

Sermon – Luke 10:17-20; Revelation 12:7-12

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Michael and All Angels – Year C

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“Peace in God’s Time”

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

1. Angels occupy, I think, very little space in our spiritual imaginations. When we think of angels at all, we think of Raphael’s Renaissance cherubs or Capra’s Clarence Odbody, *Angel Second Class*. Speaking of *It’s a Wonderful Life*, Christmastime is when we tend to give the most attention to angels, from the Annunciation to Mary to the proclamation of the heavenly host to the shepherds, all portrayed by sweet-faced children in pageants for the season. As fast as the angels fade from that narrative, so too do they fade from our consciousness. On this festival day, however, angels are at the center of the story – a story of rebellion and war and, finally, of victory and triumph. There are no second-class angels here, and little to do for chubby-faced cherubs. Angels as encountered in the biblical narrative are no minor matter. As beings who live in worship and praise of the Triune God, they come across as terrifying when encountered by humans. The holiness they reflect would overwhelm us were it not for God’s grace. This, perhaps, is why the first words angels utter are usually, “Do not be afraid.”
2. In the vision revealed to St. John, we see something which might cause us to be afraid. “War broke out in heaven,” we are told. It is the battle that has been waged against God from the beginning. It may seem strange that angels, living in paradise, would dare rebel against God or seek to usurp the Lord’s throne but, then again, it’s strange to think about humans being given a world in which we have everything we need but rebelling against God

- anyway. Creatures – humans and even some angels – are prone to rebel. To think we know better. To desire to be like God. And in such a world, on earth or in heaven, there cannot be true peace until evil is vanquished; until the dragon is thrown down and Satan is cast out. No half measures will do; neither will appeasement or the accommodation of evil do the trick.
3. If we leave the door open to evil, it will find its way in. Eighty-one years ago tomorrow, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, speaking of the Munich Agreement made between various European powers, declared that they had achieved “peace for our time.” We remember this speech mostly for its heartbreaking irony. Nazi Germany had no interest in peace, and less than a year later Hitler would begin a war that would ultimately claim more than 70 million lives, or about three percent of the world’s population. World War II drove home the reality of evil as much as anything ever has and reminds us that evil is both human and demonic; that it can grab hold of us and turn us into the worst versions of ourselves, people on whom the imprint of our Creator is barely visible. No, there can be no appeasement or accommodation with such evil. It must be defeated. War must be declared.
 4. But an odd thing happens in the battle, and God wages war in the most peculiar way. As we read Revelation today, we are caught up in the imagery of angels and dragons, of the major general Michael the Archangel locked in battle with Satan, the dragon and deceiver. But as this battle rages, we hear that it is also already over: “The accuser of our comrades has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb.” The battle against violence and rebellion is not finally won by more violence, but by Jesus Christ, who gives himself up in love upon the cross to defeat sin, death, and the devil. The great twist of God’s grace is that it brings forth life out of death. We are saved not by our fighting, or even by that of the angels, but by the Lamb *of* God whose blood has claimed us forever *for* God. In the name of Jesus, our names are

written forever in heaven, in the Book of Life, printed in baptismal water that will not run or fade.

5. We live in dangerous, confusing times. Humans always have. The devilish dragon continues to rage in this world. It takes on many forms, from white supremacy to environmental degradation, from the ever-present threat of war and violence to the simple idolatry of selfishness. Yes, on earth and sea the devil still rages. But we are reminded today that the devil rages because he knows his time is short. The devil's day is done. The battle is already over, and the victory is already won. Jesus Christ has triumphed. The angels that battle in his name fight against an already-defeated army. Evil is nothing more than an empty shell.

6. So what are we to do in this time? Let us live like angels, trusting not in ourselves but in the Lamb of God, singing songs of praise hurled against the darkness and battling evil wherever we find it, not with weapons of war, but with love and peace and the truth of the gospel. During my recent trip to Poland, as we travelled from one Holocaust site to another, one of my colleagues said, "For people of faith, the question is not what to do about evil. We know what to do. We resist it. The problem isn't evil people; the problem is the Tribe of Folded Arms, those who stand idly by and watch evil happen." As people whose names are written forever in heaven, we know the end of the story. We know that whatever befalls us or this world, God in Christ has won the victory. It is a victory won by love, to reclaim and remake a rebellious world. It is a victory won by a Savior who would not stand idly by, but unfolded his arms upon the cross, embracing us in his death so that we would live forever in his life.

7. In that hope – as sure and certain as anything has ever been – we are given the courage to go forth like the seventy in today's gospel reading, standing against evil with good; meeting hate with love; overcoming death with life. In

these days of elusive truth, when we seem to be ever hurtling toward one cliff or another, let us remember that the end of the story is already written. Let us unfold our arms and join the fray for the sake of this world, trusting that Christ and his angels will keep watch over us. Let us live like the angels, who have put their trust in Christ. And let us join the angels in doing what they do best, singing an endless song of praise to God and to the Lamb. Amen.

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