

St. Michael and All Angels Sunday
Shepherd of the Springs Lutheran Church
Text: Revelation 12: 7-12, Matthew 18:10

Theme: Spiritual Warfare: Of God, and Angels, and Men

Now war arose in Heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon . . . and the great dragon was thrown down . . . the deceiver of the whole world . . . now the salvation and power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before God . . . (Rev 12: 7, 9-10)

See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my father who is in heaven. (Matthew 18:10)

It can be quite a challenge for the Church these days to effectively communicate about Angels as the Scriptures portray them in our contemporary culture. We have depicted them and compared them to so many docile, cute, and sentimental images. Greeting cards are fond of depicting angels as cute babies with wings. We use the term *angel* as a figure of speech to indicate that we find someone so innocent, endearing, and sweet. *So and so is such an angel!* These silly images are just about as opposite as one can imagine from the reports and descriptions of angels we have in the Scriptures.

In the Old Testament, when God sought to pay a visit or manifest himself, He often did so appearing as an angel, and but at other times through an angel. It was the angel of the Lord that guarded the garden of Eden with a fiery sword to prevent any return after the fall of Adam and Eve. It was the Angel of the Lord who wrestled with Jacob, interrupted Abraham from killing Isaac on the stone altar, who twisted Gideon's arm to become commander in chief of Israel's army to go up against the Midianites, and provides food for a burned-out exhausted Elijah in the mountain cave. In the New Testament, God chose an angel to announce the entry of the Son into the world - first to Mary, then Joseph, and also the Shepherds. When Satan unleashed his war against the baby Jesus, it was an angel who alerted Joseph and saw that Jesus was delivered safe from Herod's army. Following the great temptation in the wilderness and again in the Garden of Gethsemane, angels came and ministered to Jesus. And as we heard from the reading from Daniel, the angels will serve as the Lord's heavenly entourage when he returns in glory, separating the sheep from the goats.

Perhaps more than anything else we could draw from the references to the angelic hosts from Scripture and especially from our lessons this morning is the understanding that angels, including the most powerful such as Michael, have been at the forefront of heaven's battle against the devil and all the powers of darkness. This is a battle that we learn from Revelation 12 first began with a revolt in Heaven even before the foundations of the world. Thrown out of Heaven by Michael and all the loyal

angels, Satan and all his kind in rebellion were cast into Hell, yet also having a presence to continue their opposition to God here in God's creation. From the temptation and fall of our first parents in the Garden and continuing today, Satan is alive, well, and in our midst to take as many of us into his ultimate destruction as he can.

I hope it is a very sober thought to realize that Satan has a hot, consuming jealousy about you as a child of God, just as he has also for God's only begotten Son. Yes, Satan is consumed with jealousy concerning the Son of God and his plans for each of us in his Kingdom. From your Baptism and adoption into God's family, you have become the object of his hatred and a major cause of his spiritual terrorism. He is out to destroy you. From your baptism, the evil powers and principalities of Hell are on a mission to destroy your life in Christ - to get you back as a citizen of Hell. It was Luther who well understood from the apostle Paul that the central cosmic dimension of the Christian's life in the cross of Christ is one of spiritual warfare.

But let us also consider how it is that the Devil and all his demons are seeking to dislodge you and your children from your baptismal grace and inheritance. As he is called in our Revelation text, he is the accuser of the children of God. In light of the grace that is ours now in Christ, the Devil is seeking to separate us from it. He has two different strategies to accomplish this end and he has been successful with many in the past. Take note and ask yourself, which one is he trying on you.

His first plan is to persuade a child of God that he or she no longer qualifies to receive God's mercy and acceptance. To accomplish this objective, he uses God's Word of Law to break down confidence that God has chosen you to be His child. He raises the question about evidence that He is at work to restore His image in you by His Spirit. To aid you in going inside to find that evidence, the Devil will quote Scripture passages to you (and there are many of them in Scripture, especially in the Psalms and in the Epistles) that describe the lives of sinners and the works of the flesh - *sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, strife, jealousy, anger, rivalry, envy, and the like* reminding us as Paul does in Galatians 5 that these are opposed to the Spirit and *such as do them will not inherit the kingdom of God* (see Gal. 5:15-21). Instead of seeing these in your life, counsels the Devil, if you *really* are God's child, you should rather find in abundance the fruit of the Spirit - *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control*. Now, compare both of these and tell yourself: *How are you doing? Which of these lists of things do you see most in abundance in your life? Do you see mostly the works of sinners and of the flesh? Then, says the Devil, you must take the words of Paul to heart and call into question the idea that you can call yourself a child of God. For as the apostle Paul said: Such as do these will not inherit the Kingdom of God.*

But, maybe you answer: *I see mostly the fruit of the Spirit*. If that be the case, then the Devil engages his second strategy. *On that account* he wants you to feel

confident that God considers you to be an OK citizen of his Kingdom - not that there is still not plenty of room to improve - but you can take heart in the belief you have His approval and you are his child. You are dedicated to following His commandments, you are sincere, you are doing the best, and you can see evidence of godly living under the circumstances of your life. The Devil wants you to forget that the purpose of the Law is to reveal your sin, not your fruit of faith or the fruit of the Spirit. He wants you to forget that the Law is to drive you to Christ and his forgiveness. He wants to forget that the promises of the Gospel - his grace and forgiveness and the fruit of the Spirit are articles of faith, not conclusions from self examination. Rather He wants to drive you either to despair of God's mercy on the basis of your sinful wretchedness, or to be confident of His approval on the basis of your commitments and striving to live a godly life. Either way, he wins and you loose. Either way, you have lost the righteousness of Christ, yours by faith alone - apart from your sin, and apart from your good living.

Let us this day, however, with due sober reflection rejoice in the victory we have over the Devil and all his works and ways in the saving work and gifts of Christ. This mission of salvation and restoration of His creation is also the reason for which God has dispatched his angels to assist both Christ and each of us in the achievement of His final victory over the forces of darkness, and making good His claim on us in our baptism where we live by grace or we don't live at all. But, thank God, we *do* live by grace. That is the cause for which he has given to each of us our guardian angel - to keep us in that victory both now and for eternity.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. A-men.