

It's Halloween - (All Hallow's Eve)

Clarification

Hello – please let me apologize. I wasn't clear in my report on the Towards 2035 / National meeting last week. Please let me assure you our church is not becoming a coffee shop or art studio in the next 10 years. I meant to explain how National shared some churches are adapting. We see this in our own town. The Pentecostal church (Barney's church) is both a church and a restaurant. National was sharing strategies other United Churches are using to continue being a church community when our communities are getting older and smaller in numbers. But each church decides what they want to do. National isn't making us change. For us, what we're going now is working. We're not closing our church. I'm sorry I miscommunicated.

- **Rev. Whitney Bruno**

LEARNING TIME FOR ALL AGES

Halloween is the Scots-English way of saying (All) Hallow(s) E(v)en(ing.) That means, the evening before the day for all spirits, saints, souls, ghosts, ancestors. For over a thousand years Christians have observed this day to remember people who have died because they were Christian in a time when Christianity was outlawed; or to remember people who inspire us; or to remember all our ancestors. That's why Allhallowtide is actually 3 days long! (And even longer in South America to include pets, specifically children, and those unknown.)

Many religions and cultures have similar holidays where we honour the dead, dress up, and spend time outside. Because of all the cultures and religions there are many different ways people approach Halloween.

Scary Halloween



Some people like to focus on the scary side. It is exciting to face your fears and be stronger than them! Halloween is a time it's okay to ask questions about scary things. Do you have questions that you wonder maybe you're not allowed to ask?

Happy Halloween



Other people focus on the fun side of Halloween. They try on different personalities and costumes and play. It's a great time to let your creativity out and wear something normally you couldn't wear. If you could wear any costume for Halloween, what would you wear?

Wistful Halloween



Other people focus on the wistful side of Halloween. Wistful means happy and sad. Full of memories. This is a photo of families in Finland lighting candles in a graveyard for people they miss on Halloween night. In Mexico, candy skulls are brought to graves. In Japan, they bring flowers and good smelling things. Today we have candles on our altar to remind us our loved ones still exist, even when we cannot see them. Would you like to light a candle today?

SERMON: Is That All There Is?

Jazzy-folk musician Peggy Lee sang a song called "Is That All There Is?"

She recalls being a child, watching her house burn down, and when it was all over, she wondered, "Is that all there is to a house fire? Is that all there is?"

Then she remembers being a preteen and seeing the circus, but it felt like in all the glitter and wonder something was missing. Then it was over. "Is that all there is to the circus? Is that all there is?"

She falls in love as an adult. But it doesn't work out. She thought she'd die from the pain - but she doesn't. So - "Is that all there is to love? Is that all there is?"

Her sang refrain is: "Is that all there is?"

If that's all there is, my friends, then let's keep dancing

Let's break out the booze and have a ball

If that's all there is"

Her final verse goes:

I know what you must be saying to yourselves

"If that's the way she feels about it, why doesn't she just end it all?"

Oh, no, not me

I'm not ready for that final disappointment

'Cause I know, just as well as I'm standing here talking to you

And when that final moment comes, and I'm breathing my last breath

I'll be saying to myself

"Is that all there is?"

The authors of the song, Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, based the lyrics off of a book by an escapee of Nazi Germany. It is nihilistic - if THIS is all there is, then we need to live and love and laugh today because tomorrow we die. And even death itself is going to be a big disappointment.

Maybe we'll learn there's no heaven or hell or afterlife.

Maybe we'll learn life is all there ever was.

So eat, drink, and be merry now.

Do you ever wonder if there is more to life? Do you feel nagging doubts about an afterlife? Plenty of people do. All of the book of Ecclesiastes in scripture is about "what is the purpose of all this?" "is this all there is?"

Peggy Lee butted heads with the lyric authors. She read this song and sang it as an optimistic outlook. When the fire is over, is that all there is? Well, she survived that. It'll take more than a fire to do her in. When the circus is over, is that all there is? Well, she wants more from life than the circus. She'll have her names in lights and perform globally. When her love leaves her, is that all there is? Even this didn't kill her, when it felt like it would. She will rise from this loss too. And finally, when death comes - and actually does kill her - well, that's all it is. She's stronger than death too. She said in an interview she hoped the last phrase, "If that's all there is" would make people argue with the song that no, no, there is more to life. There is more to death. And we are more.

