

Oregon City United Methodist Church
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Series: Some Sermons Mike wants to Preach before he leaves!

Sermon: Angels UnAwares

Psalm 91:9-13

If you make the Most High your dwelling - even the LORD, who is my refuge- then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.

Hebrews 1:14

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

Revelation 22:7-9

"Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book." I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

Sermon

I like to think that I'm a level-headed kind of guy. Just an average joe with an above average wife, who lives a simple life, who has a simple and practical faith, and even though I live in the world of religion and speak of spiritual things to earn my daily bread, I like to imagine that my walk with the Lord is a common sense kind of faith. I see God in the things I can see and touch and taste and hear. In relationships that I can feel and from which I learn and love. If religious talk gets too complicated or theoretical, my head starts to hurt. Give me topics like love and forgiveness, compassion and mercy to contemplate, rather than religious words like eschatology or transubstantiation. It's not that I don't know what those mean or their importance, but I find in my daily ministry if I keep things below a doctorate level and not too academic, we're going to be better off. Keep it real and practical. So when someone asked about angels - who are they and what do they really do, I found myself a little mystified. I've never really contemplated them before. Beyond marrying one, my own experience with them is pretty nil. I'm named for one - and one of my kids is named for one. We were practical with our kids names. Christian. Sounds like a good pastor kid name - and a family name at that. Next was Gabriel. Good angel name. Then Samantha - a take on the name Samuel - also biblical. Although Steph liked the name Samantha from the TV show Bewitched. So we have their names as a believer, an angel, and a witch. It all evens out.

The question was this: do angels exist and if they do, where are they? Do you ever wonder if your guardian angel asleep? I had a flat tire a while back, where were they on that one? Or when I destroyed my big toe in the dark. Or when Grandma really needed care. As I contemplated on the nature of angels, I thought about my history in dealing with them. Certainly I have spoken about them in sermons. I've read about them in scripture. Indeed, in our Christmas story, there are angels all over the place. But I've never given serious thought as to who angels are, why they exist and what's the big deal with them anyway. I wonder if its because my own practical approach to faith and how I experience God doesn't leave much room for angels. To my knowledge, I've never seen one. To my knowledge, I've never been visited. So this morning, lets take a look at who angels are, what they do, and see if we can answer that question, do angels really exist at all and if they do, where are they?

Who are angels? I used to think that angels were just dead humans. You live, you die, and bam, a bell rings somewhere and you are an angel with wings. But the Bible puts them as their own creation. There has been a proliferation of angel paraphernalia in recent decades. Countless books and publications. Movies with angels, from Clarence in *It's a Wonderful Life* to Nicholas Cage in *City of Angels* to Christopher Lloyd in *Angels in the Outfield*, John Travolta in *Michael*, to Drew Barrymore, Lucy Liu and Cameron Diaz in *Charlie's Angels* (O.K., that one might be pushing it). T.V. shows with angels have been popular in the last twenty or so years. I found one book about how to get your own personal angel's attention. Yeash...that's REALLY WEIRD. Let's think about what angels look like. They seem to look like us. Human beings in appearance, with or without wings. Wearing white, probably robed. But they have super human powers. Super humans. They can fly. They can read minds. Surrounded by fuzzy light. Or their character is the beyond what the best human can achieve. They are the most kind. The most caring. The most reassuring. This is how we think of angels today. All that aside, the best place to start when looking for angels would be to see what they are like in Scripture. Angels are found about 300 times in the Holy Bible. They help out about 40 people or groups in their appearances. Almost always, in scripture, the angels are referred to in the masculine sense. There are two girl angels in the Zechariah. But they are not always happy and reassuring or even human. The first mention of an angel is in the Garden of Eden. After Adam and Eve were kicked out, an angel was sent to guard the gate with a flaming sword. This is not a reassurance angel. Later on, Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed after angels come to test the town. The prophet Isaiah describes the angels he sees as having six wings. Ezekiel has visions of angels having four wings, four hands, four faces, only one of which is human - the others being an ox, an eagle and a lion. In the New Testament, angels carry on these differences. Revelations has angels with eyes in front and behind, all around and inside. Apparently, there are many types of angels, of seraphim and cherubim, these heavenly hosts. Sometimes they look like us, and sometimes they do not. It should be noted that angels and humans should not be confused with one another. I used to think that angels were just dead people. You die, you become an angel. But that is not the case. Angels are wholly different from humans, just as humans are wholly different than Dobermans or daffodils. God made all of us wholly different and unique, with a different function in God's creation. And from all life, from the lowliest amoeba to the human being and everything in between, we realize that there are different forms of life and varying degrees of intelligence and capabilities. And so we could ask the question, why couldn't angels exist? In all of God's creation, why couldn't there be a supernatural being between God and us? But then the question could become, what would be their purpose?

