



July 11, 2021

One Who Sees Angels

**Rev. Emma Chattin
Preaching**

First Reading ~ Numbers 22:21-32

The next morning Balaam got up, saddled his donkey, and left with the delegation for Moab. But God was very angry because Balaam was going, and God's angel stood in the middle of the road to bar the way. Balaam was riding on the donkey with two assistants accompanying him, one on either side. When the donkey saw the angel of YHWH standing in the road holding a sword, she turned off the road into a field. Balaam started beating the donkey to get her to go back onto the road. But the angel of God stood on that narrow path, which was between two vineyards with walls on each side. When the donkey saw the angel of God, she pressed close to the wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So Balaam beat the donkey again. Then the angel of God moved on ahead and stood in apace narrower yet, where there was no room to turn right or left. When the donkey saw the angel of God, she laid down under Balaam. This enraged Balaam, and he started beating the donkey severely. Then God opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, to make you beat me three times?" Balaam answered the donkey, "You made a fool out of me! Why, if I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you this instant!" But she said to Balaam, "Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden to this very day? Have I ever acted this way?" "No," Balaam replied. Then YHWH opened Balaam eyes, and he saw the angel of God standing in the road with a drawn sword. And Balaam bowed low and prostrated himself before the angel. The angel of God asked, "Why did you beat your donkey three times? I came here to bar your way, for your path is a reckless one before me! Three times your donkey saw me, and three times she turned away. In fact, if she had not turned away, I would certainly have killed you by now— though, I would have spared her!"

Second Reading ~ adapted from Andy Merrifield in "The Wisdom of Donkeys"

I love the parable of Balaam's donkey because I can really imagine a donkey veering off the roadside, steering their rider out of harm's way. It all seems believable to me, as realism rather than religion: these actions are convincingly donkey, a model of undefiled donkeyhood. But Balaam doesn't see anything, doesn't know what's happening, and, like a lot of us, in his inability to see what is right in front of him, gets mad and impatient. He's been made a fool of. So he needs to vent spleen somehow and chooses violence. In the end, it's he who's the fool, who can't see the folly of his ways, who is blind to other kinds of insight.