



# LESSONS IN LIVING

## “God’s Messengers”

A St. Andrew’s Sermon  
Delivered by Rev. Frank Ehman  
July 6, 2025

**Scripture Reading:** *(The Inclusive Bible)*

**Psalm 91: 1-4; 11-12**

*You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High and pass the night in the shadow of Shaddai, say: “YHWH\*, my refuge and my mountain fortress, my God in whom I trust!” For YHWH\* says: “I will rescue you from the snare, and shield you from poisoned arrows. I will cover you with my pinions; under my wings you will take refuge; my faithfulness will shield you... For I will command my angels to guard you wherever you go. They’ll carry you in their hands so you don’t hurt your foot on a stone.*

*\* YHWH represents the divine name found in the Hebrew text. It represents the Divine Mystery and, traditionally, is not pronounced. Instead, we say “God” or some other term of reverence.*

## Sermon

First of all, I want to thank you all for the warm welcome that you've given to me and my wife this morning. It really means a lot. It is an absolute honor for me to be here at St. Andrew’s today to pinch hit for your pastor, Jim Rigby. I know you all want Jim back in the lineup, and I know Jim wants to be back in the lineup here where he belongs.

I'm deeply thankful Jim is alive. I'm thankful he's recuperating so well, and I'm thankful he's feeling better. I am thankful for this congregation for making sure that Jim has time to heal following his heart surgery this year and also after his back surgery last year. My prayers continue for a hopeful future for Jim and for this congregation and for the wonderful staff members here at St. Andrew’s.

I know it's weird to be a congregation during this transition time, to have strangers and pilgrims wander in to be guest preachers. I'm sorry about that. *[laughter]* It is weird, but I just want you to know it's also weird being a guest preacher. I guess the struggle that I had this morning, coming over here was where to begin.

Then it became obvious. Karen and I have a daughter named Erin, who was actually a member of the St. Andrew’s Day School back in the olden days. She's a good kid.

She is in Edinburgh, Scotland this morning, and she worshiped this morning at St. Giles Cathedral, which some people say is where the birth of Presbyterianism began with John Knox, who preached there. Really early this morning she sent us a picture. If I could get my brothers back there to put that up here. St. Giles's Cathedral in Edinburgh.



Our daughter was sitting there, and said the pastor as part of the prayer, prayed for the people in the Hill Country this morning. The breaking hearts are all around the world. She's on her way to St. Andrew's, where she went to school, and then she'll be touring around Scotland. But as she told us this morning, she's just crying.

That's where I felt like I needed to start. Thanks to our daughter for reminding us that this goes way beyond us, and people are praying for us.

Then I have to remember all the really good baseball coaches I've ever known, including Cliff Gustafson and some others, always said, *"be where your feet are."*

It's hard. I'm going to try to be where my feet are. What I need you all to know is I know that I'm not normal for St. Andrew's. I know that I'm an eccentricity at St. Andrew's, but I want you all to know I'm a grateful eccentricity at St. Andrew's.

A part of me just wants to make sure you all know how special you are by the people that are way out after the rock's gone in and the ripples have gone out. I'm one of those ripples that are far out, but I get to watch you all the time on YouTube.

I'm not a cardiologist, thank God. I'm not Jim's cardiologist, thank God. But it is clear to me that Jim Rigby has a good heart. I know Jim means so much to this congregation, and I know you all mean so much to him. And I know that there is nobody else like him.

Has anybody here ever known anybody like Jim Rigby?

No. That person doesn't exist, and I want to save you all a lot of time. I've looked. *[laughter]*

Jim is a unique combination of gifts. He's the most courageous and the most hilarious, and the most intelligent person I know. When I use the word intelligence, it's the original meaning of the word intelligence. It's not just that Jim's smart. He's plenty smart. But the word intelligence is the etymology of that word. It's two Latin words that literally mean 'between the lines.'

That's Jim Rigby always reading between the lines. And the people who are obsessed with the lines get really frustrated with that because they also find out he knows the lines. Then he searches for the meaning between the lines.

The intelligence of Jim Rigby is something I'll never understand. His ability to read between the lines, which takes heart and soul and strength and brain power. In fact, has anyone ever thought at the end of one of Jim's sermons, when he says something like, *"that's my understanding of this scripture passage. Now take a moment to think about how you understand it."*

Has anyone ever thought, that's exactly what I was thinking?

