

Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

SERMON FOR

October 18, 2015

“Do Guardian Angels Exist”



Reverend Bill Freeman: Senior Minister
Eckart Seeber: Music Minister
Marie Paulus-Nyquist: Children's Minister
LouAnne Fraser: Lay Reader

Menifee United Church of Christ

Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 AM

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Live Life Fully Alive!

Psalm 33:18-22

Truly the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine. Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and shield. Our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you.

Psalm 91:9-12

Because you have made the LORD your refuge, the Most High your dwelling-place, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.

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Jesus Does Not Revere The Rich

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Angels are a part of popular culture. Movies showcase them, writers write about them, and even jokes speak of angels.

Jack, a lawyer, died suddenly at the age of 45. Jack was greeted at the pearly gates by an angel. The angel said, "We've been waiting for you for a long time." Jack said, "What do you mean? I'm only 45, right in the prime of my life, far too young to die." The angel said, "You're not 45. You're 85." Jack said, "If you think I'm 85, then you definitely have the wrong guy." The angel looked at a clipboard, then said to the lawyer, "Nope. According to our records you're 85. I've checked all the hours you've billed your clients and you definitely have to be 85!"

In the movie, "It's A Wonderful Life," Jimmy Stewart is interrupted from committing suicide by Clarence, his Guardian Angel. So maybe our Guardian Angels lead us to good things, like this church, and keep us from bad things, the way Clarence did with Jimmy Stewart. Also in that movie we're told that whenever a bell rings, an angel gets his (or her) wings.

G. K. Chesterton was an English writer, journalist, and poet at the turn of the last century. He was also a convert to Catholicism from the Church of England. G. K. Chesterton declared, "The reason angels can fly is because they take themselves lightly."

I hope we take ourselves lightly, too. Maybe when we do, that's when we're closest to our Guardian Angels.

The Bible is brimming with stories of angels.

Angels are mentioned more than 300 times in the Bible. After Jesus was tempted by the Devil in the wilderness, according to the Gospel of Matthew, "Then the devil left Jesus, and suddenly angels came and waited on Jesus." I wonder if those were Jesus' Guardian Angels.

The Psalmist believes in Guardian Angels. The Psalmist proclaims: Because God is your dwelling place, no evil shall come upon you. For God will command his angels to guard you. Their hands will lift you up. And they'll keep you from stubbing your toe on a rock. The Psalmist also says: God's eye is on those who hope in God's love. God is our help and our shield. And maybe God's help and shield take the form of Guardian Angels.

We'll hear Bible stories in a few weeks about an angel visiting a virgin. We'll read in the Bible about a choir of angels singing in the sky. And we'll sing songs about angels. "Hark! The herald

angels sing.” “Angels we have heard on high.” And: “The first Noel, the angel did say.”

Angels will soon be everywhere, if they aren't already.

I've had encounters with what I believe are Guardian Angels.

I was driving on a busy road many years ago. I was quite tired. Before I knew it, I fell asleep at the wheel. All of a sudden I heard a loud voice shout my name. “BILL!” I woke up just in time to slam on the brakes and avoid hitting a station wagon full of kids in front of me. Since I was alone in my car at the time, who shouted my name? Was that my Guardian Angel? Or maybe: Was that the Guardian Angels of the kids in the back of that station wagon?

When I first came to this church, I was told that there are angels living in this sanctuary. I was told people have seen angels in this sanctuary. I was told that there's a row of lights - up here on the ceiling - and no one can figure out how to turn them off. I was told that the angels in this sanctuary keep them on. When my colleague, Pastor Ramirez, put up ropes on the back pews to encourage people to sit up front, I asked for some signs to be placed on the ropes: Reserved for angels. I did it as a little joke. But I'm not sure anymore that it's a joke. I'd like to think that there are angels sitting in the pews of this church.

I applied for the position of Senior Minister at this church a couple years ago on a lark. I'd only been to California once before. It was a couple thousand miles from what I considered to be home, in Michigan. So when I got a call from the Search Committee of this church to do a Skype interview, I did not think I'd be seriously considered for the position. Obviously, though, I eventually did get the job. Or, the call, as we say in ministry. And I hope you know, I love it here. I love all the people here. I

love all the programs we do here. And I love all the social justice we do here in the name of Jesus. And now I wonder, since several people in this church believe in angels and Guardian Angels: Did my Guardian Angel lead me to Meniffee United Church of Christ? And did the Guardian Angels of Meniffee United Church of Christ lead this church to me? I also wonder if your Guardian Angel has led you to this church? Or again, have the Guardian Angels of Meniffee United Church of Church led this church to you?

