

Grace, mercy and peace are your through faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

⁶ Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. ⁷ He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.” **This is God’s Word.**

Dear Recipients of God’s Grace and Messengers of the Good News,

Every so often the subject of angels comes up in various Bible Classes and group discussions, and that’s not really surprising because angels are mentioned many times in scripture and people are curious about these creatures, But people don’t always have a good understanding of where angels came from or what their true purpose is in this world.

Some people have the mistaken idea that when a person dies they become an angel – they get their wings, so to speak. But that’s not really true. Angels were created during the six days of creation and are special beings with the specific purpose of protecting God’s people and being God’s messengers.

We see an example of a guardian angel in our first lesson as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are thrown into a fiery furnace. These men were not going to give into the sin of idolatry. Whether they lived or died they were going to remain faithful to God. If they died they would be taken to heaven because of their faith and if they lived they could continue to serve God. It was God’s will that continue to serve him and to be faithful witnesses of God’s Word and so he sent an angel to rescue these men and we see the effect it had on King Nebuchadnezzar. He had to acknowledged the greatness of the one true God. But what about the angel spoken of in our sermon text?

The Book of Revelation is a book that attaches symbolism to most of the word pictures in the book. As we consider this picture of an angel, is it a specific messenger of God or does it refer to many messengers? And as we consider the messenger, let’s also pay attention to the message – for the gospel message is the basis for our salvation.

I. “Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.” The gospel is to be proclaimed to every person on the earth and that certainly agrees with the command Jesus gave his disciples just before he ascended into heaven, **“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”** (Mt. 28:19-20). The Gospel message is for everyone – no one is to be excluded because everyone has fallen short of God’s demand for perfection. We need the Gospel’s promise of free and full forgiveness.

But the Gospel has always been under attack. At the time Jesus came into the world, the Pharisees had replaced the promises of God with work righteousness. That is why the message of Jesus was unlike anything the people had heard before. And even after Jesus had paid for our

sins on the cross and risen from the dead on Easter morning to proclaim his victory over sin, death and the power of the devil, the attacks on the gospel and God's people continued.

Early Christians were often persecuted and thrown into jail. Many were put to death because of their faith. The attacks on the gospel were not only physical but also spiritual. Groups of people known as Judaizers tried to convince the early Christian congregations to combine the Old Testament Laws with the gospel – thus distorting God's plan of salvation to a cooperative effort of faith and good works.

When attacking the messengers didn't work, they attacked the heart of the message – they attacked Jesus Christ and tried to raise doubt as to whether he could have really been the Savior of the world. Some of these attacks led to the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds written to defend the deity of Christ. When these attacks on the person of Christ didn't work, history repeated itself as the Catholic church tried to promote salvation as a cooperative effort where God gets you going and you have to do the rest. That led to the Lutheran Reformation.

Martin Luther was a Catholic monk, a theologian and a professor of the Old Testament. But he struggled with his sins. No matter how much he tried to pay for them he couldn't rid himself of the guilt. Fortunately Luther diligently read the scriptures. With the help of the Holy Spirit he found the gospel message in Paul's letter to the Romans. We can't begin to understand the feeling of relief Luther felt as the good news of forgiveness permeated his soul and removed the guilt of his sins. This was a message he had to share. And so Luther tried to reform the Catholic Church but his efforts were rejected and he was excommunicated from the Church. That didn't stop Luther and actually was the beginning of the Lutheran Church.

Many theologians believe that the angel referred to in this portion of Revelation may have been a prophecy pointing to Martin Luther. He certainly was instrumental in preserving the gospel message at a time when it was almost lost and we can't argue with this idea. But the attacks on the gospel have continued throughout history from outside the church as well as from within. And the angel pictured in these verses from Revelation are the messengers of God that proclaim the gospel message throughout history and to every nook and cranny of the world. Even you and I can be one of these messengers proclaiming this gospel message.

That is what we as a synod and as a church and as individuals are all about. Looking to Christ Jesus for our salvation and preserving the purity of this message contained in God's Word. That is why we are concerned about doctrine and practice. The lessons of history show us just how easy it is for a false teaching to work its way into a church, cast doubt on or distort the gospel message, and lead people away from God.

The message is simple. We are saved because of what Jesus has done, not because of anything we do. We are saved because Jesus paid for our sins on the cross and brings us forgiveness through the gift of faith. We believe that God's Word is the absolute truth which God has given us to bring us to faith and to guide us in Christian living. That is the good news we believe and proclaim, and yet at times, we get caught up in thinking our good works will somehow help us get to heaven. There are times when we fall into the trap of looking at what we have done instead of what Christ has done for us.

Take the story of a man who died and stood before St. Peter at the gates of heaven. St. Peter said: "Here's how it works. You tell me all the good things that you've done, I'll tally them up, and when you score a hundred points, you get to come into heaven."

The man hesitated for a moment but then thought, "I've done a lot of good things. I've got it made." So he started out with, "Well, I was married to the same woman for fifty years and never cheated on her, not even in my heart." "Great," said Peter. "That's worth two points." "Two points?" the man asked. "Well I attended church all my and life and supported its ministry with my offerings and talents." "Terrific," exclaimed Peter. "That's certainly worth another point." "One point!!" the man responded. "I started a soup kitchen and worked in a shelter for the homeless. I spent my Thanksgiving and Christmas days serving dinners to the less fortunate." "Fantastic! That's good for two more points," said Peter.

Exasperated the man cried: "At this rate the only way I'll get into heaven is by the grace of God!" "Bingo! One hundred points. Welcome to heaven!" replied Peter (author unknown –found in Christian News September 12th, 2005, p. 21).

Sometimes we get so caught up in what we are doing, we need that wakeup call too. We are saved only by God's grace. Our good works come as a result of God's grace. They are evidence of what is in our hearts. God's grace is the only thing that can bring us relief from our sins.

Thank goodness we have God's grace to bring us forgiveness for all the times we fail to follow his Word. Thank goodness we have God's grace to bring us the good news of salvation and to help us live our lives for him out of thankfulness for the wonderful gift of faith he has given us.

Whenever you are tempted to mix anything else with the gospel or to whenever you are tempted to ignore the truths found in God's Word it's like using duct tape to make repairs when only a nail will do. And that's exactly what God did; he fixed our problem of sin with a nail (author unknown – found in Christian News September 12th, 2005, p. 21). Nothing needs to be added to what God has done. Jesus has done everything necessary for salvation. Believe it! Proclaim it!

So remember who you are. Like Martin Luther, you are an angel – a messenger of God – with the only message that brings life and saves a person from hell. May God's Word continue to bring us relief for our sins, may it guide us in our lives and may we take every opportunity to Share the Good News, not because we must, but because we can, because God has redeemed us to be a messenger of the Gospel. Amen.