

27 September 2026
Saint Michael and All Angels

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“A Kingdom at War”

Text: Luke 10:17-20; Revelation 12:7-12; Daniel 10:10-14; 12:1-3

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

So the past few weeks, we've been hearing about and thinking about what the kingdom of heaven is like, through some parables of Jesus. And kingdom of heaven meaning not just what life is going to be like after we die, but the kingdom of heaven we're already living in now, that heavenly life we're already living now, as baptized children of God. Christians living in the world but no longer of the world. This whole new life that we have to learn, this life of unlimited forgiveness and great grace, kind of like a newborn baby coming into a whole new world. And it's not only a very different kingdom, a very different way of living, but a far superior life that we now get to live. No longer trapped in old and sinful ways, but set free to live as little Christs in the world.

And this theme continues today in the readings that we heard. Today as we hear that this new kingdom that we are living in is **a kingdom at war**. That whether we are aware of it or not, there is spiritual warfare going on all around us.

Now, you all know something about war. We have the war going on in Iran right now. The Ukraine-Russia war has been going on for a number of years. Before that were the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. And those are just the wars in the news and that our country has been involved with. There have been others as well. But the thing about these wars is that they're here and there, from time to time. There is fighting, then peace; fighting, then peace.

But the spiritual war we heard about today is not like that. It is continual. And in every place. As much as you may want to escape it, you can't. ***The devil and his angels have been thrown down to the earth, so woe to us, for they have come down in great wrath, because they know that their time is short.*** Which means they're going all in. Saving nothing in reserve. A full out assault until their time runs out. Until Jesus comes again in glory and puts an end to it all.

Now I don't know about you, but that sounds pretty daunting to me! An enemy we know but cannot see, with attacks which are mainly spiritual not physical, and so we

also cannot see, (although some I think we can see), and which is our constant reality. So that we always have to be vigilant and always fighting. Seems like a big ask! And it is. Which is why this day we celebrate Saint Michael and All Angels. To remember and rejoice in the fact that we do not fight alone, but that God's angels are fighting for us. God's angels who do not tire or grow weary as we do, but are always on guard for us. So *guardian angels*, as they have been called.

But how does this all work? Because maybe you're wondering, if God is for us, and His angels are fighting for us, why are we still under attack? Why do we still have to fight?

Well, part of that we must leave to the mystery of God. That God did not just annihilate the devil and his angels when they rebelled but had them cast down from heaven to earth, that was His decision, part of His plan, which He did not reveal to us. But since Scripture says that God uses all things for our good - ALL things! - that means He is able to do that with the devil and his angels as well. Use *them* for *His* good. When Luther thought about that, he would say that God uses the attacks of the devil and his angels to keep driving us back to God, back to prayer, back to His means of grace. To keep us looking to God and relying on God. And I think that's true. You know it from your own life. When things are going well and smoothly and you don't have a lot of problems, it's easy to get lazy as a Christian . . . forget to pray, skip Church, neglect reading the Bible and our devotions . . . It's when things get crazy and tough and are falling apart that we go back to these things and cry out for help! Which we should! But maybe we need a push from time to time!

But that's just one reason . . . I think there's another, and that's (frankly) our stupidity. Sin makes us stupid. The Bible says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. That is, faith in God, relying on God is smart, is wise. Sin makes us stupid. Sin makes us do stupid things. Let me give an example . . .

The hymn we just sang said that *Christ, the Lord of hosts, has slammed the devil and his angels into their steely cage* (LSB #521 v.1). That's not a quote from Scripture, but the idea is there - of Satan and his angels being conquered and in prison. But if that's so, why do we have to worry about them? Well, as I said, because we're stupid. So let's go with that idea . . .

Picture Satan in prison. Behind bars. That's good, right? He can't do anything to you. He's in there and you're out here. But he starts talking to you . . . and telling you how good he has it and how bad it is for you! Which sounds stupid, right? But he says: Look at me! I have it made in here. I get three hot meals a day and a cot - three meals a day and a place to sleep. For free! I don't have to pay a mortgage or rent. I have security 24/7. No commute to work. I don't have to work! My time is my own! Someone does

my laundry for me, cooks for me, feeds me. This is great! But you! Working, paying, struggling . . . You should come in here! Join me. It's *better* in here . . .

