

Rev. Shaun Arndt
Peace, Sun Prairie
September 30, 2018
St. Michael and all angels

Matthew 26:50b-54

When the Angels did nothing

*Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones
who do his bidding, who obey His Word. Amen.
(Psalm 103:20)*

Dear Friends in Christ,

What would you say is the greatest, most amazing time we hear about the angels in the pages of the Bible? Wouldn't it be hard to choose just one!

There is Jacob's dream where he saw that stairway connecting heaven and earth, with the angels going up and down upon it. The prophet Daniel was thrown into the lions' den, but the next morning he didn't even have a scratch, because

God sent an angel to shut lions' mouths. Or think of the night of Jesus' birth, when the **great company of the heavenly host** sang God's praises to the trembling shepherds.

When it comes to understanding the sheer power of the angels, think of today's first lesson where just *one* angel in *one* night wiped out 185,000 Assyrian soldiers!

But when it comes to what you and I need most of all, one of the most important and amazing accounts of the angels has to be our Gospel lesson. But it's not because of what the angels did, but because of what they *did not do*—the night **When the Angels did nothing.**

In the moonlit garden of Gethsemane, we see Jesus pray to the Father. Not far away his disciples sleep rather than watch and pray.

Now torchlight scatters the darkness. Judas the traitor arrives with **a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests** to capture Christ. After Judas' infamous

kiss of greeting we hear this: **Then they advanced, took hold of Jesus, and arrested him.**

The soldiers grab hold of the Almighty God the Son in our human flesh and blood, the one through whom the angel armies were made—and the **angels did nothing.**

Oh, but Peter did something. **Suddenly, one of the men with Jesus reached out his hand, drew his sword, and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.**

It is John's gospel that identifies the disciple with the sword as Peter. But this verse makes it clear: Peter was a fisherman and *not* a swordsman. I don't know what he was aiming at, but all he does in the end is strike a servant's **ear.**

No matter how you look at it, what Peter did was foolish—sinfully foolish. And not just because he was one man against a crowd of maybe a hundred or more.

It was foolish because it went against everything Jesus had told him and taught him. God's kingdom, His Church was not to grow by swords and armies, but by the scattering of the good seed of the Word of God. What's more, Jesus had told his disciples repeatedly that he must suffer and die.

But Jesus tells us another reason why Peter's actions were foolish: **Do you not realize that I could call on my Father, and at once he would provide me with more than twelve legions of angels?**

Think it over Peter. If I had wanted to escape I wouldn't need your puny help to do so! I could speak a word and there would be **more than twelve legions of angels** at my side.

At the time of Christ, a Roman legion at full strength had 6,000 infantry men, plus additional support troops. So at the bare minimum, Jesus is talking about 72,000 angels. Remember our first lesson? One angel in one night defeated an army.

More than 72,000 unimaginably mighty spirit beings backed by the power of God could do far more than crush the crowd arresting Jesus, they could lay low the whole Roman Empire, indeed the whole world—without even breaking a sweat!

Oh Peter! How could you ever think that God didn't know what he was doing here? How could you think swinging your feeble sword could do better than what God's **Scriptures** declared **must happen this way?**

But it's not just Peter. Every time we give way to the sins of worry, fear and doubt we do something similar. When look at the problems in our lives or the troubles in the world and we start to act like God isn't in control as He assures us He is, or that maybe He doesn't really still have the power of angel legions to protect us.

Oh we don't always think it through that way, but still that's what our worry is, a lack of trust in God's power and wisdom and that is every bit as foolish and perverse as a fisherman apostle flailing about with a sword.

Behind every other sin, too, is not listening to what the Lord says, but acting like we know better than the Almighty!

So what the angels *should do* is take Peter, the crowd attacking Jesus, and you and me and toss us **into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his** (fallen) **angels**. And there will indeed be a day when God sends his angels to **separate the wicked from the righteous** at the last judgment.

But first, God has given the most amazing way for sinners to be saved! He sent us a Rescuer **superior** to all the **angels** (Heb 1:4). He gave us Jesus, true and Almighty God, the Son of God who leaves His throne surrounded by the heavenly music of the angels to be surrounded by the discord this fallen world with all its tears, misery and pain.

He whom the Bible tells us **makes his angels winds** and **his servants flames of fire** chose to become weak and helpless to save us. Indeed, in

becoming our brother to come to our rescue, He who has the power to command the angels was once a weak and lowly newborn, not even able to support his own head as he lay in the manger!

All this He does for Peter, and for you, and for me. He takes our place to provide the holiness we lack. His life was one of perfect trust, flawless listening to God's Word, blameless obedience to God's commands free of all doubt and worry!

And then in the garden as sinful men reach out their hands to arrest Him, the Maker and Commander of the heavenly armies it happens! **The Angels did—nothing.** He who so often commanded His angels to guard his people, He, Himself goes undefended! **Twelve legions**—tens of thousands **of angels**—a heartbeat away but they do not lift a finger to save Jesus.

Why?! Not because they were on their break or because this wasn't in their contract. It's because they carry out the will of God. They only go at His command. And it was the Father's will to give His only Son for the life of the world. It was the Son's

will to not raise his voice in protest, but as to as the Good Shepherd lay down his life for us sinful sheep!

So **the Angels did nothing.** And after healing the servant injured by Peter's attack (John 18), Christ lets them take him away to beatings and bruising, to be spit upon and wear a crown of thorns. Yes all the way to the cross and the agonies of hell in the dark hours of Good Friday and finally the sting of death.

All the while **the angels did nothing,** because Jesus chooses to willingly suffer all these things for you and me, to the pay the awful price for our doubt and worry, failure to listen and obey all God has commanded.

Because **the Angels did nothing** Jesus **fulfills** what God promised in the **Scriptures,** He willingly takes the **punishment** that gives us **peace** with God, the very peace the angels sang of at Jesus' birth, **peace** in every sin forgiven by Jesus' holy blood.

But three days later, the angels had something to do again. At the empty tomb an angel preached that first Easter sermon: **He is not here; He has risen!** Because Jesus lives, because He kept the **Scripture's** promise that He would conquer death, you can know He will also fulfill that promise He has given to all who trust in Him: **because I live you will also will live.**

And the angels also had something to do on the day the Holy Spirit brought you to believe in Jesus, for most of us at our baptism. On that God's angels celebrated, just as Jesus says: **There is rejoicing in the presence of the angles of God over one sinner who repents** (Luke 15:10).

Because the Lord loves you so much **His angles did nothing** as He gave himself for you, you can be certain He cares for you and will work all things, even disappointment, struggle and death out for your eternal good. Though we may not see them now, you can be certain the Lord **commands his angels... to guard you in all your ways.**

Indeed, He will finally do for you what his angels did for the poor beggar Lazarus when he died, He will send His angels to carry you to heaven's perfect, unending joys! And His angels will be there too on that day He raises your body to life everlasting!

This gospel lesson doesn't need to be your favorite Bible lesson about the angels. But don't miss the comfort and confidence God gives us here, that He loves you so much His **angels did nothing** so that Jesus gives you everything you truly need! Amen.

(The LORD) will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. Amen.