

Sermon *Angels Help and Defend*
The Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 10.1.23

Today is the celebration day for Archangel Michael and All Saints. The opening prayer, called the Collect, for today is this: *Everlasting God, you have ordained and constituted in a wonderful order the ministries of angels and humans: Mercifully grant that, as your holy angels always serve and worship you in heaven, so by your appointment they may help and defend us here on earth.*

This is what the Church says and believes about angels – God has created an ordered ministry of angels and of humans. And angels help and defend us on earth. I get a great sense of comfort from this. God puts things in order. God has created an order for ministry for humans and an order of ministry for angels. When our world, our society, seems dis-ordered, God has created angels, and the ministry of humans, to put it back into order. When we are in trouble, God appoints angels to help. And, when we need defending, God sends angels to defend.

I believe there is more to angels than what we have listed in today's opening prayer. Many believe (myself included) that we have a guardian angel assigned to us when we are born. That angel stays with us for our entire lives. We change, our bodies and minds change, but the angel is the constant, ordered, and appointed by God to be with us and, from what we can tell, remains unchanged. When we are ready to depart this world and enter God's Kingdom, there is an angel that helps us transition from this world to the next. Sometimes called "the angel of death" I understand that the transition angels don't like that title. Death, to angels, is something completely different than what we understand death to be. We move from life to life, light to light, one world to the next and, again in faith, we believe angels help us in that transition.

There is another angel – the messenger. It's actually where we get the name "angel" from, it's a Greek word that means messenger. It's an action word – imagine a runner with a message that takes it and runs to the recipient and makes sure they received it. That's another appointed order of angels – the speaking type. From what we understand, again, based on faith, our guardian angels, those that help and defend, are not the speaking type. I imagine they can, but, that's not their appointed role. There are other angels that bring the messages in.

Have you ever spoken to someone and words came out of you that you didn't expect? Words that helped, or brought comfort, or were full of wisdom? There is an appointed ministry of humans. We too can act like a messenger, an angel, for others. Some of you have experienced this – where you speak and it helps someone. Some of us have experienced the reverse effect where someone spoke the words to us that we needed to hear at exactly the time we needed to hear them. Again, I believe, in faith, angels are involved in this.

Do you know why this church is named All Angels? On our celebration day, I think we should hear the story again. There was a group of lay people who met and were organizing this church. The priest assigned to them showed up and saw all the leg work that had been done by the lay

leaders. And, if you are looking for their names, there is a plaque on the outside wall of the office that has their names listed. So all this work had been done and the priest said, “All y’all are angels.” And, as such, the name, All Angels, stuck. So has the hard work of lay people in keeping the mission and ministry of All Angels alive. We are a house of prayer for people who are worn out, tired, grief stricken, or pondering what retirement really means. We are a place of welcome and refuge from a polarizing, upside down world. We gather to help others who are also in material need. In other words, we are doing the work of angels in our communities.

God has ordained and constituted in a wonderful order the ministries of angels and humans.

Sometimes those angels are people like you and me. Sometimes the ministry of the order of humans act in ways to bring order into an dis-ordered world and society. And sometimes; sometimes; we get help from angels.

Last week I told you about the tremendously hard ministry of transitioning a K-8 school into a center for outreach and ministry. During one of those tough meetings is where I may have spoken to an angel. We were holding a meeting with the bishop and a few members of his staff, the Vestry, the School Board and our finance committees. We were waiting for one member of the diocesan staff to show up so I had my eye on the courtyard. I saw someone walking around so I went out to meet him. Mind you this is a Saturday morning. The school and church facility – which is as long as a city block and half a block wide – is locked up except for one gate that enters into the courtyard. Any stranger wandering around would get my attention. I went out to meet him and he was wearing a grey work shirt with the SDG&E (San Diego Gas and Electric) logo and he had a clipboard. I walked up to him and he asked if I was in charge and then proceeded to tell me that they believed there was a gas leak in the facility. He kept saying “we” but I only saw him and I did not see their truck parked in our lot (nor was it on our security cameras). Anyway, he said they are going to investigate and they’ll let me know if they find anything. He then looked me in the eye, leaned back on his heels a bit, and said, “You have the Holy Spirit upon you.” I said, “Thanks, the Spirit has been with me all my life” (and I was about to say that I don’t know what it has to do with a gas leak) and he said, “Yes, the Spirit is really on you now. It’s all around you and beautiful.” He then leaned in and said, “There is a fire coming that will engulf everything around you but you and your family will be fine. God will take care of you and protect you.” When he said it I somehow knew he was talking metaphorically. I thanked him, he thanked me; and we went our separate routes. The interesting thing for me is that I was able to stay calm and open during this very important meeting with the bishop. Knowing that the Holy Spirit was on me, and being told that although a fire will burn all around, that God will keep me and my family safe, it fueled me to keep going deeper into this meeting and make sure that all points of view and options were shared.

We never received a notice from SDG&E about a leak; we did not have a spike in our gas usage. I’m wondering if this was an angel or if it was a regular human that saw something and spoke the words – which maybe surprised him – that I needed to hear.

Our prayer this morning reminds us that angels are appointed to help and defend us. But, let us remember that they also speak. Theology says that the angel we get assigned to us for our whole life is not necessarily the ones who speak. We believe that they help and that they defend; and, we believe that they speak.

One way to tell that an angel is speaking is this: do the words bring order from disorder; do they bring unity and peace into a situation that has distrust. If the words bring order; love; peace; unity; they are most likely from an angel that is here to help and defend.

We can look at this in two ways – angels defend. We can't prove we are being defended because we never see the offense coming our way, thanks be to God. Angels also help. Sometimes in miracles, sometimes in speaking the words we need to hear. On this celebration day of All Angels, let us give thanks to God for the order and ministry and appointing of angels. Let us also remember that sometimes God works through us to help others and to bring about peace, and order, and unity. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.