

**“Angels and Ghosts”  
Reverend Bill Clark**

**“Ghost and Angels”**

**A Sermon by  
The Reverend Bill Clark**

Sophie and her husband David had just moved to New York City. They had rented a beautiful duplex apartment in Brooklyn, just across the river from Manhattan. It had everything they had hoped for in a NYC apartment, high ceilings, windows with views of gardens, as well as a walnut paneled master bedroom with a bay window looking right on to the statue of liberty. It was perfect! In addition to the master bedroom it had another large bedroom, which was perfect for their two daughters. Sophie and David were very happy.

A week after moving there, David had left on a business trip. Alone in the house with her two daughters, Sophie was working in the little dressing room just off the bedroom, which she had taken over as her space. She had outlined it with shelving and was in there at the sewing machine making a dress for her oldest daughter. It was about ten o'clock at night and Sophie was content and unafraid in her new found home.

Suddenly she had the “shadowed sense” that there was someone in the small room with her. She looked up from the sewing machine and there standing

in the doorway was a man. It was not the seeing like she sees her sewing machine or the dress she had been working on, but a seeing with some inner knowledge. For he was there, she describes and also not there. There were three things she knew about him straight away. He was an older man, he was troubled in some way, and that he was good. He would not harm her. She continued to stare for a while until she cupped her hands over her face and laughed to herself. "Now I have truly gone bananas," I have been spending too much time alone." And yet all the time she knew he was standing there.

Slowly he began to move towards her. Sophie started to shake and sweat began to soak her hands and forehead. He was standing right behind her. Slowly he reached out to touch her. She thought it was a comforting touch, but all she could feel was the cold freezing touch of his fingers. It stung her skin like the feel of dry ice. She was burning up except where the cold hand had touched her. It was horrible. Then he left the room.

A flood of relief overcame her as her whole body sank into a state of calm. Suddenly she realized he had gone into the children's room. She leaped up from the machine and ran to the hall where she stopped dead in her tracks. She was frozen. She knew he was in there and yet she was unable to move.

Sophie stood there for what seemed to her like an eternity when she suddenly noticed the man sitting in the window seat watching her. Anger began to take over and she decided to take control. She spoke out loud and forcibly to him.

“Now listen, I don’t know who you are, but we just moved into this apartment and I want you to know that it is ours now! I love it here. I intend to stay here along time with my family. You are welcome to live here with us, but if you do I expect you to do no damage either to this beautiful apartment or to my family. I will not tolerate us being hurt or harmed! There, she had spoken. She felt better!

He did not speak. He stood up, moved past her across the bedroom and seemed to almost float down the stairs. He went right through the kitchen and continued out the closed back door.

Sophie remained shaken and yet returned to her sewing room and began right away to go back to work. She laughed nervously, “here I am working calmly on my little girls dress being comforted by the purring of the machine and trying to completely forget, I had just met and yelled at a ghost.”

The phone rang. She jumped. Oh great, she shouted, now they use the telephones. It was her landlady, Mrs. Glass.

“Oh, I am sorry for calling so late, but I couldn’t stop thinking about you in the apartment and about my first husband.” She began to tell the story of Dr. Glass.

“You know, my dear, Dr. Glass just loved that place. Why he even did the entire paneling in the master bedroom himself. Why he even passed away right in that room. Oh he just loved that home. His favorite room however, the small one off of the master bedroom, which he used as a study. My land he would spend hours in there. “I don’t know why I am telling you all this know, she replied but I felt it was important.” And she hung up.

Sophie smiled to herself. Well, I have just met your Dr. Glass.

In his book, *Paradise Lost IV*, John Milton wrote, “Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep.” Who are these spiritual creatures that walk the earth? Are they the ghosts of former inhabited beings who lived among us? Or are they angels sent on the wings of the divine to guard and protect us?

