

Sermon – Luke 10:17-20
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Grace Lutheran Church
Michael and All Angels – Year B
29 September 2024

“Apocalypse When?”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. If we each, in this most wonderful life, have a guardian angel, I’m pretty sure mine was on vacation this past Tuesday. Here at Grace, staff often leave various treats for one another by the coffee machine. Cookies, donuts, fresh garden produce. This Tuesday, a container marked “spicy homegrown peppers” caught my eye. I like a little spice, and these, to my untrained eye, looked like they might be paprika. I took one, ripped off the stem, popped it whole in my whole, and ate it. It was not, I knew within seconds, paprika. My mouth became as hot as heck. My whole body went into revolt, cursing my brain for not doing its job. Fortunately, there was some ice cream on hand and a colleague who got a dish for me. Turns out the pepper was a habanero, and they been set out in case anyone wanted to take them home to use, sparingly, in cooking. But as I slowly recovered – which honestly took most of the rest of the day – I found myself wondering, “Where were your friends on that one, Clarence Odbody, Angel Second Class?” *It’s a Wonderful Life* is a wonderful movie with great insight into the human condition but is perhaps less illuminating about heavenly beings. As far as I could tell on Tuesday, no bells were rung, no wings earned. Just me, left to my not-so-sharp devices.
2. Speaking of things that are hotter than heck, the very forces of hell are on the move in our readings today. We hear, in these apocalyptic readings, of things that are usually just outside our vision. Which is, I imagine, how most of us

prefer it. Perhaps we find talk about angels and demons a bit old fashioned. But apocalyptic writing pulls the lid off things, pulls back the curtain to reveal that which would otherwise go unknown. So, we hear in Daniel of an evil prince of spiritual nature at work in Persia against God's people, revealed to Daniel by the archangel Gabriel. We see war raging in heaven, the archangel Michael and the heavenly host in fierce battle against Satan, the great dragon, and his unholy angels. We hear how the Seventy sent by Jesus report back that demons had submitted to their power. Jesus replies that as they were exercising the authority given to them to exorcise demons, he could see Satan falling from heaven. On this Feast of Michael and All Angels, or Michaelmas as it is sometimes called, what are we to make of these apocalyptic revelations?

3. For one thing, perhaps, we learn that angels have better things to do than prevent pastors from partaking of potent peppers. Just as we live in a world full of anguish, of war and suffering, so is it the case that cosmic forces beyond our comprehension are in full revolt against their Creator. Evil is at work in the world, turning us against one another. War threatens to overwhelm the Middle East once more in spite of the good work being done by Bishop Younan, our preacher last week, and others in the Holy Land. Such wars are echoes of the spiritual warfare beyond our sight. The presence of angels does not mean the absence of anguish. Suffering, including suffering because of evil, is part of life in this world. But Michael and his host are at work, keeping evil at bay.
4. Ought we not then join the fray? Well, that depends on what you mean. Like the Seventy sent by Jesus, we are to go forth with the full authority of Jesus, the Word of God, upon our lips. When we proclaim the gospel – declaring the forgiveness of sins, preaching the resurrection from the dead, striving for justice and peace, bringing hope and healing to a weary world – Satan falls from heaven again and again. We make beachheads into the ground held by evil in this world against an enemy whose time is almost up. But we ought

- not take upon ourselves the work of the angels. It is they who engage in fierce battle as needed, not us. Our task is to work for peace, for justice built upon love. Jesus warns his followers not to rejoice in the defeat of demons. And I think he says this because if our joy is in the defeat of demons, we start seeing them everywhere, and in everyone. We quite literally demonize one another, giving ourselves permission to win at all costs because the other side is evil. Yes, we stand up for what is good, right, and true, but always with care and compassion, even for those with whom we disagree. Even the angels in their heavenly warfare only achieve victory through the blood of the Lamb. It is Jesus' self-giving love in which victory is found in both heaven and earth, and the life we live now emerges from the empty tomb. In the resurrection, God rejects the ways of violence. We, as those baptized into Christ's death, have renounced the ways of this world and its world-be ruler, the devil.
5. Jesus tells us that our chief joy is not in any victories won or suffering avoided, but in the salient fact that our names, by God's grace, are forever written in heaven, just as Daniel's vision foretold. For this reason, as the preacher Fred Craddock writes, "triumphalism is an inappropriate spirit among disciples. Our chief joy should be, not that we have certain gifts and powers, but that God has received and accepted us, that our names are 'written in heaven.'" As people of God, we delight in the fact that the battle will not last forever, that the outcome is already assured. God's angels, whatever else they may be doing in the meantime, are acting on behalf of Christ, shepherding us to the final safety of the Kingdom of God that will one day be all in all, when we will join them – angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim – in their proper work, the unending praise of God.
 6. Hear again the words of Gabriel to Daniel, which are the first words often spoken by angels when they appear in scripture: "Do not fear." Under the strong protection of Michael, and with the words of Gabriel in our ears to hear, and upon our mouth to share with others, we live in confidence even as

the cosmos rages around us. We know not the “when” of all these great events, but we know the outcome, and can live therefore, always, in hope, until the great song of praise breaks forth in full and peace emerges forever. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.