

Thoughts from the Manse 31st October 2020

Today is All Hallows Eve, or Halloween as it is more commonly known. This year the normal festivities will be in abeyance due to the pandemic and parents are having to find more creative ways of helping their children to celebrate.



Growing up in Scotland Halloween was a fun night when we dressed up as characters, some ghostly, but not always, and toured the neighbourhood knocking on doors. This was not Trick or Treat, although we were beginning to hear of this American form of celebrating, but friends in England were on the whole baffled by our celebrations as nothing like it was done around their



neighbourhood. We went 'guising', disguising ourselves with costumes and masks we were invited inside and there we 'did our turn', told a joke, sang a song, played our recorder (badly) or recited a poem. In return, we received treats, apples, nuts, sweets and occasionally money (3d), and at the end of the evening we returned home to count our loot. It was fun, and sometimes we even got to bob for apples.

There were Halloween parties at Brownie and Guide meetings where we definitely bobbed for apples, found jelly babies hidden in flour (no hands allowed), had to take a bite out of a scone covered in treacle whilst it hung from string (again no hands allowed), you get the picture it was a messy evening. Often we were blindfolded and taken on a tour of Nelson's last battle, water splashing our faces as the 'waves' buffeted the ship, turned round and round to simulate the motion of the ship, and then our fingers were plunged into a cut orange as we were told how Nelson lost his eye! That was about as gruesome as the evening went.

Many churches through the years have gone to great lengths to counteract what they see as a night of 'dark activities', some holding a festival of light. It has always struck me that they are taking this way too seriously but then perhaps that is my Scottish upbringing with a very different take on Halloween. Children have always been fascinated by the more gruesome aspects of Halloween, the tales of spirits roaming and more recently zombies, vampires and the dead rising. Just as children like stories of ghosts, ghouls and other mysterious figures, it is fantasy, and fantasy is escapism.



In taking it too seriously we only make it more fascinating. I worry that we have been in danger of denying the resurrection in our efforts to counteract modern culture. In my understanding of eternal life, where we die into the peace and completion of God's love, there is no place for tormented souls, zombies and the like, why would there be? Judgement is about being made right with God, recognising and acknowledging the reality of God's eternal presence and our place within it. I cannot believe that within a God of love there is any place for damnation, so those who have died have no need to rise from the grave like tormented souls. However, if we make too big a deal about the darkness of Halloween then we are in fact saying such things exist, is that what we really want to do?



This year there will be few if any trick or treaters, and few doors will be opened to share a little joy with young people, and that is sad. Next time, though, why not embrace fantasy a little for one night of the year and join in with being scared, safe in the knowledge that it is simply fantasy. Meanwhile I have made some crochet pumpkins.

