

## **The Feast of St Micheal and All Angels (transferred) 30 September 2018**

Genesis 28.10-17; Psalm 103.1-6, 19-22; Revelation 12.7-12; John 1.47-51

**A Homily preached by the Reverend Roger B. White**

Yesterday, the 29th, was the Feast of St Michael and All Angels, and we have transferred its observance to this morning. Long before there was ever a Labor Day, St Michael's Day --Michaelmas-- was in many places considered to be the beginning of the autumn season, and when the law courts and the universities resumed their work, after a summertime break, with the Michaelmas Term. Other places marked the day with their own particular traditions: my own favorite is the English parish that called the Sunday closest to Michaelmas Day 'Crack Nut Sunday', when the parishioners brought walnuts to church and cracked them loudly during the morning liturgy, presumably in the hopes that it and the sermon would be shorter ....

And it is a major feast of the Church year, and the readings that we hear on this morning tell us a bit about this. The first is the story of Jacob's vision --his dream of angels ascending and descending a staircase from Heaven that he has in the place that he bands 'Beth-El', the 'House of God'. Jacob has just stolen his father Isaac's paternal blessing from his barely older brother, Esau. Esau is now literally murderous with rage, and so Isaac and his wife Rebekah send Jacob away to seek refuge with Isaac's brother, Jacob's Uncle Laban. The dream, vision, occurs on Jacob's journey towards Laban's lands.

And this vision of angels becomes important in the Hebrew tradition, in Hebrew theology: it very well known. And so when, at the beginning of John's Gospel, Jesus calls Nathaniel to be one of The Twelve, his reference to the story is pretty pointed. Jacob awakens and in awe says that surely God is in this place, that this place is 'the Gate of Heaven', and Jesus tells Nathaniel that what he will come to see is angels ascending and descending not upon a place but upon the Son of Man --upon him, Jesus. What Jesus is doing is shifting the understanding of where it is that God chooses in the world to dwell ....

We talked about this a few weeks ago when we heard King Solomon's prayer of dedication in the grand new Temple that he has just had built, when the King insists that God will inhabit that building. And Jesus is saying that, Yes, indeed there are holy places where we can for whatever reasons know and feel, sense, the presence of God; however, the Most High prefers in this world to dwell in human flesh like ... Jesus'. God O refers to be known through human thoughts, human words, human actions. Jesus tells Nathaniel that he will see angels ascending and descending not merely on a place but upon Jesus himself, a fully human Being.

And when we celebrate the Feast of St Michael and All Angels, we are reminding ourselves that although God chooses in this world to speak with a human voice, to touch with human hands ... it does not always work .... We human beings can either ignore or avoid or be oblivious to God's urgings or purposes. And St Michael's Day is our annual reminder that God does have other agents, other than human agents, through whom to work. They are 'angels' --in Hebrew, 'messengers', in Greek, 'agents', those who work on behalf of others. If human beings are ignoring or misunderstanding or simply oblivious to God's urgings, God has others with whom to work ....

You see, when we say in the Creed that God is the 'maker of all that is, seen and unseen', we are saying that there are things that we refuse to see, that cannot see, that we will never see, that we cannot even imagine. We are saying that the Creation is broader and deeper and higher than we can ever take in, understand. We are acknowledging that there can indeed be agents if God of whom we may be mostly unaware.

The Scriptures are full of references to these beings, to ... angels. And unless we are willing to believe that God has more agents in this world than human beings, then we will never hear their promptings, see their movements, touching us without our seeing them do so .... The invitation of the Feast of St Michael and All Angels is for us to open our eyes, our ears, our hearts to the various ways in which God can move, urging us onward .... Amen.