I'd like to believe there are Guardian Angels everywhere we go.

Everyone has their own encounter with Guardian Angels. Or not.

Have you ever felt guarded or guided by what you considered to be your Guardian Angel? What was that like? Have you ever tried to tell anybody about that? Did they believe you? Do you believe in Guardian Angels? This is a United Church of Christ church, so you're free to believe in Guardian Angels or not. And I'm a United Church of Christ minister, so I'm free to believe in Guardian Angels, too. And I do.

Maybe Guardian Angels are like Tinker Bell in Peter Pan. They only exist if you believe that they exist. The longer I live, the more I believe that Guardian Angels exist.

Now, rational, reasonable, thoughtful people probably think the idea of Guardian Angels is ridiculous. To them I would ask: Why? Because you can't see them? Have you ever seen a thought? If not, does that mean thoughts don't exist? If the response is: Well, we know thoughts exist because people experience thoughts. Well then, why can't angels exist, if people experience angels? After all, Meister Eckhart, a Christian mystic from the Middle Ages, said an angel is, "an idea (or a thought) of God."

I like the idea expressed in this Irish Blessing. "These things I warmly wish for you: someone to love, some work to do, a bit o' sun, a bit o' cheer, and a guardian angel always near."

For those who don't believe in invisible Guardian Angels, there are visible Guardian Angels.

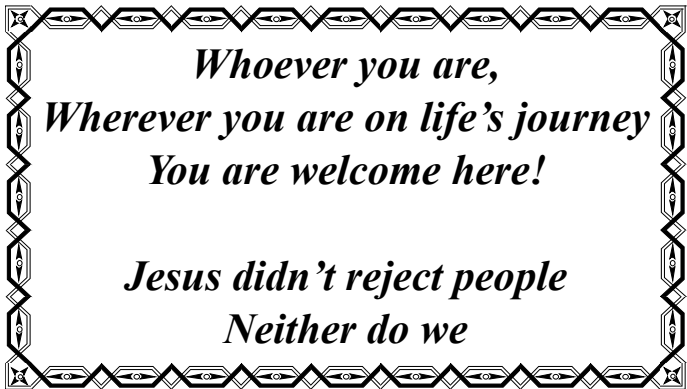
I think of First Responders on 9-11 in New York City, putting their lives on the line to save people trapped in the World Trade Center. They are truly Guardian Angels. I think of firefighters in California, putting their lives on the line to put out millions of acres of wildfires across the state. They are truly Guardian Angels. And I think of those in a usually less risky profession, school teachers, who give their all to give students a good education. They are truly Guardian Angels, too.

When this church gives food from our Food Pantry to some people who are hungry: You are truly Guardian Angels. When this church gives warm clothing from our Clothing Closet to some people who are cold: You are truly Guardian Angels. And when this church gives a place to sleep in our Residential Assistance Program to some people who are homeless: You are truly Guardian Angels.

Whenever you follow the teachings of Jesus - feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger; love everyone, forgive everyone, help everyone - then you are truly a Guardian Angel. And whenever you are a Guardian Angel to people in need, then I believe your own Guardian Angel, and God, are well pleased.

Let us pray...

God of Love,
Help us to be aware of Guardian Angels.
Help us to experience Guardian Angels.
And help us to be other people's Guardian Angels.
Now and forevermore.
By the power of the Holy Spirit.
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.

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*Whoever you are,
Wherever you are on life's journey
You are welcome here!*

*Jesus didn't reject people
Neither do we*

THE GOLDEN RULE

*Do to others what you would
have them do to you.*

Christianity

*What is hateful to you
do not do to others.*

Judaism

*None of you believes until he wishes for his
brother what he wishes for himself.*

Islam

*Do not do to others
what would cause pain if done to you.*

Hinduism

*Hurt not others in ways that you yourself
would find hurtful.*

Buddism

*Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain,
and your neighbor's loss as your loss.*

Taoism

*Do not do to others
what you do not want them to do to you.*

Confucianism

*Treat other people
as you'd want to be treated in their situation.*

Humanism