**Part One: What’s the meaning of Halloween?**

So, today is Oct 31st – Halloween. And some of you may be wondering why we are thinking about this in the church. After all, isn’t Halloween all about ghosts, and witches. I am reminded of an old traditional Scottish prayer that went:

 From ghoulies and ghosties
 And long-leggedy beasties
 And things that go bump in the night,

 Good Lord deliver us!

Maybe it’s an appropriate prayer for Halloween night.

But, does anyone here know the true history of Halloween?

Halloween is actually thought to have its roots in Christian beliefs and practices.

The name 'Halloween' comes from "All Hallows' Eve".

It is the evening before the Christian holy days of [All Hallows' Day](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_Saints%27_Day) (also known as All Saints' Day) on November 1st. And, All Saints Day – is a day when the church traditionally remembered the dead, including the hallowed saints, and the martyrs, that had passed on.

By the end of the 12th century, it had become customary in Western Christianity for folks to dress in black and parade the streets on All Hallows Eve, sometimes ringing a bell of mournful sound and calling on all good Christians to remember the poor souls.

So you can kind of see, how the idea of parading the streets in costume came about.

And trick and treating is also thought to have had it’s roots in an the ancient Christian tradition.

Since the time of the [early Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_Christianity), [major feasts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calendar_of_saints#Ranking_of_feast_days) in Christianity (such as Christmas, Easter and [Pentecost](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pentecost)) have all had vigils that began the night before with a feast.

The eve of ALL Hallows was no different.

There was an All Hallows Eve custom of baking and sharing [soul cakes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soul_cake) for the [christened](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baptism) souls.

A soul cake was like a shortbread biscuit, marked with a cross on the top, and it would be given out at the door to the ‘soulers’.

Soulers were often groups of poor people, often children, who would go door-to-door during Allhallows Eve, collecting soul cakes, in exchange for [praying for the dead](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prayer_for_the_dead).

Today, of course, Halloween has become totally secularized for most people.

Evenings of soulful prayers for the deceased at gravesides, have been replaced with wild Halloween parties and games, like bobbing for apples.

Soul cakes have been replaced by bags of candy.

Halloween costumes are now more influenced by folk lore customs and popular media icons.

And, sadly, Halloween has become a night that focusses on fear, rather than on prayer.

But tonight, if you plan to go trick and treating, or if you plan to hand out treats at the door – then just remember that tonight is actually a sacred and holy night. It is not a night to think about …..

 The ghoulies and ghosties
 And long-leggedy beasties
 And things that go bump in the night,

Tonight Is not a night of fear and terror.

Tonight, and tomorrow All Saints Day, is a time to remember those that have died. It’s a time to pause and say a prayer, and to maybe light a candle for all those that have passed on.

And on that note, I invite anyone to join me tomorrow evening at 7pm, for the All Saint’s Day vigil with WOW region. The details are on the front of this weeks Good News At Grace. It is a time of prayer and silence for all those that have passed, and especially for the indigenous children that never made it home.

Amen.

(Parade of costumes)

**Psalm 4, from *Everyday Psalms* by James Taylor**

At Home

*In the middle of the night, Lord, I wake.*

*This room is strange;*

*I can’t find the light; I can’t find the door.*

*I am afraid.*

*Then I remember – this is your house, God.*

*I was a stranger, and you took me in.*

*I was alone, and you made me welcome.*

*In your house, I have nothing to fear.*

*I can sink back into my bed and set my mind at rest.*

*I put myself in you hands. I trust you.*

*Am I crazy? Am I a fool?*

*Some would say so. They doubt you.*

*But I know the peace I felt when you opened your door*

*And the warmth when you invited me to share your table.*

*I can let my anxious eyelids close again.*

*In your home, I am at home.*

**Part Two – What are you afraid of?**

Thank you, Simon, for reading that.

I think that modern day version of Psalm 4 truly captures that fear of waking up in a strange place – the fear of being in an unknown dark room. Perhaps even waking up in the middle of night terror.

Anybody here ever felt that fear?

Fears and phobias are real.

I don’t know about you, but I have an irrational fear of spiders.

I know that almost all spiders, especially those in North America, can not hurt me; and I have no problem with them when I see them outside in nature – in fact, I marvel at their intricate webs – but when they are inside – and especially in my bedroom – I have an irrational fear that they will drop down and crawl all over me at night.

