

St. Michael and All Angels 2018
St. Andrew's, Kelowna

I speak with you in the presence of God, the whole host of heaven, and the people of God. Amen.

Today we are celebrating the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels. The Feast of St. Michael is quite old, beginning in the Eastern church, arriving formally in the West in 813 and in England by 1019. Oxford University still calls the first term Michaelmas term, there are Michaelmas daisies that grow this time and of year and St. Michael even got mentioned in a Castanet article yesterday! I read this week that Anglicans were the ones who added "and all angels" to this feast day after the Reformation. We do all the heavenly host in one fell swoop. It's what I love about the Anglican tradition: whether angels have any role in your personal piety or not is entirely up to you and there is room for the whole spectrum of awareness regarding angels in our Christian tradition. If angels are important in your life of faith, today is your day since we celebrate not just Michael but all the angels, including those ones Jacob saw in his dream ascending and descending on that ladder.

From the chubby cherubs of Renaissance art to Hollywood's beer drinking & smoking Michael in the film of the same name, our cultural depictions of angels don't help us understand the biblical ones very well. St. Thomas Aquinas called angels 'pure intelligences, beings of such unqualified understanding that they are in themselves utterly invisible agents'. Archbishop Rowan Williams once compared their immensity and power to something more like the size of whales. When Gabriel appeared to Mary she was terrified for a reason. The word angel literally means messenger and angels are those who come to tell us God Almighty is trying to communicate with us and to not be afraid. In our Nicene Creed we say we believe in God as creator of all things seen and unseen and so the first invitation for us on this Feast Day is to become aware that we are part of something much greater than we can see. God's creation is much more marvelous than we think and the working out of God's will, and the resistance to it, within that creation goes on on more plains than those we can see with our eyes. As Hamlet said to Horatio, "there are more things in heaven and earth... than are dreamt of in our philosophy."

The second invitation to us this morning is through St. Michael's role in the great cosmic drama of the Book of Revelation. We heard this morning that war broke out in heaven and Michael and his angels defeated the devil, throwing him down to earth and the great cosmic struggle of good and evil continues on the earth with Michael now known as the protector of the church. One of the brothers of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist notes that Michael's rival in this story is the mythical character of Lucifer, which means light-bearer, and he is darkness masquerading as light. And so the invitation is for us to ask ourselves and our world, how we try to pass off our own darkness as light? It's a question that has arisen with force this week as Bill Cosby's publicist bizarrely likened him to Jesus when charges

were laid; it's a question that is being asked of our culture as it watches and comments on the Kavanaugh hearings in the United States. How do we pass off our own darkness as light? And as many prayers dedicated to St. Michael begin: "be our defense against all darkness and snares of evil...."

The third invitation, the one to whom all the others point, is Jesus, the Light that has come into the world and the darkness did not overcome it. In Jesus' encounter with Nathaniel in the gospel this morning, he tells him that he will experience far greater things than being known inside out by a stranger, than having the Light of the world illuminate all that is in him. Nathaniel will see such great things that he will see angels ascending and descending on the son of man. What Jesus meant by that was that the whole tradition from Jacob onwards, the whole idea of a sacred place where God was truly present, a place which came to be exclusively represented by the Temple, that whole tradition is being fulfilled and it's no longer a place, or a building where God resides, but it is a person. The house of God has taken human form; the gate of heaven speaks! And because of that it's no longer just about Nathaniel's personal amazement at being known by the living God but rather that he, and us, and all creation will become part of something much greater, called to participate in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, to become participants in God's renewing of the world. A renewing that asks us to become aware of God going on around us, to become awake to the darkness that masquerades as light, to be transformed for the sake of the world and to proclaim with angels and archangels and whole company of heaven that Christ has died, Christ is Risen and Christ will come again.

Amen.