



Sermon at the Cathedral Eucharist

Feast of Michael and All Angels

Readings: [Genesis 28:10-17](#), [Revelation 12:7-9](#), [John 1:47-51](#)

29 September 2024

Today, we gather to celebrate the Feast of Michael and All Angels, acknowledging the presence and role of angels in our lives. So, I guess the first question should be, do you believe in angels? What have angels ever done for us?! Angels, as described in the Bible, are messengers of God, spiritual beings who serve as intermediaries between heaven and earth. However, in our current culture, angels have also become a big business, often depicted as fantasy beings with wings, serving us rather than God. In this sermon, I refer to the biblical angels, who I believe play a significant role in the biblical narrative and influence our spiritual journey. Happy to follow me with this biblical definition of angels? Ok, ...

Jacob's Ladder: A Vision of Divine Connection

Let's start with Jacob and his dream in Genesis 28:10-17. Jacob saw a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending on it. This vision symbolizes the connection between God and humanity, with angels serving as God's messengers. It reminds us that we are never alone; God's messengers are always present. Jacob's ladder is a powerful image of divine communication and the assurance of God's presence in our lives.

The truth is, we often struggle to relate to this story. We either make it something symbolic or unachievable for people like us. Something that can only happen to patriarchs of the faith, rather than normal people like you and me. So, indulge me slightly, as I delve into this passage more deeply.

Before we talk about Jacob's dreams of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending on it, let's talk about him. How he got there and his relationship with God up to then. First of all, Jacob was already old when this happened, some commentators have suggested that Jacob was doing this trip in his 70s. Whatever Jacob's age, Genesis had not yet recorded any instance where Yahweh - God, had revealed himself or spoken to Jacob. None! Jacob was not on a pilgrimage to find God; in fact he is on this route ostensibly to find a wife. But he finds God, or rather God finds him. Jacob's expectations of encountering God somewhere between Beer-sheba and Haran were about as great as Saul's expectations of meeting the Christ somewhere between Jerusalem and Damascus. Or perhaps it might be fair to say: I expect that Jacob's expectations of encountering God somewhere between Beer-Sheba and Haran are about as great as **your** expectations of meeting the Christ somewhere on your way between the cathedral and home today. **Does something need to change in the way you approach your faith or how you make time to interact with God? Mull it over, perhaps on your way home today.**

What happens next in the Bethel story, is that God stands next to Jacob. He doesn't communicate via an angel he does it himself in this instance. He stands next to him and gives him a large number of unconditional promises.

Ok, let's stop there. Let's look at this interaction a bit more closely. This is Jacob:

- whose name means: "the supplanter".
- Who has deceived his father Isaac and took advantage of his brother Esau.
- Who has never had any conversation with God up to now, even though he is not young man.
- Whose mind was not set on searching God, in fact he is on this trip looking for a wife.

And yet when God appears to him there is no rebuke from God, just promises. God promises Jacob land, numerous and scattered descendants, plus spiritual blessings through both Jacob, and his offspring. In fact, Jacob will be eventually given the new name of Israel, and he will become the father of the 12 tribes of Israel. God truly "sees" Jacob. **Is it possible that God, truly "sees" you too?**

Michael's Victory Over Satan: A Triumph of Good Over Evil

In Revelation 12:7-9, the archangel Michael leads the heavenly army to defeat Satan and his forces, representing the ultimate triumph of good over evil. Michael's victory assures us that God's power is supreme and that evil will not prevail. Some commentators, including Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, suggest that God's victory is so complete that even Lucifer and his fallen angels may be reconciled to God. Some of this is speculative, and the bit about Origen was called heresy at the council of Calcedon, so don't worry too much about that. As Christians, we are called to stand firm in our faith, trusting that **evil will not prevail**.

Jesus and Nathaniel: An Invitation to Believe

In John 1:47-51, Jesus meets Nathaniel and tells him that he will see "heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." This reference may be to Jacob's ladder or the times angels helped Jesus in his ministry. Either way, it highlights Jesus as the ultimate connection between heaven and earth. Through Jesus, we have direct access to God, and the angels continue to play a role in this divine relationship. Jesus' words to Nathaniel invite him to believe, and he does.

Both Jacob and Nathaniel are called to believe in God's promises and follow the calling that these promises entail. God continues to have a calling on each of our lives. We often fail to inhabit these stories, thinking that God only calls those whose lives are steady and pious. Yet, God called Jacob, whose life was mired in deceit and fear, and Jesus called his disciples, who came from all walks of life and had various problems.

Jesus continues to call people who struggle with mental health problems, debt, poverty, addictions, and those who are young, elderly, and everyone in between. When Jesus calls us, it doesn't happen in a vacuum of perfect calm. It happens in the middle of the mess of everyday life. Following Jesus is a relationship. He knows and loves us and calls us daily, bringing love, support, and salvation. These invitations often come supported by angels, whether we see them or not.

Conclusion

So to conclude, today as we celebrate the Feast of Michael and All Angels, we remember the vital role that angels play in our Christian life. They are God's messengers, protectors, and warriors, constantly working to guide us and to uphold God's will. Jacob's ladder reminds us of the divine connection we have with God, and that God isn't looking for perfection before he calls us. Michael's victory assures us of the triumph of good over evil, and Jesus' encounter with Nathaniel invites us to believe and trust in God's plan, not just for him but for us. What is God calling you to now? You as you are today, in your joy or weakness, strength or frailty and with all your gifts and limitations?

Trust that there is more to life and love than meets our mortal eyes. Whether you are aware of the angels around you or not, may their presence strengthen your faith and inspire you to live according to God's will for you. Amen.

The Revd Carla Vicencio Prior Canon for Community Learning