Sophie Burnham, in her book *A Book of Angels*, helps to draw out the distinction between ghosts and angels. From her story of Dr. Glass she relates that ghosts are attached by their longing and troubled memories to

this physical plane. Or they are lost shadows, unable to reach the other side. Ghosts are found in every culture and all people tend to agree on how they look. Ghosts, like angels, can appear as a thought nudging our mind, as a sense of their presence, even as disembodied voices, or balls of light. But when a ghost materializes they always take their own form. And this is different than an angel. It is said that sometimes ghosts can bring messages of love and calm to their loved ones but a ghost is not an angel. A ghost has once lived in human form. Often times they return in search of our help. You can see through a ghost, or else they appear as a milky, misty substance with rippling edges. They have no feet. This I did not know. And since they retain their own personalities, they are as dear or as wicked as they were in life. The story of Dr. Glass relates to this. But typically, ghosts according to all research, and be assured there was much research on this topic out there, ghosts are our loved ones returning in concern or to tell us everything is all right. To believe in ghosts one must believe in some sort after life. Happy Halloween to all!

Angels on the other hand are a different matter all together. “For he shall give us angels to charge over thee in all ways.”

Sara Michaels, a young twenty-two year old girl was walking back to her rented room on the island of Ios in Greece. It was late at night and she was returning from a night of wonderful conversation with a friend from the states who happened to meet on this small beautiful Greek paradise island. It was quite dark and Sara was walking alone despite her friend's hesitations. "This is Greece," she said. And she walked on. As she continue to walk the seed of fear, planted by her friend began to surface. Don't ruin this beautiful walk she reminded herself and she continue on. Ten minutes from the village she came to the rope footbridge over a canal. It was lit by a bare light bulb and was close to the village cemetery. Don't get spooked she reminded herself. Suddenly there was a loud and horrifying scream. It was terrifying. It was the sound of pure evil. And it scared Sara to death. She could not move. She was frozen in place. Sara started to pray. In the name of all that is love save. In the name of all that is love save me. She repeated over and over again. Time passed. She was not sure how much time, but all of sudden he, (she says she called it he yet she saw nothing...noone) came down from above and lifted her under each arm. He lifted her off the ground about six inches and carried her over the bridge." What was so strange she remembers is that it felt so right, so normal, so peaceful....as if it happens everyday.

Once on the other side she was lightly dropped to the ground and she ran as fast as she could to her room. When she arrived her friends asked what was wrong? One girl kept insisting tell me what happened! “You met an angel out there didn’t you? When you came the light about you was so bright we couldn’t look at you. You met your guardian angel didn’t you?”

“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.”

Stories and the popularity of angels these days abound. Entire gift shops are devoted to angel memorabilia. Television shows and movies concerning angels are quite popular. There are angel pins, angel pens. Angel calendars, angel mouse pads and angel websites. Clearly something is going out there. The stories from members and friends of this congregation, good rational minded Unitarian Universalist makes me stop and wonder what is the mystic of the angels? On a personal level I have never had a close encounter with a celestial winged being. And yet I certainly hold to be true each and every story I have read and been told concerning peoples encounters with angels. The distant cry of a dying mother to her daughter across miles warning her not to wed the man she was betrothed to could have certainly been carried on

the wings of angels. Waking from a dreamlike state after having a conversation with your deceased dad certainly could count as a visit from an angel. Finding a perfectly dry photo of your deceased sister's favorite flower on a wet and damp Christmas morning could be a sign from an angel. A hat that moves; a vision of a man in a military uniform who was known to have drowned in that house trying to save a disabled woman – who only returned when a woman was living in the house – can all be visions of angels. or ghosts.

And yet perhaps the popularity of angels is our need for a personal God in an increasingly impersonal world. In Shakespeare's play, Hamlet cries out: "Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" Perhaps the search for angels is society's cry for connection to a power greater than ourselves in a universe so out of control we may often feel abandoned by or rationally reject a personal God.