Stupid, right? But we do. We go into the cage of bitterness and anger. We go into the cage of lust and sexual sins. We go into the cage of rebellion, or the cage of despair. We go into the cage of envy and jealousy and coveting. We go into the cage of selfishness. We go in because we hear these things will be better, will make our life better, will make us happy, will get us what we want. And we go in . . . and then find out the truth: that we are imprisoned to these things. It was all a lie. And now we're in the cage with the one we don't want to be in the cage with!

But there's something in the catechism called the Office of the Keys, remember that? It's the authority to forgive. To *unlock* the prison we've stupidly put ourselves in and set us free again. That's what you hear at the beginning of the Divine Service here every Sunday. We come and confess our stupidity, our sins, and you hear the key turn and the prison door opening . . . *in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins* . . .

This is part of what we heard today in the reading from Revelation. That in addition to the fighting and protection of God's angels, ***they have conquered him*** (satan) ***by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony***. In this war, this *spiritual* war, we fight not with sword and spear, bullet and bomb, and not with our own strength, power, and smarts - but with *spiritual* weapons: the Word and Sacraments. For in these is the blood of the Lamb, the blood of Jesus, that won the battle for us. They may not seem like much, just words and water and bread and wine compared to all the sin and evil we see when we walk out those doors, but do not be deceived. The reading from Revelation today talked about satan as a ***great dragon*** and Jesus as a Lamb. And in a battle of a lamb against a dragon, all reason would say the lamb stands no chance! And yet the Lamb won! Through His death and resurrection, Jesus, the Lamb of God, won for you the forgiveness of all your sins, the opening of your prison door, and a new life in His kingdom, the kingdom of heaven. And that new life, forgiveness, and salvation He put here for you, in these things that seems as strong and powerful *as a lamb*! And they are! For they are the power of the Lamb of God.

So when the devil invited Jesus into his steely cage, when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness, how did Jesus fight back? Not with His divine strength, but *with the Word of God*. And that Word won, countering the lies of the devil. Were the angels there? We find out at the end, yes, they were. That when the temptations were finished (for now!), *the angels came and ministered to Jesus* (Matthew 4:11). We also hear they were there when Jesus was arrested and on His way to the cross. He tells His disciples not to fight with sword and spear, for, He says, *Do you think that I*

cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels (Matthew 26:53)? And the Old Testament is filled with stories of angels fighting for God's people, thousands of angels on the ready all around (i.e. 2 Kings 6:17). And today especially we give thanks for that, and for them.

But we also heard from Jesus today that there is something far greater than that for which to give thanks. ***When the seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!"*** And Jesus said to them . . . Yup! ***But do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.*** The battles and fights continue, and we have the Word and Sacraments as our weapons that are more powerful than the dragon (if we aren't stupid and use them!), but even greater than that is that your name has been written by the Lamb's blood in the Lamb's book of life. That you have been brought into His kingdom to live a new life. And that when the battles and fights are finally over, Jesus' victory will remain, and you ***will awake to everlasting life.***

So that's another aspect of our reality living in the kingdom of heaven here on earth. It's not easy, but it's good. We have a powerful enemy, but an even more powerful Saviour. And His powerful angels, fighting for us. Remember that! When you're weak, when you're struggling, when you stupidly listen to the evil one, when you feel caught in the middle, when you're being attacked on all sides, turn to the Word and blood of the Lamb, cry out, repent, and receive His victory in His absolution and in His Body and Blood. And rejoice! Because you know what? *Satan can't!* He has no joy. Only gloom, only anger, for he knows his time is short. *But yours is everlasting!* So he wants to rob you of your joy and plunge you into his gloom and anger. Don't bite! Don't fall for it! Rejoice! Laugh at his lies. Laugh at him. Rub it in his face! And walk away. Because in the end, ***those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.***

That's your future, dear child of God.

So today we thank the Lord for His angels and their protection. But even more, we thank and praise their leader, which the angels do, too! Around His throne, continually. We thank and praise the Lord of hosts, the Lord God Sabaoth, the Lord of power and might, our Lord Jesus Christ, for His greater gifts, for His death, for His resurrection, for His forgiveness, for His life and salvation.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.