St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)
Saint Michael and All Angels – September 27, 2026
Matthew 18:1-11 – The War For Your Soul
Rev Peter Wagner

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

Our Gospel reading today seems strange for the feast of Saint Michael and All Angels. After all, it has very little to do with angels. Jesus only mentions the angels once, in passing, when he says, "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven."

This verse is where we get the concept of guardian angels. But really, angels are not the main focus here. Jesus is really talking about his concern for his little ones, his children, those who come to God in humble, childlike faith. He's talking about Christian believers.

And that is exactly the point. The angels do not strive for attention, the focus is not on them. God's attention is directed on us, his believers. Even though we are mortal and the angels are eternal, even so, Michael and Gabriel and all the rest of the angels are God's ministers, sent to defend us and fight on our behalf. Amazingly, God has devoted his attention and his saving grace toward us, and he commands his angels concerning us.

So the psalmist says, "What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the angels." With these words, King David is marveling that God cares for us, even though we are lower than the angels. God has created us – and not the angels – in his image, and he does not help the angels, but us. For the Son of God did not come to the angels, but he came to us, to dwell as a man among us.

And yet, the angels certainly do have a role to play. They do God's bidding, fighting spiritual battles in the war for our souls. They carry out the spiritual war on our behalf against the forces of evil in the heavenly places, to protect and defend us from the devil and his demons.

Yes, the devil is real, and the demons are real, and they are constantly attacking us.

Originally, the devil and the demons were good angels, created by God. But they rebelled. They sought to exalt themselves and were driven out from heaven. So now they are striving to bring us down with them, by tempting us into sin, and turning us away from God.

The devil attacks us daily, in both body and soul, just like he attacked Job in the Old Testament. Job's possessions were destroyed, his children all killed, and his body was afflicted with terrible painful sores. Everything was swept away from him in a moment. Even his wife urged him to curse God and die. And it was all the devil's work. Satan attacked Job in all these physical ways, to drive him to spiritual despair, to turn him against God and destroy his faith.

In the same way, the devil constantly attacks us Christians, in both body and soul. He doesn't need to bother about unbelievers; they already belong to his kingdom of darkness. As long as he can keep them from hearing God's word, they are safely in his clutches. Of course, God is always working to proclaim his word everywhere, because he wants unbelievers to hear and believe.

But Satan is mainly focused on believers, in the church. Sometimes he attacks us directly, like with Job. He attacks our bodies with sicknesses and he snatches away our possessions to drive us to despair. Other times, he whittles away our faith gradually by the distractions and cares of the world. Other times, he tries to sow seeds of discontent and strife among us. He plants criticism and envy, seeking to destroy the church through jealousy, like when the disciples of Jesus jockeyed for position, arguing about who among them was the greatest.

The devil has so many strategies, and all of them are very effective. Against him we cannot stand. We would surely fall, if not for the constant watchfulness of the angels.

Therefore, we need the greatest, most powerful guardian angels, to protect us constantly in both body and soul. Thanks be to God, who assigns his mightiest angels to us. As Jesus said, the angels of his little ones, the angels of his believers, are the greatest ones in heaven, because they always see the face of his Father in heaven.

As for us believers, Jesus rightly calls us little ones. Amid all the terrible spiritual battles in the heavenly realms, we are as weak and helpless as children. Like little children, we often argue and squabble. And like little children, blissfully unaware of everything their parents are going through to take care of them, we are oblivious to the great war all around us, the cosmic battle of the ages being fought over our souls.

But God wants us to be like children. He wants us to turn to him in childlike faith. He wants us to simply listen to his voice, and trust in him, that he will safely bring us through.

So when the disciples asked Jesus who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, it showed their spiritual weakness, that they were being tempted by Satan. So Jesus took a little child and set him in their midst. And he told them, "Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." We must humble ourselves and turn to him. Otherwise, we are falling prey to the devil's attacks, by exalting ourselves and seeking our own glory.

We must acknowledge how helpless we are. We are not the great warriors of the kingdom. So we must humble ourselves like a little child, and repent, and return to Christ, our Savior.

For Christ alone is the mighty conqueror. He is the one who made himself a little lower than the angels, and he withstood the devil's attacks, all to rescue us. The Son of God humbled himself and became incarnate for us, as a man, our brother, all for our redemption.

He chose to become the least in the kingdom of heaven; he became our servant. He was obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him, and crowned him with glory and honor, so there is no one greater in the kingdom of heaven than him.

Christ did all this for you, to drive out the devil and claim you as his own. As he said when you were baptized, "Depart, you unclean spirit, and make room for the Holy Spirit." That was an exorcism. Jesus was driving out the devil from your heart, to make room for God.

So now, because Jesus has done so much to make you his own, he will also zealously protect you. He sternly warns the devil and the world to keep away. He says, "Touch not my anointed ones," for you are the apple of his eye. And he says, "Woe to the world for temptations to sin!" And he warns all our enemies, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea."

What a terrible warning, and terrible condemnation, for all who would try to destroy our faith. However, the world pays no attention to this warning. Instead, the world mocks our faith. It laughs at us, that we actually believe in Jesus. "If your Jesus really died and rose again," they say, "If he really conquered the devil, then where is he now?" To them, Jesus is dead, our Savior is crucified, and the cosmic war is over, if there ever was any war in the first place.

And it's easy for us to give in. It's very easy to be ashamed, ashamed of Christ, ashamed of the Gospel, ashamed of our faith. This is the devil's very worst attack, his final weapon, in the cosmic war for your soul. He wants to make you ashamed of the Gospel.

Woe to the world for this. Woe to the world, because your Savior, Christ crucified, he is truly the Lord of glory, who has destroyed all the powers of darkness by his holy death. When he went to the cross, when he submitted to all the devil's attacks, enduring all the shame and letting Satan attack his body, like a serpent striking his heel – by that same holy death, our Lord put to death the power of death, and he crushed the serpent's head.

So Christ won the great cosmic victory; he conquered all your foes.

Dear Christians, it may seem like God has lost the battle. And it may seem like we are losing too. To all appearances, Satan gets stronger every day, and the fight seems hopeless. The church is more divided than ever, and believers often fall away.

But do not be afraid. Open your eyes, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them. Look around you by faith. See how you are protected on all sides by the army of God, the whole host of heaven. See the horses and chariots of fire – all the angels, led by the risen Christ himself, your great captain, the commander of the armies of heaven. He is the rider on the white horse, whose name is Faithful and True, whose victory is certain, who will never let the evil foe come near to touch even a hair of your head.

Under his protection, baptized into his name, you are safe. The war for your soul is won.

Since you dwell in the shelter of the Most High, under the shadow of the Almighty, since the Lord is your dwelling place, no evil shall be allowed to befall you. For he will command his angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone. You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.

You will trample them all down, because the Lord of hosts, Jesus Christ, has already crushed the serpent under his own mighty feet. Amen.