The conflicting vision of what the song meant lead to the artist and authors to not collaborate again. But the ambiguity and layers of meaning lead this song to be a global hit in the 1960s and 1970s. It also speaks to this holiday of Halloween. Halloween is a holiday of asking – is this all there is?

In a negative light -

We desensitize ourselves to pain and misery. Blood and violence are the norm. This is all there is. This is the state of the world. So don't flinch. Don't look away.

We look at death and bones and know that's the fate of all that lives. Memento mori. Remember you must die. So eat, drink, and be merry today because tomorrow we all go into the ground. That is all there is.

And we hold up religion and superstitions and traditions as meaningless backward thinking. Empty words to lie and make ourselves feel better. Witches were female doctors. A cross isn't going to protect anyone from disease, horror, war. Everything is meaningless. Random. Cruelty comes upon the just and unjust alike.

In a positive light -

We put up skeletons and images of death and laugh - is that all death is? Well, we are stronger than that.

We face our fears - of spiders, bats, witches, the dark - is that all these things are? If so, we have faced them and came away victorious. So let's dance and socialize.

And IF life is all there is, then... why are there ghosts, and dreams from loved ones, and spirits who guide? Surely, we are aware of only a portion of reality. The spiritual realm is full too. So, we tell each other stories and share real encounters we've had that defy expectations. We say this is NOT all there is - there is more yet unseen, unknown, or known only dimly like a reflection in a clouded mirror. We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, saints, ancestors who support us and worship God with us and join us in holy communion.

I think the crowds, apostles, and disciples listening to Jesus on the level plain also heard different meanings in one set of words.

One group heard blessings - which is why we call it beatitudes. Blessings.

Some hear Jesus saying their current reality - poor, hungry, and weeping - will be reversed. "You WILL be well. I am on the case, personally. Each of you are now siblings and on the case. We WILL make

Earth like it is in Heaven. And yeah, we'll get hated and excluded, reviled and defamed, but that's how we know we're being prophets and seeing where the work of God is leading." Some hear Jesus as very good news.

But others hear Jesus as bad news. Their current reality - rich, full, happy - is over. "You WILL weep and mourn. You WILL be hungry. The more people think you're successful and respectable - the more you know you're in for what will feel like hell on Earth. The false prophets are yes men and yes women. Go with the flow. Do not rock the boat. But God IS rocking the boat."

Some hear really good news. Others hear really bad news.

Some hear Peggy Lee's song as a victory over hardship. Others hear it as a realization of constant disappointment and meaninglessness.

And Halloween is a time of joy, or spirituality, or love for some -- and a time of pain, or terror, or meaninglessness for others.

Is this all there is? Is this it?

The entire book of Ecclesiastes asks this very question. At the end, after considering everything under the sun, the author concludes the meaning of all life is to remember our Creator, to do God's commandments, and know all we do --good and evil-- is being tracked by God. Everything else is meaningless.

Jesus concludes his speech today on the plain in a similar way. He calls people to love their enemies. Who wins in our contests isn't as important as the love shown. Give generously, don't value possessions. In the end, it is just money. It is just an earthly inheritance. Choose the relationships. Choose the heavenly inheritance. Don't seek revenge - seek peace. Meaning isn't found in getting even. Meaning is found living into the reign of God. And Jesus says the words we call the Golden Rule - Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Is that all there is? Else where, Jesus says yes. All of scripture, all of faith, is supposed to help us love God and love each other, as we love ourselves.

This Halloween - what is your conclusion? Is this -- our lives, families, homes, country, the now - is this all there is? Or is there more?

Is this - a world where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer - and the nice guy finishes last - is this all there is? Or is there more?

Is this - where we are here today and gone tomorrow - remembered today and forgotten within 100 years - is this all there is? Or is there more?

In the words of Paul, paraphrased, I pray God gives you a spirit of wisdom and revelation. I pray your enlightened heart perceives the hope, the "more," to which you are called. I pray you take notice of the riches around you, known in the lives and deaths of those seeking to follow Christ's way. I pray you get an inkling, a hint, of the huge holy power that is working for the good of all. I pray you have the realization God's power is in this place, among us, and within us, and within you.

May you be able to reflect on if this is all it is. **Amen.**