No, that's never happened.

I've been thankful for the blessing of Jim's friendship for 50 years. He has been the same extraordinary character that I met in the summer of 1975. He's been that same extraordinary character since the day he was installed here as your pastor. That was another worship service I had the joy of participating in.

Man, that was a wonderful day for St Andrews. Back when you all were called the St. Frisco Presbyterian Church because you all were behind the Frisco Steakhouse. Maybe you don't remember that. That's another story for another time.

I want you to think about what you are thankful for when you think about your pastor, Jim. God bless the one and only Jim Rigby. Let me invite you to join me in a prayer: *[congregation joins in prayer]*

*Eternal God, from whom we come, and to whom we belong, and unto whom we return, we give you our thanks for the gift of our pastor and friend, Jim. Help him to know how much he is appreciated and admired and loved and respected and needed by so many of us, near and far. And we thank you, dear God, for the gift of this church and for their ministry to Jim through all the circling years.*

*We pray for your blessings of healing and health, for strength for today, and bright hope for tomorrow, because there is more hard work yet to do. In the spirit of your grace and peace, we have gathered today, and in your spirit, we pray. Amen.*

As you heard read from Psalm 91, God has quoted this remarkable quote that says, *"I will command my angels to guard you wherever you go. My angels will carry you in their hands so you don't hurt your foot on the stone."*

We began the service with the statement about questions that rise us up, and I have a question for you. Do you believe in angels? Or maybe even a more curious question than that, do Presbyterians believe in angels? I wonder if you all here at St. Andrew's have had anyone ask you lately if Presbyterians believe in angels. Maybe not, but that's really my question.

I don't pretend to speak for the Presbyterian Church, thank God. But from what the Scriptures teach us, I believe God uses angels to deliver God's message to us.

The common perception of angels is that they are perfect little beings with these little wings. The Hebrew word *mal'akh* is commonly translated into English as the word "angel." But originally, the Hebrew word *mal'akh* meant "messenger."

That's more of a job description than it is the name of a divine being with little wings. Angels are God's messengers who watch over us, especially when things are not going well for us. There it is in Psalm 91, God says, *I will command my angels to guard you wherever you go. On their hands, they will bear you up so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.*

Think for just a moment about the important role that angels play in the story of the Christian faith. Remember the role of the Christmas angel when Jesus was born? The angel was God's messenger to the shepherds who were out in their fields keeping watch over their flock by night. And the angel said to the shepherds, *"do not be afraid, for see, I'm bringing you good news of a great joy for all the people."* That's a great line. And then you move the story forward from Christmas Eve all the way to Easter morning and the resurrection of Jesus.

And the scriptures tell us that it was the angel who said to the women at the empty tomb, *"Do not be afraid. I know you're looking for Jesus. He's been raised."* Notice that in the stories about Christmas Eve and Easter morning, the angels begin their messages with the very same phrase, do not be afraid.

Isn't it interesting that the common thread of the angels' messages from the birth of Jesus to the death and resurrection of Jesus is, *do not be afraid*. They must teach that lesson over and over in angel school. The head angel says, *"Okay, listen carefully, angels. Here's the message that God wants you to deliver to our friends, those human beings."* And I'll bet you could even say it with me.

*"Do not be afraid."* [congregation joins in saying the phrase aloud] I believe the angels really do understand our human nature. We are afraid so much of the time because there's so much to be afraid of.

I want to tell you a story, and I hope you'll be able to picture this scene in your mind's eye. It's about an experience that I had with my wife, Karen. I'm glad Karen and I are both here today to go check in on Rigby. He's known us a long time.

This happened when Karen and I were newlyweds 48 years ago. Before we were married, I had the experience of canoeing on a beautiful river in Southern Missouri. I wanted to share the experience I had enjoyed floating on that gorgeous spring-fed stretch of river that's so clear with Karen. Where you can see every rainbow trout swimming along. You can see every little rock on the bottom as you float downstream.

