

THE FEAST of ST MICHAEL & ALL ANGELS 29 September 2019

A Homily preached by the Reverend Roger B. White, Rector of St Andrew's Parish, Kent, Connecticut

Genesis 28.10-17; Psalm 103; Revelation 12.7-12; John 1.47-51

Over the past ... several decades ... we here at St Andrew's have regularly ignored the rubrics in The Book of Common Prayer on three Sundays each year. We have always given the Sunday nearest to All Saints' Day on 1 November over to the readings appointed for All Saints' Day and have ignored the readings intended for that Sunday whatever number of Sundays after Pentecost. And pretty much every other parish does this as well, because All Saints' Day is an important reminder that we are in this business of living, in this world and into other worlds, with a lot of other people, some of whom we can see and know, most of whom we cannot see and have never known.

We have also observed, on the Sunday closest to 2 February –forty days after Christmas—the Feast of the Presentation. Most other places do not transfer the appointed readings for this major feast to a Sunday, but I have thought that it is important to have its reminder that the temples in this world that God most wants to inhabit are not like the one that Solomon built out of stone and bronze, but are like us, our bodies. God seeks always to dwell in human hearts, in human minds, in human tongues, and human hands.

And we have regularly observed on the Sunday nearest to 29 September the Feast of St Michael and All Angels –Michaelmas. Happily, this year Michaelmas falls on a Sunday –today. And I think that it is one of the most comforting feasts of the year, for, it is about angels –God's messengers—who are active in this world even when human are not proving especially responsive to God's invitations to action. Angels are the reminders that although God prefers to work, to bless in this world through us, God does have other options.

And angels are not without flaws: they are not gods or God. The passage from the Book of Revelation that we have just heard tells us that in other realms the (Arch)angel Michael and his angels do battle with the angels of rebellious dragon Satan –sometimes known as 'Lucifer', the brightest and so the most arrogant and presumptuous—who has rebelled against God, who seeks to supplant, to be God.

But angels, when they are in fact God's messengers instead of serving their own purposes, surprise and try to move human beings to notice, to acknowledge that God is always looking to poke, is always poking, into human lives. That bit of Jacob's story that we have also just heard is about his vision of angels ascending and descending on a ladder that stretches from the place where he sleeps to heaven itself. The angels get his attention and so, since he is about in the morning to face the brother whom he has badly wronged and can only assume that Esau is about to kill him, he is able to hear God assure him that he will live to receive the inheritance promised to his grandfather Abraham.

In other words, although distracted by terror, Jacob is able to hear God tell him that in ways that he cannot anticipate, it will work out. ‘All will be well, all shall be well, and all manner of thing will be well.’

And Jesus, when he calls Nathanael to follow him, after astonishing Nathanael with how much he already knows about him, Jesus assures Nathanael that he will see what Joseph saw –angels ascending and descending, angels breaking into his world so that God can reach out and move him.

God prefers to dwell in and to work through us flawed human beings, through our corruptible flesh, and when we and our flesh are resistant, then there are the angels, the messengers, who are also flawed but who can burst into our worlds, distract us from our own purposes often enough to allow God –God’s voice, God’s presence—to attract our notice.

The stories that we hear on this Feast of the Angels are stories that we need always to bear in mind, to treasure. They tell us that it is not all up to us. Yes, do try to build Jerusalem, a new Jerusalem here in earth; and also know that, when we stumble and drop the bricks or lay the foundations crooked, there are messengers, angels, seeking to turn our attentions to God’s redirecting of our purposes.

You see, the (Arch)angel St Michael and his angels drive Lucifer from heaven, and he sets up shop here in earth in order to tempt us to do things his way; and it is the (Arch)angel St Gabriel who finds the human being, Mary, who is willing to bring God into the earth in human flesh in order to show us just how very much human flesh can do to bless this earth instead of cursing it. Together, all the stories that we hear today describe with vivid images of angels and dragons a lot about us and about the world that we inhabit.

If you follow me and listen to me, Jesus tells Nathanael, you will see what Jacob saw –a Creation alive with God’s movements through creatures seen and not always seen, known and unknown, obvious and less so, yet all of them astonishing.

And ... we have got to be willing to notice. None of us will ever be able to see what we insist cannot be in front of us. The Feast of St Michael and All Angels invites us just to open our eyes, our minds, and our hearts to what could be, what might be, what is –a world filled with messengers and messages, holy invitations to each of us to make a difference, great or small, to be ... blessings.

You have blessed; you can bless; therefore let us, each of us, look, listen for the promptings, and ... simply be blessings, for Christ’s sake. Amen.