We are a connected community

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Michaelmas 2012 A & C: *Kids:* Angel Windows – connection

The message of our Gospel for the feast of Michael and all Angels is quite simple; tell people about Jesus, and call them to meet him. We saw this acted out right before our eyes where Philip found Nathanael and told him, *We have found Jesus–the promised one*. When Nathanael seemed doubtful, Philip said, *Come and see*. And he took him to meet Jesus. That's today's message. Tell people about Jesus, and encourage them to meet him.

Why? And what's it got to do with Michael and all Angels? Angels are messengers: that's what the name angel means. Philip brought a message to Nathanael, so by definition that made Philip an angel – a messenger. And as he called Nathanael to Jesus, that also made him an evangelist – something Jesus tells all Christians to be. We are to call people to belong, with us, to Jesus.

Who is this Jesus we are introducing people to? He's the most important person we know; he's our teacher; our example, our Redeemer and our Saviour. The Christian message is that telling people about Jesus is the same as telling them about God, the source of our being. And that, astonishingly, the source of our being chose to be born and live among us, die our death and rise from the dead, so he's alive now.

Because Jesus was born and lived our life, died and rose again, we who know Jesus, and anyone we introduce to him, can connect with the source of our being at any point in our life – birth, times of joy, suffering, fulfilment, despair, hope, love, compassion, loneliness, need, fear – and we remain connected on beyond this life. That's some connection. And when we tell of Jesus as our Redeemer and Saviour, we're also

talking about this connection with Jesus helping us to confront the power of things that attack and divide us: hatred, slavery, greed, apathy – and again, even death. That's an extraordinary message to carry; it's a great privilege to be called to carry this message – to join in the work of the Angels.

If people – all living creatures – are to be whole; to thrive; to grow, we need to be connected to the source of our being, like a plant in the soil and sunshine. It's both a biological and a spiritual necessity. Throughout history, the messages that angels bring are all to do with connecting us with the source of our being – the source of all life and growth. The ancient Jewish sages wrote *There is not a single blade of grass on earth below that does not have an angel in the heavens above that strikes it and says to it: 'Grow!'* *(Midrash Rabbah, Bereishit 10:6; Zohar, part I, 251a [on Gen 18.1])*

We people of the book have developed several quirks over the millennia, and we have the joy of encountering plenty of them today. Some of the readings and hymns at Michaelmas can make us feel like tourists in an ancient, exotic world, untouched by the passage of time. As today's tour guide amongst words and images that the *OED* labels *obs*, I want to focus on the centre of all the readings and hymns: our sense of connection with a greater reality than just ourselves – with the divine. I think you'll agree that this calls for extraordinary language and imagery.

We travel in a realm of cosmology and imagery that lots of people in the developed world find alien; bewildering. What do we make of Daniel's white-haired Ancient One enthroned in the heavenly court? Isn't that precisely the picture of God that western thinkers have used to caricature the Church since the eighteenth century? Those same thinkers have also told us to see the cosmic battle in Revelation between Michael and Satan as nothing but an ancient metaphor for the struggle between

good and evil.

It’s up to each one of us to choose whether we see these visions and images as literally real, or as metaphors for our connection with the source of our being. I don’t think it makes much difference which we choose. But if our experience of life is to have any depth, we need to venture into that connectedness, and also to respectfully explore both ancient and contemporary ways of naming and expressing it.

Christians believe that the fullest experience of that connected life is to be found in this community that Jesus called into being: the Church – a community where we can and should share our experiences of God’s messengers, and let those messages shape our lives.

One of our most important roles as connected people is to teach our children how to live connected, full, rich lives of belonging. Kindy teachers are experts in this. They get kids singing funny old songs together, playing together, making things together, co-operating and caring. These are time-tested ways in which we hand down our civilization – our belonging – to successive generations.

They are also significant ways we live out that connection as adults. How do we see that at work here? I see a community that learns and treasures the words and tunes of the hymns; I see people singing together; meeting together; praying together; rejoicing together; grieving together; running a community store together; gardening together; learning together, being a multi-generational community where we know each other’s families, children and grandchildren; founding / supporting Christian work like SJYS and the Magdalene outreaches: the list goes on.

I’m conscious that all these treasures we nurture and hand down are things that our secular world is increasingly reluctant to value or support. Our schools and university

systems are less and less funded to pass on our history, our wisdom and our deepest values. So it falls to the Church to do this – as we have done in other dark ages. One of the most important jobs this parish has is handing on the legacy of spiritual connectedness that God has given this community. We are a connected community. We are built on the bedrock of God's love for us. We experience that most perfectly in the love that unites us in Jesus Christ. When we introduce our friends to Jesus, as Philip did with Nathanael, we connect people with God's love for them, and we offer to share the ways we experience that love in our lives. So go to it Angels!

Amen