On our first vacation together as a married couple, Karen and I went to the Riverside Canoe Rental in Caulfield, Missouri, and we rented a canoe. We floated down the North Fork River, and it was good. And as we were floating along, taking it easy, I remembered an area of the river right up ahead of us where I'd had some trouble on my previous trip. My canoe steering ability had to be pretty good to avoid crashing into a bridge built at an angle across one of the bends in the river. And sure enough, after a couple of hours of quiet, uneventful floating, we came to that turn in the river, and there was that bridge I had remembered.

I wanted to ease us through the concrete pilings under the bridge as if that situation posed no great problem for my canoe handling ability. But I began having problems steering the canoe way before we ever got to the bridge. I started paddling madly to steer us between any two of the bridges pilings. I really didn't care which two as long as we went between them.

And we made it! We whooshed under the bridge and into the bend of the river. Then directly ahead of us was something I had not remembered. I guess I had not taken that path under the bridge before. There was a rock that was about the size of a Volkswagen Beetle sticking up out of the river directly in front of us.

And lo and behold, we hit that rock very hard. Karen went flying out of the front of the canoe, and I went flying out of the back of the canoe. All of our towels and T-shirts and stuff went flying pretty evenly distributed around both sides of the canoe. I remember hearing people laughing. It must have been a funny sight for those that were lucky enough to be watching from a rest stop in that area of the river.

I saw Karen had made it over to the side of the river safely, and I looked at the canoe still against the rock. I tried to get my footing in the chest-deep water to pull the canoe off the rock. I just wanted us to get on with our float trip.

It just wasn't that easy. That was the problem. The canoe, if you can possibly imagine this, had miraculously balanced on the center of the rock with the bottom of the canoe right at the center point of the top of the rock. I was looking at the inside of the canoe, and thought, if I can just tip it off of the point, the physics has got to work.

The water was rushing equally around both ends of the canoe. I tried my best to pull the canoe off the rock, but the current kept me from getting my footing.

Then I began to see an unusual sight. As the water was rushing around both ends of that aluminum canoe, still with the bottom of the canoe against the center point of the rock, the force of the river began to push the bottom of the canoe in.

It literally began to bend the canoe inside out right before my eyes, slowly molding the canoe to the shape of the rock. It was the weirdest sight. One I've never seen before or since. I was unable to at least watch, but I was unable to stay ahead of the process of that canoe turning inside out.

I knew that the longer this went on, the more hopeless it looked for ever getting the canoe off the rock. There were people still standing along the riverbank, watching and pointing and laughing. Karen watched patiently and offering her encouragement. She had a terrific view of the scene.

I tried my best, but my best was not good enough. Then I heard a voice that called to me from the bridge right above and behind me. I heard someone say, "Do you need some help?" [with a southern drawl]

I looked back and there was the biggest farm boy I've ever seen standing on the bridge in some well-worn overalls. He looked like he weighed 300 pounds. He probably had been out plowing in the fields. I'm sure that he would get a scholarship immediately as a lineman for the Longhorn football team.

"I sure could use a hand, whatever you could do" I said.

He said, "I have a Come Along in my truck. Let me go get it. I'll be right back."

"I'll be right here." I replied.

He went away and came back in a couple of minutes, backing his truck down the bank of the river. He hooked one end of the Come Along to the trailer hitch on his truck, and he told me to attach the hook on the other end of the Come Along to a ring on the front end of the canoe. He began to crank the come along, and the ring on the front of the canoe popped off.

At that point, I wanted to give up. I figured that I had just bought a canoe that would remain inside out on the top of that rock forever. But then the big guy waded out into the river, and I noticed that the current did not seem to affect him as it had affected me. He had that look on his face that said, if you want a job done right, you just got to do it yourself.

He put the hook of the Come Along on one of the crossbars of the canoe and waded out of the water. He began to crank the Come Along, and the canoe began to move very slowly. He pulled the canoe off the rock, and he cranked it all the way over to the bank of the river where Karen was standing.

Fighting my way across the river, I saw the canoe sat awkwardly on the sand inside out. I thanked the big guy for his help. Then I wondered, dear God, what do I do now? I knew for that as soon as we got back home, I was going to buy my very first Come Along, which I did.

Then the big guy said, "I bet I can help with that problem."

He told Karen and me to hold the canoe steady, balancing it with both ends of the canoe and lodging it in the sand. He jumped up in the air higher than I would have ever imagined he could jump.

