



SAINT ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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Sermon for Sunday, September 30, 2018

St. Michael & All Angels

FR. ALAN GIBSON

Genesis 28:10-17 | Psalm 103:19-22 | Revelation 12:7-12 | John 1:47-51

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

It is important that preachers try very hard not to waste anyone's time. So, let me start by saying, "I believe in Angels." You strict rationalists out there have my permission, this time, to take the next few minutes to check your emails. Don't make it a habit. For those of you still listening, the reason I believe in Angels is not because I've seen one. (That would probably scare me to death.) Not because I've had some experience of being saved from harm by some unseen hand grabbing me from behind before I tripped over my own feet. (I long ago reconciled myself to the fact that I'm a klutz and will always suffer for it). Nor is it because I have ever felt myself to be the recipient of any vision or divine proclamation transmitted from God. (Based on what scripture tells us of what such people go through, that's fine with me.)

The word 'Angel' comes from the Greek word for Messenger. Angels are those beings who live in the divine realm, in the eternal presence of God, who deliver God's message of truth, love, justice and healing to God's creatures in this world. These messages can take the form of a warning, an announcement, guidance; and while startling they come with the assurance that God has a plan and is watching over everything.

Now doesn't that sound nice? If that's what an Angel is and does, then who wouldn't want to believe in them, seek them out even? Then why is it, from what we see in the Bible, that every angelic encounter with a human being is shrouded in fear? Why does an angel have to introduce itself with the words, "Fear not," instead of a more routine, friendly greeting? Why is no one left jumping for joy after they have heard what an Angel has to say to them? Because, when God finds it necessary to send an Angelic Messenger it's often because God has something to tell us that we might not want to hear or can even begin to believe. Such as:

Abraham and Sarah being told in extreme old age that they would finally have a child together.

Moses being told he had been chosen to liberate his people from slavery in Egypt.

Elijah being sent to Mt. Horeb to prepare for his fateful solo confrontation with the forces of the wicked Queen Jezebel.

Mary being told she would give birth to God's Son, and Joseph, her fiancée being told to deal with it.

These are just some of the messages Angels have delivered to mere mortals. In each of these instances the message was received and acted upon as God had hoped it would be, and wonderful things happened. This worked to put the recipients of angelic messages on something of a pedestal, into stained glass windows where they are admired for their extraordinary faith and accomplishments. This leaves us off the hook to simply admire the work of others. How could we ever live up to such examples? God has never spoken to me like that, and anyway, why would God ever entrust something important to little ol' me?

And there's the problem. We make it about us, we make excuses, when if we really look at Abraham and Sarah and Moses, Elijah, Mary and Joseph and all the others who have had an angelic encounter, it wasn't about them. It was about God and how God wants love, sometimes tough love, to work. Once they recovered from the shock of hearing what the Angel had to say, they all got to work to turn the message into a living reality to the best of their mere mortal ability.

Angels still speak. The reason why I believe in Angels is because I hear them, and if we were all honest with ourselves, all of us would admit that we hear Angels speaking to us, all the time:

Warning us not to abandon the image of God that is imprinted on our souls, even when it might be more expedient to do so.

Guiding us in God's will, to be God's hands and feet and voice in the world even when it's not so convenient to do that work.

Announcing the good news of God's peace offered to world hell-bent on getting what "I" want no matter what it takes or costs someone else.

These can be frightening messages to receive and to live out, especially when we know there are forces in the world that would like to silence such messages by paralyzing us with malice and hostility. If we stop listening to what the

Angels have to say we can convince ourselves that we can withdraw from the world. There's nothing we can really do. What difference could little ol' me make, anyway.

Or we can be honest with ourselves, and each other, and say "yes" we hear what the Angels are saying and then act on the message to bring God's love and healing and peace into the world to the best of our mere mortal ability. It all begins with two words that can sustain us in whatever God has planned for us: "Fear not."

That's not just an angelic greeting, it's how God has always intended for us to live.