Now, maybe my fear is legitimate given that I was once bitten by a spider in my sleep while camping. I didn’t know that it was a spider at the time, but the bite kept becoming infected – so a few months later I was referred to a skin care doctor. It was then that I found out that I had been bitten by a spider, and that the spider had actually laid eggs under my skin, and when the area would get hot in the sun, the spider eggs would try to hatch.

I know, it’s a pretty gross story! Sounds crazy, but if you don’t believe me, then google ‘spider’s laying eggs under the skin.’

Anyway – enough about that image – that’s all pretty scary fear factor stuff if you’re afraid of spiders.

Fear of spiders might seem irrational, but phobias are a very real thing.

A global study shows that about 8% of the world population suffer from phobias.

And phobias range from all kinds of things.

What kind of phobias do you folks have? (answers)

Phobias are given very specific names sometimes – perhaps as a way of legitimizing the fear.

There are lots of them!

I was surprised to find out that one of the strangest phobias is ‘​Ergophobia’ – Any ideas what that might be? It is the fear of work or the workplace. So, make sure you never call a Minister who has ergophobia, or you might find there is no sermon on a Sunday!

There are some pretty strange names for phobias, so I thought we’d play a game to see if we can guess what each of these phobias are – you can consult as a table, then throw your hand up.

(slides:

Arachnophobia (fear of spiders)

Astraphobia (fear of thunder and lightening storms)

Ophi-dio-phobia (fear of snakes. Tricia Wetlauffer keeps rubber snakes on her porch to scare squirrels)

Zoophobia (fear of zoo animals)

Pogono- phobia (fear of beards)

Alektoro- phobia (fear of chickens)

Coulro-phobia (fear of clowns)

Acrophobia (fear of heights. Blair!)

Iatrophobia – fear of Dr Bartlett – LOL – fear of Drs.)

We might laugh at some of these – but a phobia can be life threatening.

A heard a recent CBC interview where a lady was so afraid of Dr’s that she delayed some very critical surgery. She was lucky that someone recognized her fear, and her friend was willing to walk with her through this time of immense anxiety.

The definition of ‘phobia’ is “an extreme of irrational fear.” It might seem irrational to others, but nonetheless, the fear is very real for the person who has the phobia.

So, how do we handle that fear?

Well, the children in this video give some very sound advice of how to handle our fears – take a listen:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JyHlgXnMrsg&ab_channel=CBCKids>

A bridge to ‘get over’ our fears.

What an interesting image.

As people of faith, what is our bridge to get over our fears?

As you think about that for a moment, I invite Jayden to come and read another *Everyday Psalms* by James Taylor. It’s a modern day version of Psalm 121:

A Hiker’s Creed

*Somewhere out there, past the highest peaks, someone watches over me.*

*God made these peaks and these valleys, this air and this earth.*

*Yet God is close enough to guide my feet,*

*Every step I take along life’s precipitous paths.*

*I may grow weary, but God does not nod off.*

*My mind may wander, but God always stays alert.*

*God watches over me.*

*God stays as close to me*

 *as the hat that shelters me from the sun,*

*as close as the jacket that shields me from slashing rain.*

*God watches over me.*

*God’s hand holds me when I crawl along the edge of a cliff.*

*It saves me from delusions of depending only on myself.*

*God keeps me from falling off the edge,*

*and keeps me safely on the path.*

*God watches over me.*

*Wherever I go, wherever I may find myself,*

*God will go with me and watch over me,*

*Even into eternity.*

**Part Three – God walks with us**

Thank you Jayden.

*‘God watches over me.*’ – what a wonderful message that is – and it’s repeated 4 times in this modern-day Psalm that Jayden read us.

*‘God watches over me.’*

The need to know that God is watching over us, is not a new modern-day need. The Old Testament is full of calls for help in times of trouble, and reassurances that God is there – watching over us.

The people of Israel were a nation who understood fear. The Babylonians had come in and destroyed their homes and their livelihoods; many had died; and they had again been forced into exile. But then, just when they are at their lowest, they hear the voice of hope in the oracle:

*For I am the Lord your God
    who takes hold of your right hand
and says to you, Do not fear;
    I will help you.* (Isaiah 41:13)

Can you guess how many times the words ‘fear -not’ or ‘do-not fear’ appear in the bible? 365 times!

“Fear not” is the most repeated command in the Bible. 365 times – that is one “Fear not” for every day of the year!

