

2000: ST. MICHAEL'S CONFERENCE SERMON

St. Michael and All Angels (transferred): August 26, 2000
Holy Eucharist: Camp Wildwood - St. Michael's Youth Conference
M.P. - Psalm 34 / **2 Kings 6:8-17** / Acts 12:1-11
H.E. - **Revelation 12:7-11** / St. Matthew 18:1-10

From the First Lesson at Morning Prayer, from the Second Book of Kings:
Fear not, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them. (2 Kings 6:16)

There was war at St. Michael's: Squirrel and its angels fought against Evergreen; and Evergreen fought and its angels, and prevailed not, neither was their sleep found any more . . .

The King of Syria is at war with the King of Israel; and like all good commanders, he wishes to use the element of surprise. So in secret he meets with his advisors to discuss their strategy. They weigh the various possibilities and they decide where to march and where to set up their camp. They hope that with the right attention to detail they might catch the King of Israel before he even knows that he is in danger.

But before the trap can be set, someone tells the King of Israel. He is warned and he avoids the trap, much to the annoyance of the King of Syria.

But not all plans unfold as they are meant. One trap unsprung is not a dire problem; but when it happens a second time, well, then the King of Syria has a problem.

He knows that it can be but one thing: someone in his counsel, one of his trusted advisors, one of his own servants, is a spy for the King of Israel. There can be no other explanation, no other possibility.

"Will you not show me who of us is for the King of Israel", he desperately asks his servants.

"None, my lord, O king;" is the answer offered, "but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the King of Israel the words that you speak in your bedchamber."

The King of Syria realizes that this must be the answer, so he quickly dispatches an army to deal with his problem. They go to the city of Dothan to find the man of God, to find this Elisha; and when Elisha's servant rises early one morning, he discovers that the city in which they live is surrounded by hostile forces.

He reacts as one would normally, naturally, react under such circumstances: he is terrified. He rushes to his master and he cries out in fear:

"Alas, my master! What shall we do?"

But his master Elisha shows none of his servant's terror.

"Fear not", he tells his servant; "Fear not, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

'Are you crazy', we can imagine his servant thinking. 'Have you lost your mind. There's an army out there and little more than us in here, and all you can say is "fear not!"'

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony. (Revelation 12:11)

Much of the imagery in this morning's lessons from Holy Scripture is the imagery of warfare: armies laying siege to cities; a host of angelic warriors with chariots of fire; a dragon and his angels cast out of heaven. It's enough to warm the heart of the most addicted fan of video fantasy games.

But, of course, it's not really a game.

It's really about life; and that why, again this year, we have come together in this place to do the very things that most people, young and old alike, would not do, even to save their souls.

All this week you have listened, perhaps at times more than you cared to; all this week you have listened to the Word of God: at Morning Prayer, at Evening Prayer, at Compline, at the Holy Eucharist, in class, even in some of the games that we have played.

Over and over again you have been asked to reflect on what this Word has to say to you and to your life; on what it offers you in the struggle which is life itself.

It is, of course, a struggle for our very souls, our minds, and our bodies. And it is a struggle in which defeat comes not so much because we have fought and lost but because we have chosen not to fight at all; because we have chosen to take the easier way of accommodation or apathy: 'it's all right, every one else does it'; 'it's too difficult'; 'it's too boring'; 'it's all superstition'. We hear it all, and we are tempted just to give up.

The message which I hope you can take home from this week, the message which I hope you can take home from all this worship, all this study, all this reading and listening and praying, and all the time that we have spent together as friends in Christ, is the very same message which Elisha's servant learnt when God opened his eyes to see the countless hosts of angels and chariots of fire.

We are not alone; and when we fight against evil, we do not fight alone.

The God who has created us; the God who has invited us into a relationship with Him through His Son Jesus Christ; the God who welcomes us as both His children and as His friends, is the very same God who equips us in this struggle.

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony.

The most powerful weapon that God offers to us all is the Word: the Word of God written which tells us of the Word of God Incarnate; the Word of Life which tells us of our new life in Jesus Christ.

It seems to me that each year this Conference ends just a little early. We just seem to be getting to know each other, we just seem to be getting some where and we all have to leave. Why can't it go on longer? Why not a ten day conference, as one person wrote on their evaluation a few years ago.

I'll leave you to react to that idea on your own; but I think the real point is this. It really doesn't matter how long this Conference goes on, because, in the end, we all have to go back. And the point of this Conference is to help you, to help all of us, once we get back; that is, to equip us to live even better lives and even happier lives back home - better and happier because we know even more than we've ever known before about how Jesus Christ can make a difference, a real difference, in our lives.

"Fear not!"

"Fear not, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

Christ's victory is our victory.

And in Jesus Christ there is hope, forevermore.

Fear not!

The Rev'd Kevin M. Stockall