

19th Sunday after Pentecost
September 29, 2024
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
2 Kings 6:8-17 (EHV)

⁸Now when the king of Aram was waging war against Israel, he would make plans with his officials, saying, "My camp will be at such and such a place." ⁹But the man of God would send a message to the king of Israel, saying, "Be careful when you pass this place because the Arameans are going down there." ¹⁰So the king of Israel would send scouts to the place that the man of God had pointed out. So the man of God warned him, and he was kept safe—and not just once or twice.

¹¹The king of Aram was enraged because of this. He summoned his officials and said to them, "Won't you tell me who of us is for the king of Israel?" ¹²One of his officials said, "No, my lord the king. It is Elisha, the prophet in Israel, who tells the king of Israel the words which you speak in your bedroom." ¹³Then he said, "Go and see where he is. Then I'll send men and capture him." He was told, "Dothan is where he is."

¹⁴So he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They came at night and surrounded the city. ¹⁵When the man of God's servant got up early and went out, there were soldiers, horses, and chariots surrounding the city. So his attendant said to Elisha, "Oh no, my lord! What will we do?" ¹⁶He answered, "Don't be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." ¹⁷Then Elisha prayed and said, "O Lord, open his eyes so that he can see." Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he saw that the hills were full of horses and chariots of fire, all around Elisha.

Dear Friends in Christ,

This day has been set aside by Christians for going on one thousand years as a celebration of St. Michael and All Angels. We heard about the archangel Michael battling Satan in the reading from Revelation. We hear about the other angels in many places in the Bible. But we also hear plenty of things about angels in popular thinking of the day. Let's dispense with some of the myths about angels before we look at what God tells us in 2 Kings today.

Some think people become angels when we die. But angels are angels and humans are humans. Some ideas about angels come from Hollywood angels like Clarence in "It's a Wonderful Life." The angel who is sent to earth to guide someone through life decisions and if the angel does a good job, they earn their wings. And then there is the image of baby angel cherubs. But we need more than a buddy angel to help us make life decisions. We need more than cute baby angels to make us smile. We need the powerful angels of the Lord God Almighty when surrounded by earthly and spiritual evil forces. God sends his angels on such a mission in 2 Kings 6.

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Aram was at war against Israel. Note that this is during the time of the divided kingdom. Israel is the northern tribes who had for the most part abandoned and corrupted the worship of the true God. Judah was the southern kingdom who were more often faithful to the Lord God. In his mercy God had the prophet Elisha working in Israel to call the people back to the Lord. As Elisha does his spiritual work of calling to repentance, he also gives advice to the king of Israel in matters of government. God reveals the plans of the enemy king to Elisha who then tells the

king of Israel. This kind of intel about the enemy movements gave Israel the clear advantage in the battles and it kept happening, “not just once or twice.” Understandably, the enemy king was upset that his plans always failed.

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The king assumes there is a spy among his officials. But somehow one knows that Elisha is the problem. Elisha's name would have been known to the officials in Aram. One of their army commanders named Na'aman had been healed of leprosy by Elisha (really by the Lord) some time ago. Elisha's activities as a powerful prophet of the Lord extended beyond the borders of his own nation. The arrogance of the king of Aram shows in his decision to send men to capture Elisha, the same Elisha who knew the words the king spoke in his bedroom. How do you expect to surprise a prophet when the Lord is telling him your every move? But the king is somewhat wise. He does not just send a small group. He sends an army to capture one man.

¹⁴So he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They came at night and surrounded the city. ¹⁵When the man of God's servant got up early and went out, there were soldiers, horses, and chariots surrounding the city. So his attendant said to Elisha, “Oh no, my lord! What will we do?”

From a human point of view, the king has won. Elisha's servant can clearly see that they are outnumbered and have no way to escape the city. They are surrounded by an overwhelming force. “What will we do?”

Thankfully, not many of us will be surrounded by a hostile enemy army. But we will still find ourselves in situations when we ask, “What will we do?” Stress and anxiety levels have been on the rise among Americans in recent years. People are finding themselves in more and more situations in which they wonder, “What will I do?” They don't see a way out. Tragically, some chose to end their own lives because they see no way out, no end to whatever issue is surrounding them.

Some might think that followers of Jesus won't face such desperate situations. Some believers might give the impression that true believers will never be in doubt like the servant of Elisha. Fellow followers of Jesus, we are not in heaven yet. Therefore, we may still face days of anxiety and fear and doubt. It may be due to more earthly issues: money, job, school, disasters, bullies, physical and mental illnesses. Or it may be due to spiritual issues like shame, guilt, temptation, secret sins, and accusations of Satan.

We may go to sleep each night praying “Give us this day our daily bread...forgive us our trespasses...lead us not into temptation...deliver us from evil.” But in the morning the bank account is still tiny, the feeling of guilt and shame is still there, the struggle with a particular sin is not gone, and the evil and violence of the world fills the news. We are surrounded. “Lord, what will we do?”

¹⁶[Elisha] answered, “Don't be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” ¹⁷Then Elisha prayed and said, “O Lord, open his eyes so that he can see.” Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he saw that the hills were full of horses and chariots of fire, all around Elisha.

Dear followers of Jesus, those who are with us are more than those who are with them. Whatever evil surrounds us, the Lord of angel armies can handle it according to his will and in his time.

But he has the power to handle it. Christ himself took care of sin by becoming sin for us and suffering death on the cross to pay for every sin. The Holy Spirit comforts us with the good news of forgiveness through Word and Sacrament. In addition, our Triune God sends his angels to serve and protect us. Notice that the angels surrounding Elisha were not cute baby cherubs. They did not take the form of ordinary men. These were powerful soldiers with horses and chariots of fire, just what Elisha and his servant needed. Though surrounded by the enemy, his servant realized that the enemy was powerless to harm them when facing off against the powerful angels of God.

Our loving God still sends his powerful angels to us. We may never see them before we reach heaven, but they are doing battle for us in the spiritual realms. They are protecting us from physical harm. So if you are worried and anxious about your children being in this scary world, remember first of all that God put his name on them. They were claimed by Father, Son and Holy Spirit in baptism as his children and he will not easily let them go. In addition, when talking about little ones, Jesus said, "I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 18:10). The Lord cares so much about your little ones that he sends powerful angels to watch over them.

When you worry about health and safety, recall the words of our Psalm for today. "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone" (Psalm 91). Our gracious Father in heaven is concerned about our well being so much that he sends his powerful angels to protect us according to his will.

And when we are feeling weak and helpless in our battle against temptation, sin and the devil, pray the prayer we will sing at the end of the service. Luther's Morning and evening prayers both include the petition "Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me."

There are many misconceptions about angels in this world. Today we thank the Lord, our God, for creating angels and giving them a mission that helps us. The author of Hebrews tells us the glorious purpose of God's angels. "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent out to serve for the benefit of those who are going to inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14). Thanks be to God for all the angels.

Amen.