

Genesis 28: 10-17
Revelation 12: 7-12
John 1: 47-5
Psalm 103: 19-22

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Come and See

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to thee, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen

Week after week we praise God “... joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your name.” And then for the rest of the week, I’m betting, few of us give little thought to angels.

But today we celebrate, a day ahead of the calendar, the Feast Day of Michael and All Angels, or in church shorthand “Michaelmas,” for Michael’s mass. (Just as Christmas is “Christ’s Mass”) Michael, if you need a refresher is the leader of the angels, the angel above all angels—sorry Gabriel-- but conquering angels trump messengers every time and Michael got the job done by defeating the devil and *his* angels in heaven in the celestial war, as Revelations describes:

War broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

Well then. The great throw down.... an explanation for evil most of us skate right by because our tentativeness in blaming the devil for the horror in our world is on a par with our eagerness to credit angels for countering it.

Surely you’re aware of the angel industry that has taken angels out of the church, into pockets, and onto lapels. Maybe you’ve seen the angel cards with fortune cookie-like messages on them: “You are special and blessed.” In the Oprah-sphere of self-help we all have our guardian angels and a quick Google search will turn up seers who can, for a small fee, will introduce you to your angels who are

apparently right here by our sides. No doubt operators are standing by somewhere at 1-800-All Angels.

But today we're sticking with the church and St. Michael who may be the only angel we ever need because, as it's been said, "In times of unusual danger, when the malice of the devil seems triumphant, St. Michael will come to our aid."

"Where is he now?!" You might well ask as the viciousness and evil of war, the death and destruction from Hurricane Helene, and the escalation of hatred and divisiveness rip through our political season, leave us hammered daily by fear, questions, and anxieties that can be hard to tame.

In Genesis this morning we are reminded of Jacob's dream and the ladder whose top rung reached up to heaven "and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it," suggesting that the divine and angelic realms may be connected in ways more apparent to our psyches than to our selves.

We see angels in our beautiful blue stained glass window – just off to my right -- and their mystery and beauty seems constant and always worth celebrating because whatever you believe about angels in general, or guardian angels, in particular— our church does. Where would we be without the Angel Gabriel? So we celebrate today, on the Feast Day of Michael and All Angels.

The link between angels and the rest of our lectionary readings today I believe is this: Angels help the goodness of God be seen in ways that often are real, but inexplicable. This brings us to our gospel reading this morning from John, which is about seeing as Jesus sees, through the transformative power of love.

"Come and see" is always one of the invitations from Jesus. It is what Philip insists to his friend, Nathaniel, just four verses before today's text begins when he urges him to come and see the Messiah; he tells him he's convinced has arrived in fulfillment of Moses's prophecy.

Nathaniel doubts this when he learns Jesus is from Nazareth. "What good could ever come from Nazareth? A town considered without status by many. But Philip insists and, in an instant, Nathaniel is won over because Jesus, "sees him" when he says, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."

Those words do not resonate in our modern souls the way they did in Nathaniel's. But we know that he is converted and becomes a disciple. He has been truly seen and embraces Jesus as the Messiah.

This spare text offers, in the end, quite a lot. Nathaniel is known by Jesus before they actually met. How did you know I was "without deceit" or pure of heart?

“I saw you sitting under the fig tree.” Jesus replies. Saying in effect, I did not need to actually meet you to *know* you.

Isn't this what the deepest love is? To be known in our essence? Our souls? To be loved for who we are as God, not life, made us? Our egos and this life will make us many other things but who were you *before* you were Melissa or David, Connie, or Erin?

How *did* Jesus know? Because he is where the divine and mortal are united. Jesus sees with a divine vision that's translated through the lens of human eyes and consciousness.

The power of transcendent moments are both intimate and internal. I can describe what I experienced once at a Eucharist in Westminster Abbey or in, of all places, Tunisia, but what was transformative for me will probably feel just interesting to you because the Holy Spirit acts with specificity and unique intimacy.

The deep knowingness of being in the presence of God is the mystery of faith. Words will only get you so far. Music, when it penetrates or soars, will bring you even closer but then, whatever happens and how it happens, can only happen within you or me.

Something happened to Nathaniel that had happened to Philip. Philip couldn't explain it; Nathaniel had to come and see. Everything changed when he did.

Week after week, you, too, are invited to “come and see” in the Eucharist. Jesus is known in the breaking of the bread. It was when he was first “seen” by the disciples after the crucifixion. Their disbelief on the road to Emmaus was resolved when they broke bread together later that evening and recognized him again, both mortal and divine.

“Jesus be known to us in the breaking of the bread,” is one of the communion hymns we sing on Sundays. And perhaps it is the angels we are celebrating today that are manifesting that knowingness in our mortal lives through their divine presence. May it be so. AMEN