

## Sermon for the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels – Revelation 12:7-12

“And 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.”

Grace, mercy, peace be to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In today's epistle, St. John, in the book of Revelation, tells of war. War is hell. It's not pretty. It's not easy. It's messy and brutal. Ask any soldier who has come back from Iraq or Afghanistan – or who stormed the beaches of Normandy in WWII. Many will not speak of it.

St. John was first addressing the early Christians who were being heavily persecuted by the Roman emperors. In Revelation's war, Satan is cast down by the Archangel Michael and the other angels. They defeat the devil and he is stripped of his power. Strong angels battle against a strong foe. They are armed with sword and physical strength to defeat the prince of this world.

But just what are the angels – and what do they do? The word “angel” means “messenger.” They serve before God's throne. They do His bidding. They worship God – as we confess in liturgy when we sing the song of the angels – the “Holy Holy Holy” – sung with angels and archangels and all the company of Heaven, including Michael, the cherubim, and the seraphim. They sing for joy and glory for salvation has come to us. They rejoice over the sinner who repents.

Angels protect us. Psalm 91 says that God “commands his angels concerning you ... lest you strike your foot against a stone.” Yet they protect us from more than trips and falls. They serve God by protecting us from Satan. Satan has been cast down – but he is a sore loser.

This is why the ministry of the angels is so important. They protect us. But pause to consider how we depict angels. Very few of us probably have pictures of armored angels. Instead, our image of angels is more the image of fat children tripping over clouds. Or wispy blonde-haired maidens walking over bridges. Or gospel singers who drive Cadillacs.

What does this art communicate to us about the reality of our lives – the danger of the devil and the fallen angels and demons? Is this war something serious? Or something that we think of as just for Hollywood and the movie theater?

The devil is like a thief who is after what has been taken from him — what he thought was rightfully his. St. Peter tells us that he roams about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour – namely you. You. He lies. He deceives. He accuses. And he does so all the time in many and various ways. And although he is a sore loser – he is very good at getting what he believes is rightly his. He keeps whole nations in his bondage through false belief. Before God's people Israel entered the Promised Land, the Canaanites who dwelt there were seduced by the devil to sacrifice their own children to the false god Molech. Shortly after the time of Christ, Satan worked through the Roman emperors to rip Christian fathers, mothers, and children apart to be tortured and killed. For the centuries before the Gospel came to Europe, Germans practiced paganism, worshipping trees, rocks, stars, and ancestors only to die in despair. Even today Muslims find sham security in the deceitful writings Muhammad in the Koran. Millions of people are suckered into Hinduism and Buddhism's false peace. So it is with the traditional religions in Africa. There, demon possession is real. Wickedness is real, pagan practices of idolatry, human sacrifice, and the manifestation of spirits—all of these are what many pagans in Africa continue to practice today. Satan has Africa bound!

But the testimony of converts in the Lutheran churches in Africa is joy and freedom. Victory – like when the Great War ended — was a time and a solution that defined post-war whole lives. It was

just the same as with those Christians who cast out the idols and the rites of their pagan forefathers. Granted, they suffered being shunned from their families and tribes. But they rejoice in their victory in faith in Jesus Christ! He has conquered by His cross for them and they go to where He is – to church services that last three hours or more, with preaching for more than an hour and a half! In memorizing the Small Catechism and teaching it to their 4 year-old children. And hearing the Good News with others. There's no surprise that the church is growing in Africa faster than we can train pastors. For example – the Lutheran church in Ethiopia has 900 baptisms ... every single day! They know the Gospel, because they know firsthand of the danger and the suffering of the lies of the devil.

Such activity of the demonic is not just in faraway places or the pagans and their heathen rites. The devil and his legions are active among us today. Even among us who have been baptized as Christians. We are the targets of the devil. Not just in the jungle brush of Africa, but in the panels of our French doors and bay windows, Satan is busy casting his lies.

Really the ones who are in the most danger are we – we who see so many evil things as merely differences of opinion, as rights, and as little character flaws. The Canaanites sacrificed thousands of children to Molech, but millions of children have been murdered before even being born in strip mall storefronts with names like “Women’s Clinic” over the door. We pass by them every day without a thought! Roman officials at the time of the early church ripped husbands, wives, and children apart from each other, but today no-fault divorce and risqué websites have done more damage to marriage and the family than all the Roman emperors combined!

Refusal to forgive – the laziness that keeps us from waking up in time for church – the idolatry that places Sunday’s big game before prayer—all these are the weapons Satan routinely uses against us. Our own flesh wallows in the idleness that passes over devotions and Bible reading and prayer in the home – exchanging this time to watch a silly sitcom. Christians in Africa are giving their lives to have a Bible, even if it’s not in their own language. Meanwhile, our Bibles collect dust on our shelves as we neglect to read them. Don’t be deceived: there is no neutral territory. All of these faults are little victories for the devil. All of these grieve the angels and our Lord. Is it then any wonder why we see so many falling prey to the devil and falling away from the faith? They don't believe that they need any saving!

Angels are real. There are good and bad ones. They contend over death and life. And the battle is over our souls, but the war has been won. Satan and his demons have been cast down, not by military might of the angels, but by the blood of Jesus shed on the cross. They have been defeated by the “little word” that fell them. That “little word” that Luther sang about in his hymn, “A Mighty Fortress” is Christ.

War is hell – but Jesus fought that war for you and He won. He won heaven for you. Today as we confess those defeats where the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh have caused us to sin, we are forgiven. We rise again as new men – as forgiven saints. We go out onto the battlefield – just as the many new Christians in Africa and the generations who fought before us - as conquerors who have no need to fear. The battle is Jesus’ battle. The victory of Jesus is our victory. His life is ours. And in the presence of His powerful Word, the prowling lion’s mouth is shut; his lies and deceit have no weight. He accuses no more where the Judge of the Living and the Dead has spoken forgiveness, life, and light unto you. You are a safe and blessed citizen of Christ’s heavenly kingdom which has no end. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in faith through Christ Jesus. Amen.

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