He came down in the center of the canoe and stomped around until he had the canoe pounded back into its normal shape. I was dumbfounded. The big guy had the canoe ready to go.

“Man, I don't know how to thank you enough.” I exclaimed.

He simply said, “I'm just glad I could help.”

He put the Come Along in the back of the truck and drove away. Karen and I got back in the canoe, and we floated down the river picking up our towels and T-shirts along the way. That experience left me with a big question,

*Was that guy too big to be an angel?*

I'm prepared to believe that he was truly an angel. That big guy taught me that angels do not necessarily have little wings. But what angels do is watch over us and hold us up with their hands to keep us from hurting our feet on the rock. Wow. I like to think about what that big guy did not say to me as the other people were pointing and laughing at me. The big guy did not say, “*boy, you're an idiot.*”

But if he did, I would not have argued with him. Instead, he said, “*do you need some help?*”

I like to think about what that big guy did not ask me. He did not ask me if I was a Republican, or a Democrat, or an Independent. He did not ask me if I was a Baptist, or if I was a Presbyterian. He did not ask me if I was gay, or if I was straight, or if I was rich, or if I was poor, or if I had a passport. Instead, he asked me, “*do you need some help?*”

Reading between the lines of that angelic moment, what I heard was, “*do not be afraid.*” Do not be afraid, Frank. I have a Come Along in my truck, and I know how to use it.

What a helpful and hopeful message that was for me to hear. I will always be amazed by how well that angel understood our predicament. And he was so patient, helpful, and generous to Karen and me, especially since we were complete strangers.

I want you to think again about your pastor, Jim Rigby.

How many times has his message been, “*do not be afraid. Do you need some help?*”

That's the message we've heard in his words and actions, year after year. Don't tell Jim, I don't want it to go to his head, but that is God's message from a bona-fide angel. That is also the message that Jim has heard from you all. *Do not be afraid. Do you need some help?* Reminding him that he's not alone.

I got you all your very own Come Along. [*he points to a wrapped present by the altar at the front of the sanctuary*].

Later, maybe one of the kids can open it like an early Christmas present, but there it is.

When you all are dealing with people facing serious challenges, and you will be, you can say, “*do not be afraid, we have a Come Along.*” Maybe a Come Along is what Jesus had in mind when he said, “*Follow me.*”

I believe that angels can help us sense the blessing of God's presence with us in the ordinary words of a fellow human being. Angels can help us sense God's healing spirit in the touch of human hands. Angels can offer their help even before we know how to ask for help.

I believe God uses angels, God's messengers, to help us recognize God's presence with us in the fast-flowing and sometimes deadly dangerous river of life. We hear God's message from the angels in the midst of all the chaos.

Do not be afraid.

Do you need some help?

That's an angel's job description. That's your job description. Thank God, that's the job description of countless angels who are the first responders who showed up to help in the Hill Country this weekend.

Let me wrap this up. I want to encourage you to reflect on the angels in your life. The ones who gave you something you needed when you needed it the most so you could get on with your life. This Sunday is as good a time as any to remember their blessings in your life.

I want to encourage you to be watching for ways that God can use you in the days and weeks ahead to be an angel, to be God's messenger for someone who needs help. I'll leave you with a quote that I love from Albert Schweitzer. He said,

*“So many people gave me something or were something to me without ever knowing it.”*

I always think we all live spiritually by what others have given to us in the significant hours of our life. These significant hours do not announce themselves as coming, but they arrive unexpected.

Please take a moment now for your own reflections.

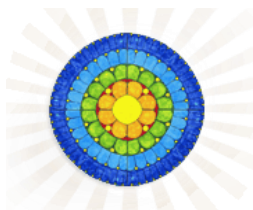


## Benediction

Rev. Babs Miller

I would remind all of you that each of you is a child of that wonderful spirit of love that we sometimes call God. And that spirit knows when you skin your knee or your heart. That spirit knows when you admire a butterfly or cry in the darkness. So go as angels out into this world and tell the whole world that they are loved just exactly as they are. Go and kiss the hurts of this world. Go and laugh and play in the fields of grace and love. Go in peace. Amen.

*Transcribed and edited by a member of the St. Andrew's Sermon Transcription Project.*



### St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

14311 Wells Port Dr.  
Austin, TX 78728  
512-251-0698  
admin@staopen.org