

Reformation Sunday
November 4, 2018
Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM

Revelation 14:6,7 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.”

“God’s Good News Flies Forever”

It doesn’t happen all the time. But when you are least expect it, you can sometimes spot them. High above the canyons, sailing over the mesas, large majestic birds soar through the air. They must have amazing eyesight. They circle hundreds of feet in the atmosphere and then swoop down to the ground with the precision of laser-guided military arsenal. And yet, just watching them up there in the sky, just soaking in their majestic flight, the effortless floating can be an inspiring sight.

There is another kind of flight that happens all the time. In fact, it happens so often all around us, you probably don’t even notice it. It happens with people we know and see every day. It happens in big ways and tiny ways. It’s even more impressive and more important and creates a greater impact than the flight patterns of powerful birds of prey. But because it is so common, you probably don’t even realize it. Did you know there are angels all around us? And not just any angels, God’s messengers. They carry God’s good news of salvation for sinful people. Those messengers go and fly and soar from one human soul to another. And it’s not just them. It’s not just a single angel soaring high in the sky in isolation. It’s something that has been happening by God’s power and God’s grace for generations, for centuries. And God promises it will keep happening. His message, his good news will keep flying. That’s the reality God wants us to know and cherish and hold in our hearts from Revelation chapter 14 today. Revelation tells us God’s messengers are constantly carrying his good news. They are doing it right now. They won’t ever be silenced or stopped. God’s Good News Flies Forever.

Are you like me? When you see those high-flying birds soaring free in the skies, do you get a little jealous? I mean, we’re stuck down here. And sometimes I can’t help but thinking about how liberating, how exhilarating it would be to just float above it all and soar. I don’t think we are alone. Throughout history, human beings have marveled at the ability to fly. Humans have modeled machines and new inventions to mimic the ability to get off the ground and stay airborne.

But I’m guessing that is an especially powerful desire for any of us when things aren’t go the way we want them to go. When these words in Revelation were written, things weren’t going so well for Christians. There are some terrifying images in the Book of Revelation, but they all correspond to some realities faced by real people that were even more frightening. In the chapters surrounding this one, we see horrifying beasts rise up as enemies of God’s

people. They destroy so many with their lies and deceptions. People are cowering in fear. It seems like the devil and his evil forces will just keep advancing, continue to make progress, march toward victory without much resistance. But then the page turns to Revelation chapter 14. Here we see a picture of God's people enjoying perfect peace with Jesus. But there is one big message that dominates the entire book of Revelation. These vivid visions were recorded so God's people wouldn't lose heart or give up hope. So any time you read Revelation, just remember God's got this. Throughout it all, the best thing to remember is in the end Jesus wins. We get just a slice of that victory in Revelation chapter 14 when we hear: **"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."** (Revelation 14:6)

That's such an important message for Christians of every age and time and place to keep in our minds and in our hearts. It's important, because so often it doesn't always seem like the gospel is soaring. So often the gospel seems grounded, stuck here on the earth. Here's what I mean. So often it feels like the Bible and God's Word and spiritual things in general aren't very, well, practical in our lives. We have so many other things to worry. We don't have time to think lofty thoughts about God's angels and what they do in history.

Did you know that in the most recent survey on religion, almost 90% of Americans say they believe in God? That's a lot more people than you probably thought. And 72% of Americans believe in angels.¹ We live in a pretty cynical time when people are distrustful of just about everything. So I think that's pretty impressive. But when you ask a few more questions, the results aren't quite so encouraging. Only 56% of people believe in God as described in the Bible. Almost everyone else believes in some kind of higher power or spiritual force in the universe.² So now we can compare the numbers and see that more people believe in angels than the people that believe in the God as described in the Bible.

So what does that mean? That means we have our own ideas of angels. We have our own definition of what kind angels we want. And I think those are the messengers that give the practical kind of help we are after. They are the angels of getting good grades without having to study. The angels of getting your car fixed without having to drop hundreds of dollars at a mechanic or even having to pay your cousin for the parts. Our kind of angels are the angels of dropping a good paying, low responsibility job right in your lap. These angels make your children behave and brush their without scolding and yelling and bribery. These angels take care of devastating diseases and aches in our joints without trips to the healthy center and waiting long hours in waiting rooms and taking all sorts of medications. Angels force your uncle to put down the bottle and prevent your sister from pushing her kids off on you again. Our version of angels tells us how wonderful and kind and smart we are to boost our self-esteem, improve our finances, and take care of our health concerns. They drop iPhones in our hands and park new trucks in front of our homes. When we feel grounded by life, those are the kinds of angels that would help us really soar.

