

FAREWELL SERMON, AURORA 9/27/15

Today we celebrate the **Feast of St. Michael and All Angels**.

People of faith have always felt that we are not alone in this world; that there are helpful spirits who attend us throughout life and at our deaths. Whether we interpret the language literally or metaphorically, our liturgy, prayers, hymns, and poetry overflow with the imagery of angels.

Angels are understood to be another of God's created order of beings who are without physical bodies. They are spirits but can take on the appearance of humans or even dazzling brightness. We usually picture them as anthropomorphic and androgynous youths often with wings because they appear and disappear quickly like birds of the air.

The word Angel comes from the Greek word aggelos which means messenger. Indeed, we all know the story of the Annunciation, when the Blessed Virgin Mary was given the message by the archangel Gabriel that she would conceive Jesus by God's Holy Spirit.

This imagery of swift, winged beings is imprinted strongly upon most of us. I once remember near this feast day which is assigned to September 29th, of working early in the morning in another church getting the altar ready for the Eucharist. I was alone and suddenly heard the fluttering of numerous wings. At first I thought that some birds had gotten into the rafters somehow. But as I gazed upwards through the beams of light coming from the stained glass windows, none were to be seen. Suddenly I felt a shiver race through me for I thought that I was indeed in the presence of angels.

But rational thinking prevailed and I went outside to see a flight of pigeons coming and going on the roof outside. It seemed that a few days before an old house had been torn down and they were looking for a new place to roost.

Very few people have seen angels, but most of us have probably been visited by them. They go about doing God's Will as our guardians and protectors. They carry God's blessings to us in many, many ways. However, part of their job is exactly to NOT be seen. For all they do is for the glory of God and to point us towards God and not themselves.

This brings me to the other theme of today's worship. We are marking the end of four years of interim time. In 2011 I begin serving as your long term supply priest. I was just here on Sunday mornings to celebrate the Eucharist with you, have some coffee hour fellowship and then head back home. You surprised and delighted me when we shared my 40th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood later just before Christmas.

In 2012 Deacon John joined our leadership team. As his skills unfolded he took over the pastoral care of the members while I mentored the wardens and vestry in administrative and liturgical matters.

By the end of 2013 it became clear that for Trinity to move towards the future, an intentional interim time was needed. During the interim journey, together we worked together to bring Trinity Church to a point where we knew what had been, what is going on now and where we want to go. Deacon John and I became temporary shepherds leading you toward the ability to commit to a new vision and new leadership as Trinity moves into the future.

A Search Committee was established in the Fall of 2014 and, with the help of the diocesan consultant, various activities and documents were done to produce a job description for a new part-time priest and profile of the parish.

When no applications were forthcoming for such a position, it became clear that only a full-time position would interest qualified priests, and the Search Committee was reorganized last Spring to expand the calling process. Thanks to the Bogvilo bequest of several hundred thousand dollars in 2013, the vestry was able to commit funds for this full-time position.

In a strange way I too came to realize that what needs to be done at Trinity could not be done as a part-time interim. Everything of value we have accomplished in the last four years was in preparation for going to the next step, a new priest to lead Trinity. But more needs to be done.

The role of an interim priest is to put himself out of a job. To be willing to end some things, begin some things, and change and try out a lot of things. The endings and the new beginnings are somehow linked together. You can't have one without the other. It is a weird paradox.

You see, I have believed from the very beginning of my time here that God has a plan to keep Trinity Church a place where people can grow into faithful followers of Christ Jesus. It is a place that offers love and help to any and all who enter its doors. In the 12th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews we hear these words, "Throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith..."

What this means is that you and I, and everything about Trinity Church, is a work in progress. We have our faults, make mistakes to be sure, but if we run the straight race, with God's help, we will see a path that lies before us. In spite of everything else, Jesus is always the victor, and Christ is the prize that transforms us.

So my friends, the best remains, but it changes, it is called to be more and do more. Some things must be left behind, some must be cut down to size and refitted for future service and purpose. But, the best is yet to be.

At the end of today's service we will have a ceremony of Farewell but it will also be a pledge for the new beginning in the midst of saying good-bye.

LET US PRAY: God of grace and God of glory, on Thy people pour Thy power. Crown Thine ancient church's story; bring her bud to glorious flow'r. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of this hour.

Set our feet on lofty places; gird our lives that they may be, Armored with all Christ-like graces in the fight to set 'everyone' free. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, that we fail not anyone nor Thee.

And all God's people said, "AMEN, AMEN, AMEN."