

Year A, July 23, 2017
7 Pentecost (Proper 11)
Christ Church, Mexia

When reading the gospel lesson for today, I was struck by the fact that angels would be the "reapers" of the harvest at the end of the age. It also reminded me of the OT lesson – the dream that there was a stairway (the NRSV is the only one to present it as a ladder, but that's not the point) – a stairway that went from earth into heaven and was being used by the angels of God. And God was at the top of the stairway and spoke to Jacob, essentially repeating the promise God had made to Abraham, Jacob's grandfather, and to Isaac, his father, and reassuring Jacob that God would be with him and watch over him wherever he went.

And when Jacob awoke, he said, "Surely God is in this place and I did not know it," and, "how awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." So he made an altar and called the place Bethel, the "house of God."

We are in a "house of God" now. But what about out there? Do you feel a real presence with God in other places? Are you aware of angels that are with you, especially during times of trouble?

The problem, I think is that too many times we are distracted by so many things, have so much on our minds, have so much to do – that we forget, God is in this place – and I'm not just talking about here, this building, but anywhere that we may be. Wherever we go, we are in God's creation; it is said that God breathes life into each and every soul; that Christ is within each and every one of us ... Isn't the great appeal to have communion each Sunday, because we want to remind ourselves – to feel that we are in Him and he in us. And it is wonderful to have this church, all churches, and the sacrament of Holy Eucharist. But too often we miss out on the richness of the experience we can have by not realizing, or knowing, that God is in this place, wherever we may be, whatever time of day, whatever is happening.

"Dobie Gadiant, a school teacher for thirteen years, decided to travel across America and see the sights she had taught about. Traveling alone in a truck with a camper in tow, she launched out. One afternoon, while she was rounding a curve on I-5 near Sacramento in rush-hour traffic, a water pump blew on her truck. She was tired,

exasperated, scared and alone. In spite of the traffic jam she caused, no one seemed interested in helping.

Leaning up against the trailer, she prayed, 'Please, God, send me an angel, preferably one with mechanical experience. Within four minutes, a huge Harley drove up, ridden by an enormous man, sporting long, black hair, a beard and tattooed arms. With an incredible air of confidence, he jumped off and went to work on the truck, without even glancing at Dobie. Within another few minutes, he flagged down a large truck, attached a tow chain to the frame of the disabled Chevy, and whisked the whole 56-foot rig off the freeway onto a side street, where he calmly continued to work on the water pump.

The intimidated school teacher was too dumbfounded to talk, especially when she read the paralyzing words on the back of his leather jacket: 'Hell's Angels - California.' As he finished the task, she finally got up enough courage to say, 'thanks so much,' and carry on a brief conversation. Noting her surprise at the whole ordeal, he looked her straight in the eye and advised, 'Don't judge a book by its cover. You may not know who you are talking to.' With that he smiled, closed the hood of the truck, and straddled his Harley. With a wave, he was gone as fast as he had appeared." Now you may dismiss this as a story about coincidence involving a nice stranger - but many view it as an angel story.

But let me tell you one of my experiences. I've told you about my accident in Thailand years ago and the warning I received beforehand, but let me now add. After the vehicle rolled and came to a stop, I found myself lying half in and half out. I got up to look for the driver, whom I thought had been thrown out near where we hit the tree. A Thai bus had stopped on the other side of the road and one of the conductors was coming toward me. I thought he said, "Don't worry, we have called an ambulance." But this was long before mobile phones were in existence and very few Thai homes had telephones. Within a few minutes a jeep with American dentists arrived on the scene; they had a military radio in the jeep and had contacted the nearby air base for an ambulance. So who told me, who assured me that all would be alright? I believe it was an angel.

Janet had a similar experience when a taxi in which she was riding from the airport to her hotel in Phoenix was broadsided by a car. As she was sitting on the curb, a man approached and assured her that

everything was going to be alright. But then he vanished and wasn't seen again. Angel? I think so, though neither of us can prove it.

I don't think angels need a stairway or ladder to ascend or descend into heaven; there probably isn't just one gateway, or even two or three. I have experienced angels at other times and in other places, and you may have also. The point is that heaven and earth are connected; we just forget that sometimes. Sometimes, even here in this peaceful setting, with the Liturgy and the music, we forget it – because our mind and maybe our heart are distracted by the concerns of this secular life. But what a glorious feeling it is to realize “that God is in this place.” And the opportunity for that recognition is endless... it can be anywhere. All we have to do is to be open to it.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.

Amen.