In his book, *Facing the Future without Fear,* Lloyd Ogilvie writes:

*“There are actually 366 “Fear nots” in the Bible, one for every day of the year, including Leap Year! And that’s because God doesn’t want us to go a single day without hearing God’s word of comfort: “Fear not!”*

It is a great comfort to know that God is with us.

Even in our darkest times, or maybe especially then, as people of faith we know that God is with us.

I am sure that many of you are familiar with the words of the 23rd Psalm.

It is often read at funerals, perhaps because it reminds us that even when we are in dark valley of grieve, God is with us:

 *“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will not fear.”* (Psalm 23:4)

They are comforting words. And yet for many people living in fear is a daily reality.

And I’m not talking about the phobias of spiders or snakes – I am talking about real fears.

Fears like poverty – fear that you do not have any money to pay the rent, that bills are overdue, and that soon you will be evicted and have no roof over your heard.

Fears of starvation - fear that you just do not have enough food to feed your family, and that your children are dying of starvation and malnutrition.

Fear of domestic violence – the fear that you stuck in the constant struggle to escape an abusive relationship.

Fear of racism – fear that you can not even walk down the street without being attacked verbally or physically, or pulled over by the police, just because of your skin colour.

Fear of addiction – an overwhelming fear that includes drugs, alcohol, gaming, pornography, even social media – anything that consumes and overtakes your power to make choices.

These are all very real fears.

So, what do we say to someone who is facing these fears?

What do we say to someone who feels like they are walking on the edge of cliff and about to fall?

What do we say?

I imagine that we have all been there at some point in our lives.

A time of darkness, a time of uncertainty, a time of grief perhaps, a time when we felt alone.

But in those times, we also know that if we call out to God, and if we open our ears, then we can hear God calling back to us.

It might be through the help of a friend;

it might be through the power of reading scripture;

maybe through the words of a song or a poem – God calls out to us in many different ways.

I don’t know how God might call out to you in the midst of your fears, but I can promise you with all certainty that God does call out.

Because I know God promises to always be with us, holding our hands as we crawl along the edge of the cliff.

It is that certainty, and it is that assurance, that we need to share with others when they are facing fears.

We need to have the courage to tell others that God is with them;

the courage to prayer with others;

the courage to tell them that God will hold their hand and walk with them.

You don’t need to be a Minister to tell anyone that.

Each and everyone of us – even the children like the ones in the video – can share how God is our bridge over the trouble waters of fear.

God is our strength in times of trouble.

God holds our hands and walks with us.

God is our light in the darkness.

And so, whatever fears each of us may face – let us encourage each other, and those beyond these walls, to rest in the promise that you do not need to be afraid, for God’s love is stronger than our fears!

Amen.

**(MV 90) Don’t be afraid, my love is stronger; my love is stronger than you fear.**

**Don’t be afraid, my love is stronger, and I have promised, promised to be always near.**

Ever present God, we thank you that you always walk with us. We know that there are many places, and many people in the world that live in constant fear. Some shelter behind locked doors, some are afraid to leave their homes, and some have no shelter at all. We pray for all those that are vulnerable and that feel powerless. Help the staff in all world agencies that give help in times of trouble and distress – provide them with resources and funds. And open our eyes to seek ways that we can reach out and to bring the comfort of your light into dark places.

*Holy One, help us to always feel your presence with us.*  **Don’t be afraid...**

Jesus, light of the world, you spoke to us gentle. Telling us never to be afraid. Living, you faced discrimination, abuse, and fear, with courage. In death, you showed us that your love was stronger than anything else. In resurrection, you gave us God’s Spirit to always be present as our helper and our comforter. We pray that your Spirit may give peace and comfort to all who are grieving (pause) to all who are sick, in body or in mind, (pause) to all who are lonely, anxious and lost (pause). And we pray especially for those that live with life threatening phobias and are in constant fear.

*Holy One, help us to always feel your presence with us.* **Don’t be afraid …**

Spirit, our comforter and our guide. We pray for this community. We pray for the safety of all trick and treaters tonight. We pray for all those that feel unsafe about returning to church. May your Spirit give each of us courage, whatever our fears may be. Fill us with the reassurance that you do hold us by the hand, that you walk along the edge with us, and that even in our darkest times, we can trust that your light will guide us.

*Holy One, help us to always feel your presence with us*. **Don’t be afraid**

We pray in the name of the Holy One, Holy Three, Holy Divine. Amen.