¹ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/193271/americans-believe-god.aspx>

² <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/april/we-believe-in-god-what-americans-mean-pew-survey.html>

But those are angels invented by our own imaginations. What God says we actually need is the angel flying in midair in Revelation. We need the message he brings: "**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.**" (Revelation 14:7) There are people who study human behavior and describe the nudges that help us versus the disciplines we need. Nudges are small changes in our environment that make it easier to make the the choice we want to make.³ Think of setting a bunch of apple slices or baby carrots on your kitchen counter so it's actually more work to go into the cupboard to get a bag of chips when you need a snack. Disciplines on the other hand are tough choices we consciously make. We have to push ourselves to the limit. Disciplines develop and train us from the inside so we make the better choices even when it's not easier.

God understands what you really need. That's why the kind of angel he chooses to send gives a message that isn't easy. God's angel tells you to "**fear God and give him glory.**" (Revelation 14:7) Fear in the Bible is often another way of saying faith. But it's slightly different because it involves holy reverence and deep awe. Fear for God clears out any competing allegiances in your heart. There is simply no room for anyone or anything else. Fear for God means the discipline of removing from your heart the idea that the gospel message from God is outdated or impractical or weak. Fear of God means coming to grips with the real judgment of God that isn't just fairy tale meant to scary little children. Fear of God means opening your heart to the reality of how easily you get discouraged because you fail to make God's Word a priority, how rare glory is in your life, how infrequently you worship him because you are chasing after angels of your own invention.

What are we celebrating on October 31st? Is that a trick question for a crowd of Lutheran Christians? As we look at the words of Revelation chapter 14 we see God has sent his angel messengers throughout the history of the world. Every time things seemed extra dark, most dreadful like hope was completely lost, His good news flies. Do you see his angels flying?

We can celebrate the Reformers without dressing up as Martin Luther or indulging in German food. We have a heritage to celebrate. The heritage of Lutheran Christians uniquely realistic and ideally suited for the real world. Luther talked about the way God produces those nudges and discipline in our lives through prayer, meditation, and temptation. The more we are absorbed in God's Word, the more our hearts will overflow in prayer to God. That includes both praise and thanks for God's goodness to us as well as those 9-1-1 prayers of help when we feel helpless and powerless. Prayer points us back to God's Word instead of just getting lost in our thoughts or emptying our minds in a mystical exercise. Meditation is an engaged interaction with God's Word that allows us to chew on God's message and swallow it in bit sized amounts until it becomes part of who we are. Prayer and meditation are more logical. But Luther reminds us that God uses temptations, testing and afflictions in the lives of Christians too. When we struggle, when we are going through rough times, we know we can't get through it on our own. We need Jesus. We need to rely on Jesus alone and exclusively.

³ Crouch, Andy. The Tech-Wise Family. Grand Rapids: Baker Books; 2017, p. 33.

This is the way God gives you the eternal gospel. Jesus is that good news. Jesus is the only one who ever walked this earth with a 100% perfect track record of always fearing God. Jesus lived every day of his life to the glory of God. Jesus gave uncompromising worship exclusively to the true God. And yet at the cross God's judgment fell on Jesus. Jesus took that judgment so you can a different kind of fear for God. When you have a proper respect and awe of who God is and what God does, you can stand in amazement at his infinite and undeserved grace. Glorify the one who sent his own Son to spare you from severe judgment. Worship in joyful astonishment at the one who chose you to be his own child purely out of his goodness. This fear and trust removes competing allegiances. It clears out the debilitating fear of anyone or untying in life that would cause me to fail to serve God.

That means your heart gets to soar with the gospel freedom from Jesus Christ. Your life gets to be filled with gospel worship, gospel fear and every moment consumed with glorifying God.

We could use more angel costumes this week. Pure, innocent angels would be welcome replacements for ghosts, goblins and ghouls. But you don't need any special costume to be God's angel. You get to be that good news messenger anywhere you go any time. You get to be an angel with a life-changing message whether you're getting good grades are barely passing, whether your job is easy or you have no job at all, when things are peaceful in your family or typically chaotic. You have the good news of Jesus to share with the inattentive and unconcerned people in your life, your friends trapped in sin, and fellow Christians who are feeling weary and discouraged. Psychologists call this "flow." We think we will be happiest when life is easy. But studies show it's actually the opposite. When you push yourself to your limits voluntarily in efforts to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile, that's when you get the best sense of satisfaction.⁴ God's nudges and discipline will be rewarding. God's good news flies and produces something more meaningful than anything else life could offer.

And this is the confidence you have as you carry around the good news of Jesus Christ. The good news will soar. God's message will not silenced, can not be defeated. God's good news flies forever. Amen.

⁴ Newport, Cal. Deep Work. New York: Grand Central Publishing; 2016, p. 84.