And we find their purpose in Scripture, and even in their name. In popular culture, angels fly around helping people. They help start your lifeless car on the interstate, they help turn your life around, (what was that show with Michael Landon, *Highway to Heaven*). The basic idea of angels we read about in today's Angelology, is that they are an ever-present help in which we can tap into to fix and mend our emotional, spiritual and practical needs. We can even find support for a guardian angel in Psalm 91: For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. But we find a different job description in other places in the Bible. Angel is a form of the Greek word for Messenger. One with a message. They are God's delivery service, if you will. We get the word Evangelical from the same word. Evangelist has the word Angel in it, one with a message. The basic character of angelic action in Scripture, is not for an individual's benefit, but for the sake of the larger picture. They serve God and God's purposes. One of the vivid images from Genesis comes from a dream that Jacob had - he saw a ladder stretching between heaven and earth, and angels ascending and descending upon it, no doubt being God's messengers in the world. The Apostle Peter was freed by an angel while in prison, not because he was in prison, but because God had other things for him to do. The prophets got to see angels, not for the sake of seeing angels, but to get the message of what they were supposed to do. Mary didn't get to have a visit of an angel for her sake, but for the sake of the task that she was about to do. While angels may comfort us, their real job is to help us understand what we are supposed to do, how we participate in God's action in the world. I think the line in Hebrews, chapter one gives us the clue as to what angels do. Angels minister to us, serving those who inherit salvation. Translation: Angels help you as long as you're doing God's will in the world. They are not at our beck and call, but God's beck and call. John Paton was a missionary in the New Hebrides Islands. One night hostile natives surrounded the mission station, intent on burning out the

Patons and killing them. Paton and his wife prayed during that terror-filled night that God would deliver them. When daylight came they were amazed to see their attackers leave.

A year later, the chief of the tribe was converted to Christ. Remembering what had happened, Paton asked the chief what had kept him from burning down the house and killing them. The chief replied in surprise, "Who were all those men with you there?" Paton knew no men were present--but the chief said he was afraid to attack because he had seen hundreds of big men in shining garments with drawn swords circling the mission station. God sends angels when you are doing God's will.

Above all, angels are witnesses and messengers of God's plan in the world. Maybe that's why there are a lot of angels in the birth story. Jesus' coming to earth. They were also the guardians to the empty tomb where Jesus was laid. The role of sharing the Gospel is given to humans, but with angelic support and guidance.

So are there angels? We tend to believe so. Time magazine had a survey where 61% of Americans believe in Angels and over 30% believe that they have been personally helped by the aid of an angel. 1.5% believe that they have seen an angel. And even without these beliefs, I think we have more reasons than that to believe in them. Angels are not to serve individual needs, but to play a role in the redemption of the world. To help the believers in their task of doing God's work of love and justice, judgement and mercy. We believe in angels because we believe that God is working toward this idea of salvation for humankind. The question "Are angels real?" really depends upon the question, "Is Jesus, the son of God, real?" If the answer is yes, then we have good reason to believe in angels. If the answer is no, I don't believe in Jesus, then there is no good news, therefore no need of messengers to proclaim that which is false. If Jesus is not risen, then we have little reason to believe that there are angels; nor would it matter much if there were.

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, wrote three sermons on angels. Very early in his career, he preached a sermon called "On Guardian Angels" at St. Michael's in Oxford on the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels in September of 1726. Then in January 1783, more than 56 years later, he published two more sermons on angels. "Of Good Angels" and "Of Evil Angels" attempt to describe the work of angels and demons respectively. In these sermons, Wesley refers to the biblical evidence and makes inferences about angels from those texts.

Toward the end of "Of Good Angels," however, Wesley writes this: "...we may imitate them in all holiness; suiting our lives to the prayer our Lord himself has taught us; labouring to do his will on earth, as angels do it in heaven."

So where do I land on angels? I pray that there are angels above and below. We could use all the good we can in this world. And I know that many of you have had your own experiences of the divine. Where an angel or a being had helped you out of trouble. While questions about angels persist, let us aspire to live into their example—living on earth as they do in heaven. For I believe the scripture is true - Be not afraid to entertain strangers, for some have entertained angels unawares. And the family of God said, Amen.

