stranger's not alone, when the homeless find a home,  
when the sick are set aright and all demons cast from sight,  
let the Spirit fill our praise, guide our thoughts and change our ways.  
God in Christ has come to stay. Live tomorrow's life today!*

**BLESSING:** Live without fear: your Creator has made you holy, has always protected you, and loves you unconditionally. Go in peace to follow the Way of Jesus, and as you journey, the blessing of our Triune God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, be with you now and always.