

SERMON FOR ST MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS
SUNDAY 29 SEPTEMBER 2024

ST JUDE'S, BRIGHTON

When I was about 12 or 13 years of age I had three very vivid dreams. I saw myself wearing a clergy collar. I saw myself in a country where dark skinned people lived. I saw myself being hung by the neck off the back of a Land Rover. The memory of those dreams has stayed with me.

I lived and worked for five years in Papua New Guinea and I have worn a clergy collar. The third dream and its interpretation had to wait until in 1974 I attended St Barnabas' Theological College and met the Rev'd Morton T Kelsey from the Notre Dame University, USA. He gave the occasional lecture at St Barnabas' College that year. He lectured on the spiritual implications of 'Out of the Body Experience', and 'Dreams'.

I had the opportunity to ask him about the vision of me being hung by the neck. He said that such a dream was usually pointing to something other than to a literal meaning. His suggestion was that the dream indicated that something in my life needed to die. Great relief! But what in me had to die? Where do I start?

I mention my dreams because they provided motivation for me to seriously consider offering for ordination. I took them to be messages from God. But like prophesy, dreams need to be fulfilled for them to be trusted as a sign or instruction. Mine were fulfilled so I look back on them as a sign and as an instruction. They proved their worth then and they remind me that what I'm doing now is what I am called to do.

Dreams are recorded in the Old Testament. Ezekiel saw visions of God (Ezk 1.1). And in today's reading from the Book of Daniel, Daniel had a dream (Dan 7.1) and (Dan 7.13). The dream was interpreted for Daniel (Dan 7.16).

So yes, I do believe dreams can be a vehicle for spiritual awakening. Perhaps you've been guided by the dreams you've experienced?

You're an angel! A remark to reward unmerited goodness perhaps, certainly an affectionate expression.

Angels have a long and one would say an interesting history. Notwithstanding their frequent mention in both OT and NT literature, angels are mentioned in Mesopotamian and Hittite records as in Canaanite records.

Angels are described throughout the bible, both OT and NT as God's messengers who are active in the affairs of men and women. For example, an angel of the Lord prevented Abraham from killing his son Isaac. (Genesis 22.11). An angel protected the Israelites by forming a protective cloud between them and the pursuing Egyptians during the exodus (Ex 14.19). In the NT an angel warns Joseph to flee to Egypt with Mary and the infant Jesus. (Matt 2.13) And angels surround the throne of God. (Rev4.9)

The theologian John Macquarie describes creation as a hierarchy of life. All living creatures are imbued with a likeness of God. Humankind is the pinnacle of God's creation on earth, but angels are of a higher order. Humankind has the power and authority to rule over all living creatures on land, sky and sea. Macquarie sees the origin and belief in angels as an extension of human awareness of life being an hierarchy. Now, why wouldn't God who created the universe, and everything that is in it, not create a spiritual angelic life to exist within creation? The point I want to make is that a belief in the existence of angels, isn't something we should think is nonsense.

We believe in the Holy Spirit don't we? We believe the disciples saw the risen Jesus! The women touched Jesus who appeared before them as they went from the empty tomb. Don't touch me he said to them (Matt 28.9-10). We try to understand how Jesus entered the room the disciples were in with the door locked without him having to be let in (John 20.19). Thomas reach your hand out and touch me (John 20.22). On the shore of Lake Galilee Jesus ate the fish that had been brought ashore by the disciples. We believe in life after death and those rooms that Jesus has prepared for us in his father's house. We believe in heaven.

And in the company of angels and archangels we will soon say "*Holy, Holy, Holy Lord.*"

So many extraordinary events! The history of angels and visions within Holy Scripture. The mysticism that wraps around us and from time to time breaks into our physical and material world. Things that are beyond our comprehension to challenge us to the core of belief.

Dreams, visions, and angels! I'll let John Macquarie bring this sermon to its end.

“The panorama of creation must be far more breathtaking than we can guess in our corner of the cosmos, for there must be many higher orders of beings whose service is joined with ours under God.” Principles of Christian Theology. Page 218

Fr John