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St. Michael and All Angels Day – 2023

Text: Matthew 18:10 -14

¹⁰ See to it that you do not look down on one of these little ones, because I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. ¹¹ For the Son of Man came to save what was lost.^[c] ¹² “What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go looking for the one that wandered away? ¹³ If he finds it—Amen I tell you—he rejoices more over that one sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not wander away. ¹⁴ In the same way, your Father in heaven does not want even one of these little ones to perish.

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

I used to wonder WHY IT SEEMED SO IMPORTANT to start each sermon with these words, *dear fellow redeemed*. Theologically, homiletically, there is a very, very good reason. Earlier in my ministry I perhaps didn't appreciate it as much as I should have. But then I met a former pastor from another church body.

He had been a reformed teacher and pastor for over 15 years but had never heard this salutation. He himself, was in a wheel chair at the early age of 45 due to a major accident. For one reason or another, he had become disillusioned with his church and so started to visit ours. But then one day, he asked, “Why do you use that salutation?” He thought it was a reference only to believers, then I told him that the phrase “dear fellow redeemed,” was meant for all people, even those who have yet to come to faith.

You see, Christ didn't just die for those who were “predestined,” [...in Calvin's eyes], for heaven, but for every single soul born and to be conceived on this earth. If God's word is rightly proclaimed we bring the message that Jesus Christ came, lived a holy life in our place and, by his atoning death, atoned for the sins of the whole world. God therefore, for Jesus' sake, declares the world (you and me) forgiven/justified. Sin's debt is canceled. And that's the joyful message we seek to share every time we preach. True, to benefit from Christ's atoning work one needs to believe it. [And so it is, at the same time the Gospel spoken, proclaimed and administered conveys “as well as” creates faith in the hearts of those who believe.] So once again I say...

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

This past weekend's rally was themed, “Train up a Child in the Way They Should Go...”. And today's text once again has an emphasize on the importance of reaching children for Christ and especially seeking the lost and straying... Our text also reveals the special role that the angels play in the lives of children as well. But don't count yourselves out. We pray this text will also help you to see your own God-given roles in this work, as individuals, as a congregation, as well as your role as members of a fledgling church body known as the ELS.

Given these lofty goals, we would like to focus on one main thought today. Yes, it is an imperative, a command, but it is one given to cause us to pause and be aware of just how much God's loves you, my dear fellow redeemed.

In view of our text, let's consider our theme based on our Lord's Word and warning. It is simply this,

Don't Mess with the Angels!

Now I realize that generally a pastor would prefer gentler words. But there are times when firmer encouragement is needed.

For the better part of 17 years I've urged people to remember the Lord in their estate plans. At the same time with the our Lord's reminder that "*the He never asks for more than we have.*" Never! So, wouldn't we be glad to support the one who gave us all in the first place as our creator, sustainer and Provider?!?

Yet over the years, there has been less than 1 in 10 households who remember the Lord in their giving in their estate plans (And Parkland Lutheran members have actually done better than the average). But in the end, wouldn't we be glad to render to our Lord that which is his?

Yet I've been around for a long time as Giving Counselor, and I wonder if the number has moved any, even if our Lord does encourage us to render unto God the things that are God's.

At the same time, it helps to remember the real motive in all of this. Our actions are motivated by love for the One who **first loved us!**

Here in our text, and with this reference to the work of the angels, we see once again God's divine love and providence.

I would contend that seeing the face of the Father means that each and every day these little ones have their angels reporting to the Heavenly Father. Which makes our interaction with such very important. We should ask of ourselves, 'Do these children get to see the hand of their Savior in the loving care of both parents and teachers, grandparents, aunts and uncles? AND at the same time, is there a reminder or example shared of our Lord's loving and providential hand? Do they hear regularly how - God's loves them and their Lord and Savior Jesus, came to be one of them, to live a life perfect before his Father and then, in dying, take away the guilt and the punishment they deserved? I would certainly pray it was so.

I. But let's back up a bit and talk about children and culture.

It is very possible at the time of Christ that children were not always cared for properly. Even though the Jewish culture was likely much better than most, there was still the issue of high infant mortality, rampant sickness or simply the difficulties of life which made children seemingly looked like a burden.

True, different eras and different Cultures took different tacks on how to view children. Some have seemingly viewed them only as small adults... Artist even painted children as simply smaller adults making you wonder what it would have been like as a child in that era.

More recently it was common to say, "*Children are meant to be seen and not heard,*" a reminder to the child to keep check one's child-like behavior. [Being absolutely still at public functions isn't easy for children and I can still remember my own father teaching me to "*Twiddle my thumbs*" as a way to limit my tendency to be "too" active in the pew. By the way, it worked, mostly.]

The other side of the coin is when a culture overindulges their children, failing to correct, guide or properly teach them in love for their soul's sake in Christ.

Finally, in our day, there has been a consistent effort by anti-Christian forces to indoctrinate children against Christian, family, and faith based values, and ultimately cause them to stumble. As our Lord warns, it will not go well for such in the judgment. And so, this reminder of our Lord, about not causing children to stumble in their faith is as important, an applicable as ever.

But so our Lord takes time to prepare his disciples teaching them the importance of teaching and mentoring little children in the faith, from a very early age and to nurture in love their child-like faith. But he also goes further in that warning and reminds them.