And still the stories are told. What is even more assuring is that they are told not by religious zealots or high priest or nuns. They are told by people. Everyday people who have had an encounter with a great calm presence and peace in a time of duress. They have received a message of do not be afraid, things will work out and they had. And most importantly they all seem to remember their experience and have been changed by it.



One of the most telling tales for me was that of Sara Michaels (the woman in Greece who was lifted away by her guardian angel. She related further in the book that at the age of thirty-three she was raped. She kept waiting for her angel again during this time. But nothing materialized. At first confused and angry over this; she later said as horrifying as being raped was, “I survived. I did not die. Perhaps we go through horrible events for reasons we don’t know. We can’t expect that every time we prick our finger we will be saved.” Perhaps she was helped at the footbridge from something worse than rape.

Hindu poet Tagore writes; “I believe we are free, within limits and yet there is an unseen hand, a guardian angel, that somehow, like a submerged propeller drives us on.”

A ministerial colleague, the Reverend Jennifer Justice related this story in her trip to downtown Boston on a subway. The underground station was moderately crowded, but not jammed. Glancing around she happened to notice three scruffy young men saunter down the stairs. They strolled up to a woman standing alone. Her arms were loaded with shopping bags; her purse dangling, casually from her waist. She hadn’t noticed the young men whom Jennifer now perceived to be stalking her. They drew closer forming a semi-

circle around the woman while exchanging directive glances with each other. It was becoming clear some action would be required, yet Jennifer was too frightened and uncertain what to do.

Suddenly the tension in the air lifted. The three men melted into the shadows and disappeared up the stairs. As Jennifer turned she discovered a group of ten young men and women wearing red berets moving quickly and efficiently into the area. Half of them broke off and followed the three would be muggers up the stairs. The others dispersed in the underground, leaning casually against the walls, keeping their protective eyes open. This red-capped volunteer group watches over high crime areas in major cities, preventing attacks and robberies. They are known as the Guardian Angles.

The poet Rilke, raises the questions in the reading, does the infinite space we dissolve into, taste of us then? Is part of that angel essence in us as well? Do the angels really reabsorb only the radiance that streamed out from them, or sometimes, as if by an oversight, is there a trace of our essence in it as well? If something of us is in the angels, could there be something of angels in us? This is the celestial message herald in upon the wings of angels I hold up to you on this day for your consideration. When these transparent troubles crash upon our heads and we fall to the ground from the weight of worry, it is the angel essence in us, the half angels in the words of the poet Matias,

which dive down in a sort of free fall filling our spirits to make each other care. Does the infinite space taste of us then? Are we not all connected to the divine in this manner? Can not each and everyone of us offer guardianship, courage, care and comfort?

There is a story told from the Sufi tradition about a spiritual seeker who was praying outside. As he prayed he noticed a constant stream of beggars, people crippled in body and mind in spirit and heart, go past him. He looked at this mass of suffering humanity and, lifting his voice to God, cried, “Great God, how is it that a loving creator can see such things and yet do nothing about them?”

And then out of the long silence came the voice of God saying, “I did do something. I made you.”

My friends, the essence of angels, whether human or divine or the combined grace of each, is found in the knowledge that there is something of the eternal in all of us. If our thoughts and deeds are light as angel wings nothing will tie us down to revisit this world in any form of ghostly manner. The essence of any divine messenger resides in all of us. Our task it appears is to wake now our senses to hear, to see touch and to feel the essence of the

angels that may abound in and around us. Having no direct close encounter with any celestial visitation does not preclude the existence of these winged messengers of love. Looking into the eyes of a stranger or into the heart of a friend or family member we may entertain angels unaware.

“Be not afraid to have strangers in your house, for some have entertain angles unawares.”

Or perhaps we are the ministers of grace guarding and protecting the other. We are the concrete manifestations of the divine. “God how is that a loving creator can see such things and yet do nothing about them? God did, my friends. God made us. We are the angels. With or without wings.

Blessed Be.