

Sunday 4th October 2020 Cathedral, Grahamstown 7.30 & 9.30 a.m. Live-streamed, 9.30 a.m.		Feast of St Michael & All Angels 18th Sunday after Pentecost Feast of St Francis - Season of Creation
Job 38:1-7	Ps 148:1-6	Revelation 12:7-12
		Matthew 18:1-10
REOPENING CELEBRATION		

So here we are together again! Who would have believed, when lockdown started in March, that it would be six months before we were once again able to gather for worship! But here we are, together with Anglicans all over our country, as church buildings reopen and we gather again. Early on in lockdown, we realised that the church did not close - only the building. Our life of worship, witness and service continued, but with a difference. Nothing can quite replace gathering together. So today is a day to celebrate!

My very sincere thanks to all who have worked hard to prepare the Cathedral for today: Theo Duxbury (on behalf of PCC); Lou-Anne and the office team – Lou-Anne is our Covid Compliance Officer; Jackie our cleaner; Sly our vergger; sacristans; sidespeople; members of PCC. And all of you for being here, registering, wearing masks, social distancing – this new language and new behaviour that we have had to get used to, these past six months!

PATRONAL FESTIVAL AND THE ANGELS

Today in the life of the Cathedral is our Patronal Festival, the Feast of St Michael and All Angels.

Angels are a wonderful part of our Christian spirituality.

The word ‘angel’ means messenger. Angels – these great heavenly beings that we encounter in the pages of scripture and sometimes in everyday life – are messengers from God. Our catechism tells us that they “are spiritual creatures and part of God’s great unseen world...”¹ Angels are “guardians to human beings against danger and temptation, and they watch over children. They remind us that we are part of a great spiritual world that is bound up with our material world.”²

WHERE ARE THE ANGELS? (1)

In the pages of both Old and New Testament, we find references to cherubim, seraphim, archangels and guardian angels. Isaiah’s great vision of God enthroned in glory in the temple, surrounded by angelic beings. The angel that came to Mary. The angels that welcomed and announced the birth of Jesus Christ. The angels that are part of the heavenly worship. The angels that surround *us* in worship. As we pray in the Eucharistic prayer, “Therefore with

¹ *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*, 442

² *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*, 442

angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, we acclaim you and declare the greatness of your glory...”

Angels are part of the heavenly and the earthly battle against evil. Here, our Prayer Book catechism picks up on our NT reading from Revelation 12:7, in which the archangel Michael and his angels defeat the dragon: “Angels were created good by God, but some rebelled against him and became his enemies. Those are called demons and their leader is Satan or the devil.”³

The angels (or heavenly beings, sons of God) rejoice at the creation (Job 38:7); we join in worship with the angels (Psalm 148:2); the angels of these little ones behold the face of the Father (Matthew 18:10). Angels aid us in our struggles against evil; they are defenders of the poor and the weak.

And they accompany those who are dying. In our liturgy of the prayers for the dying, at the point of death, we pray: “Go forth, Christian soul, on your journey from this world...aided by angels and archangels and all the armies of the heavenly host.”⁴

At the end of the funeral service, we lead the coffin out of the church with the words “May the angels lead you into paradise, may the martyrs come to welcome you and take

³ *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*, 442

⁴ *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*, 522

you to the holy city, the new and eternal Jerusalem, may the choir of angels welcome you...”⁵

Some speak of their experience of heavenly beings. For others, angels are those opportune visitors, friends, strangers, who just happen to be there when we most need them.

In all this – in the pages and witness of scripture, and in people’s personal experience - we are given a picture of a spiritual and heavenly world beyond what we normally see or experience; a reality greater than the everyday; the power of God at work, present and active.

WHERE ARE THE ANGELS? (2)

We all have our lockdown stories to tell, I am sure... a time of retreat and renewal for some... a time of privation as jobs were lost, as income dropped... a time of outreach and compassion ... food parcels and food vouchers... a time when the seething anger just below the surface bubbled over... the death of George Floyd in the USA ... the Black Lives Matter protests ... floods and droughts... deaths... we have had to dig deep. What a time this has been.

And angels have been all around us. Angels in disguise.

⁵ *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*, 543

Gill Meyer's accident... "you must have had a guardian angel..."

The individuals that have been there for us.

The repeated reminders that we are in God's good hands.

The ongoing witness of the church – the SACC's call to stand against high level corruption in our country; the voice of the Anglican Church (ACSA) at Provincial Standing Committee two weeks ago, with its strong statements against gender based violence, against discrimination and racism, the calls to care for our environment; the appeal to rebuild our society, our communities after covid-19, with wisdom and compassion.

Many of the events of these past six months have exposed the fragility of our society, and the inability of government and state structures to cope. Again and again it has been the church, and other organs of civil society, who have been there to help and to support. Angels have been all around us, there when we most need them, surrounding us, giving us strength and courage, protecting us.

CONCLUSION

On this our Patronal Festival, let us be profoundly thankful for the ministry and witness of angels, St Michael and all the angels who have surrounded this Cathedral community over the years, and continue to surround us today. They are

present in our worship. They sustain us in our fight against evil. They join in our prayers and praises.

Let us be thankful.

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Dean of Grahamstown
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