⁵“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me,⁶ but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin,^u it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

Again our Lord follows up with “Do not offend one of these little ones, for their angels see the face of my Father...

II. Angels - How they serve:

There is something else we want to remember about the angels. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews, after putting the angels in their rightful place showing that Jesus is both Lord and Savior and no simple angel. He adds for all our benefits, (Hebrews 1:14) “*Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?*”

A great reason to thank the Lord for angels... Our Lord not only grants us all we need for our physical life, but assures us that he has the invisible/spiritual world covered for us too.

The Scriptures do give us some very strong examples of these mighty beings intervening on behalf of God's children. My all time favorite is the vision given to the servant of Elisha when the Arameans sought to capture Elisha while he was in the city of Dothan. The King of Aram sent a strong force to capture him to stop him from undermining his attempts to conquer Samaria. As the army surrounded the city the servant of the “Man of God” saw them and said, “Oh no, my lord! What will we do?” and Elisha said, “Don’t be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Then Elisha prayed and said, “O Lord, open his eyes so that he can see.” Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes and he saw that the hills were full of horses and chariots of fire, all around Elisha.” 2 Kings 6:13-17

Bottom line is, every time someone messes with little ones who believe in our Lord Jesus and should they cause them to stumble in any way and fall from faith, they are messing with the strongest creatures in the whole of creation. They’re putting their eternal welfare at risk as well as their physical welfare. For at any given moment our Lord could unleash the angels to reign horrible wrath of our just and holy God upon them. Simply put, it is not a healthy (physically or spiritually) to be actively or passively causing little ones to stumble in the faith. Final word from our Lord: Just don’t do it.

That simple child-like faith that is seemingly so easy for a child is precious in his sight. How many times after but a little instruction, does a young child show signs and even openly speak lovingly of their Savior, who they quickly learn and appreciate how God loves them.

Just a couple of years ago I witnessed an amazing thing, a four-year old make a public confession of his faith before a “Lutheran” congregation. His father has refused to let him be baptized as an infant, but at the age of 4, after only a few months in our church’s preschool he asked his parents if he could be baptized. Needless to say, he made a clear confession of his faith in the Triune God so clearly so that many who attended were floored.

Can little children believe? You can I know they can, not so much because we see it (though this was a wonderful example), but because God’s Word proclaims it to be true. In Luke 18 our Lord declares, “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” (Luke 18:17) The term used in this instance referenced little breast-feeding infants.

III. If they are lost, Go get them!

Here is our call to action as those who possess the keys (Office of the Keyes) of the church for the benefit of all. Because as you may note the context of this passage referencing the angels, that our Lord immediately segues into, “**Go get the lost ones...**”

I don’t have to remind you just how many of our young people are not a part of the church anymore, or find it, not as important. At the same time the next generation is being raised totally apart from the Church and the blessed means that God uses to convey the forgiveness of sins, to strengthen them in the faith.

Our Lord then gives us not only the task of seeking to regain those who stray, but he gives us the very means to do it, namely, the power of the Keys. And what a challenge it is to use them in a loving way, to ultimately reach them.

At the same time, most of us were not brought into the fold by someone.

Somewhere down the line, somewhere in our background, someone reached out to us, someone brought us to the waters of baptism, someone instructed us in the faith, someone placed the very Saving word in our hands... And through the Gospel, given and proclaimed in Word and Sacrament, the Holy Spirit worked the faith to believe... Perhaps even more moving was that someone took time to call us back to the sheep fold, perhaps risking their reputations, sacrificing their time, in order to do so. Some body, went out and found and restored this (me) wondering sheep. And thank God they did.

So on the basis of God's mercy in Christ, who was conceived of the Virgin Mary and lived a perfect life in our stead, obtaining the righteousness we need before God... Why? So we could stand before the mercy seat of God. And that same Jesus came, having lived a holy life, and willingly gave his holy life as the once and for all-sufficient sacrifice redeeming me, buying me (a lost and condemned sinner) back to God. And through this Gospel has created and strengthened God's gift of faith, with angels guiding it all the way... Thanks be to God for the Angels, but most of all for his Son who redeemed me so that I can now be an heir of heaven with Him.

Finally, as we gather around our Lord's word of forgiveness or partake of his table, may we truly be strengthened in believing as we are fed and nourished in our Lord's sheep fold through Word and sacrament.

Friends, we had a marvelous weekend at the Pacific Northwest Mission Rally learning how children learn and we were even given some pointers on how and when to teach, as well as when to discipline and love a child no matter what. So may our Lord truly give us the wisdom and desire to do this. Why? Because we know our Lord values children and us and would have us to seriously look at and do what we can to bring them to our Savior... And even though they may go astray, may our Lord guide and direct us in seeking to restore, and through the power he gives to his church, restore them into the fold.

It is also nice to know, that by God's grace, when it happens, the angels themselves rejoice when one sinner repents. May we joyfully join the angels in the rejoicing as the lost and straying sheep are brought home.

Finally, given the sincerity of our Lord's words in verse 14, it is good to remember. First, *"Your Father in heaven does not want even one of these little ones to perish."* And Second, is this reminder (Luke 15:10), *"In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."* *May we diligently seek to support the work of the church in all we do so that we may fully rejoice with the angels in heaven, all to the glory of God the Father. Amen.*

Soli Deo Gloria.