Offertory:

Welcome to the Offering, our chance to give back. As United Methodists, we support many ministries, within the church, outside the church, at home and abroad. Every year, we take an offering to support Native American Ministries. Within our own Conference we have the Great Spirit UMC up in Portland. Here is a quick video sharing what this special offering supports. As always, thank you for your generous support.

Opening: Good morning Oregon City UMC and online guests! Welcome to our worship this morning. Today, we are filming just off of 99E south of Oregon City. I am at the Coalcas State Park, along the river - and some of you old-timers might know what is right behind me. Up on the hill is our own Balancing Rock, or what is called Coalcas Pillar. Ancient legend says there used to be four of them. But only one now survives. The earliest reference to the name appears in the Oregon City Enterprise in 1897, where it is rendered as Coolca's Pillar. The article relates what it calls a "romantic and pathetic" legend of Coolca, a Molalla chief who loved Nawalla, the daughter of Chelko, a Clackamas chief. This is generations before Europeans ever came on the scene. Rejected by both Nawalla and her father, Coolca kidnaps the girl, but months later, she dies of a broken heart. A small war breaks out between the two tribes, the Clackamas and Molalla. Coalca's band slowly pressed back the Clackamas and finally determined to capture their village. Stealthily they trailed among the rocky cliffs and for the night camped on the plateau upon which our pillar now stands. Here, in restful security, they tarried before dealing the; final death blow to Chelko and his tribe. But they contended with an older and craftier warrior, who wearied not nor slept. Before the morn Chelko scaled the rocky pathway, drove the Molallas over the cliff, and permitted not one of them to escape death.

The Indian legend further recites that the Great Spirit, sorely grieved at the untimely death of the beautiful Nawalla, wreaked vengeance upon Coalca and the three braves by turning the four Molalla warriors into pillars of stone and placing them at the edge of the cliff, exposed to the heat of summer and the storms of winter — that their stony forms might be an awful warning to passerby's for all ages. But in time the heart of the Great Spirit softened to the three Molallas, who had but done Coalca's bidding in the abduction of Nawalla. Their spirits were released and permitted to go to the happy hunting grounds; three pillars were thrown to the bottom of the precipice and form now a part of the broken rock by the road and rail. This account was published around 125 years ago.

Well, we're all trying to find our balance in these days. I pray that as you teeter and flow back and forth you find your balance, and your footing, on the Solid Rock foundation of Christ, whom we praise. Let us watch our morning announnements!

Children's Time:

Hey kids! Thanks for stopping by. I have a quilt here today. My grandmother's cousin made this for us for our wedding - it was one of the most special presents we got at our wedding. Just for the amount of time it took to create and it is beautiful. This object has been put together with small pieces, each piece with its own place, some pieces a little different from the others and some very much the same. Each color and shape belongs here. Each piece is a part of the whole picture. This would not look the right if it were missing some of the pieces; it takes each piece to make a beautiful picture. This is a special Sunday in The United Methodist Church. It is Native American Ministries Sunday. Does anyone know whom we are talking about when we talk about Native Americans? Native Americans are people who lived here before the United States became a country. They had other languages and customs. Some of those languages are still spoken, and some of those customs are still practiced today. The Native American people have not always been celebrated, and there have been times in the history of our country that they were not treated very well at all. Today, we are celebrating our brothers and sisters in Christ who are Native Americans and the way they serve God and others. We celebrate the work they are doing in their communities to love and care for children your age. We celebrate their special voice in The United Methodist Church. Like the pieces of our mosaic from earlier, they make us a more beautiful church. Their part of us helps us to see the bigger picture of how God created each of us with different colors, shapes and cultures. Like the mosaic with its many pieces making one big picture, each of us is part of one whole church, and we

stand together because of God's great love for all of us. We are all important to be included in the church - even you. And all of God's children. Thanks for stopping by!

Prayer:

Today's prayer is taken from the our Hymnal. 329. A prayer to the Holy Spirit.

O Great Spirit, whose breath gives life to the world, and whose voice is heard in the soft breeze; We need your strength and wisdom. Cause us to walk in beauty. Give us the eyes ever to behold the red and purple sunset. Make us wise so that we may understand what you have taught us. Help us learn the lessons you have hidden in every leaf and rock. Make us always ready to come to you with clean hands and steady eyes, so when life fades, like the fading sunset, our hearts come to you without shame. Amen – Traditional Native American Prayer, UMCH #329

Closing:

Have a wonderful week OCUMC. Because of the weather. Because of the changing season. Because you are blessed. But most of all, because you are loved by God. Go love others and value everyone!