

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Welcome to morning prayers at the Memorial Church. I invite you please to rise for our responsorial psalm, which is Psalm 142 in your psalter. Please make the responses in bold. "I cry with my voice to the Lord, with my voice I make supplication to the Lord."

Congregation:

"I pour out my complaint before Him. I tell my trouble before Him."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"When my spirit is faint, Thou knowest my way. In the path where I walk, they have hidden a trap for me."

Congregation:

"I look to the right and watch. There is no one who takes notice of me. No refuge remains to me; no refuge remains to me, no man cares for me."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"I cry to Thee, O Lord. I say, 'Thou art my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.'"

Congregation:

"Give heed to my cry; for I am brought very low. Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to thy name."

Congregation:

"The righteous will surround me; for Thou wilt deal bountifully with me."

Choir:

(Singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

This is a reading from the Gospel according to Saint John. "When Jesus saw Nathaniel coming toward Him, He said of him, 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.' Nathaniel asked Him, 'Where did you get to know me?' Jesus answered, 'I saw you under the fig tree before Phillip called you.' Nathaniel replied, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God, the King of Israel.' Jesus answered, 'Do you believe

because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.' And He said to him, 'Very truly I tell you, you will see Heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.'" Here endeth the lesson.

Today is the Feast Day of Saint Michael and All Angels, which is why we have this gospel lesson. It's the one time Jesus talks about angels. Saint Michael and All Angels is a favorite feast day of mine, but to be honest, I'm sort of ambivalent about angels. I'll tell you why it's a favorite feast day in a minute.

First of all, angels are hard to preach on. There's no kind of historical figure, like there usually are with saints' days that I can speak about. There's some record of angels in the Scriptures. Michael shows up in Daniel in Revelation. Michael's the captain of the heavenly armies. Gabriel of course, is the messenger of God who appears in Daniel and Luke.

The Archangel Raphael is in the Book of Tobit. Uriel instructs the prophet Ezra in the Apocrypha Book for Esdras. There are lots of other angels' names that run around in early Christian and late NT Jewish literature, Somhiel, Sandalphon, Hadraniel, Raziël. Jophiel is the angel who's meant to have banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden.

He was named by this strange Syriac sixth-century figure named Pseudo-Dionysius. Dionysius Orderic is also the one who came up with this list of nine orders of angels. Seraphim, Cherubim Thrones, Dominions, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Archangels, Angels. Some of these come from Scripture. The Seraphs are mentioned in Isaiah as six-winged creatures who attend to God. Two wings cover their face, two wings cover their feet, and two wings, they fly. The Cherubs are four-faced creatures who show up in Ezekiel. The other names, Thrones, Dominions, Powers, Principalities, come from Paul.

I've been avoiding the topic. Why am I uncomfortable with angels? It's not because I don't imagine that God moves in the world in ways that I can't comprehend. Indeed, I'm quite sure God does. I have an evolutionarily-limited brain. Of course there would be movements in the world that I can't comprehend. What I'm less eager to do is put a name to it, a name like Gabriel or Michael or Principalities or Powers, because it seems like trying to constrain that mystery. And it's important to me to constrain that mystery because I've been a pastor for a dozen years or more, and I've seen people pray fervently to angels, for the intervention of angels, into their lives, in moments of stress or tribulation.

It seems like sometimes those angels show up, sometimes they don't. I'm probably being too hard on the angels, because it really has to do with the inscrutability of God's work in the world. I want to preserve the mystery of that, which is why I'm reluctant to put it all on the angels. But it may be that I'm chasing down the wrong rabbit into the wrong hole, because whether or not we understand why and where and when God works in the world, I do think that in the midst of all this mystery that we cannot understand or adequately describe, I think God does speak to us on occasion. And indeed the word "angel" from the Greek, "angelos" means, "messenger," which is a translation of the Hebrew, "melak," which means, "messenger." I think people do sometimes, or things sometimes, do give us messages from God in the midst of all this mystery.

I said, this is a favorite feast day of mine. It's a favorite feast day of mine, not because I'm such a huge fan of angels, but because today is my wife Colette's birthday. I'm going to tell you a very short story about Colette. I can't remember a time when I didn't want to be a priest. My whole life, I wanted to be a priest. And when I was 31 or so, I was set to be ordained. We lived out here in Boston, but I had to travel back to Michigan, to my home diocese to be ordained. The time had come for me to be ordained priest. And we were driving home for Christmas and an ordination on the Feast of St. Thomas. I remember I was in the bedroom, packing my bag and Colette was in the other room, doing something else.

I started to have, it wouldn't be fair to call it a panic attack, but I started to have a sort of moment of spiritual crisis. As I was packing my bag, and realizing in three days I was going to be ordained a priest, because all my life I'd wanted to be a priest. I realized as I was packing my bag, that I had not become the person I thought I would be by the time I would be ordained a priest. And yet I was scheduled to be ordained. Colette noticed that I was in some distress, and she came in and she said to me, "What's wrong?" And I told her what was wrong. I said, "I feel like I fooled everybody. I feel like the Bishop and these committees and all these people who are waiting for me and who are going to be greeting me and see me ordained, they think that I'm somebody who I'm not."

And Colette looked at me very kindly and said, "You're not fooling anybody, buddy. They know exactly who you are. They don't think you're anybody better or worse than who you are. They've decided they want you." Which was exactly what I needed to hear. It would be hackneyed to call the person I love and with whom I share my life an "angel," but she did give me a message and it was a message I needed to hear. And for me, in that moment, it was a message from God. I invite you please, to rise for our prayers.

Everlasting God, who has ordained and constituted in a wonderful order, the ministry of angels and of mortals, 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, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Now let us pray the words Jesus taught us, saying, "Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name."

Congregation:

"Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven."

Congregation:

"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Congregation:

"Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Congregation:

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen."

Congregation:

"For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Please join in singing our closing hymn, number 85. (singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Glory to God whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to God from generation to generation in the church and to Christ Jesus, forever and ever. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:

Thanks be to God.