

## HALLOWEEN – SHOULD WE BE EXCITED OR ANXIOUS?

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'Hold still,' I told my daughter who wriggled as the last of the Dia de Muertos makeup was applied in a vain effort to make each blackened eye nearly the same size.

It was Halloween and she was keen to get out the door in her pretty skeleton makeup to receive her fair share of treats this year.



My street, which could be called Anglican Avenue by the number of clergy who live upon it, is not known for its celebratory atmosphere. You'd be hard pressed to find any rollicking reindeer in the yards, souped up sleighs on roof tops let alone any jaunty jack-o-lanterns loitering on front porches.

Knowing this, my wife went to each of our neighbours with a bag of candies to let them know that my kids would be visiting them shortly, asking for a treat.

For my daughter, it was a fun evening making the most of a day to dress up. For my son, it was a chance to score some sweet chocolates and while he enjoys pranking the family he's not yet into scary movies.

As a pastor, the evening was yet another pastoral dilemma, should my kids participate or not? Should I make them dress up as angels or pirates even though they wanted to go out as a skeleton and a warlock? What would my devout neighbours think? Was I being a bad parent and terrible priest?



The case against participating in Halloween (31 October) seemed pretty cut and dried. If All Saints Day was the Christian festival for remembering departed family (1 November), Halloween was its unkempt and obnoxious brother.

Formerly a pagan festival, I find Halloween's association with darkness disturbing. Skeletons, zombies, ghosts, vampires, devils, witches and warlocks are all about death and destruction, epitomising a world without God. Scripture tells us not only to put away all the deeds of darkness (Rom 13.12) but that God finds witchcraft detestable (Deut 18.10-13).

Worse, the day simply shouts commercialism as if we need another day buying stuff we didn't need – isn't that what's Christmas is for? Jesus also warned us about the futility and danger of serving two masters (Matt 6.24).

Nevertheless, I helped my kids get dressed up for one simple, biblical reason. I could have justified it on the basis that it was good excuse to get to know the neighbourhood for the sake of God's mission. You get to know all the kids and their parents when you offer big bags of free chocolate. It gives you plenty to talk about when you see them next at the shops.

I could have gone all theological and claimed that we were redeeming the day. Our forebears did this well with Christmas by turning all the Nordic pagan symbols of trees and lights towards Christ. I also made the most of it by reminding my kids that we don't have to be afraid of anything or anyone because of what Jesus did for us on the cross and that by his grace, no one comes back from the dead.



As I tried to apply the make-up to a wriggling child, I simply thought of Paul's words to the Corinthians about food offer to idols (1 Cor 8.1-13).

Gentiles and Jews eating together was a big deal in Corinth. It wasn't simply that some flouted God's dietary laws but they were eating food sacrificed to pagan gods through false worship and everyone knew how that story ended. Yet for Paul and many in Corinth, such things had no power compared to Christ. He highlighted the importance of conscience and the need to care for each other.

For my kids, Halloween was about the dress ups not the darkness. Furthermore, the darkness has no power to it compared to the resurrection. If it didn't cause them to doubt the faith, it was OK.

Was I worried about my witness, about causing others to fall by giving them conceptions? Sure. Yet I figured this would give us an opportunity to talk about things that really mattered. An open and honest conversation about deep things requires far more love than simply letting their poor opinion of such things control the day.

Standing on the porch, I saw young kids urge their parents to keep up. I saw families meet strangers with a smile, admiring each others costumes and offering a gift without expecting anything in return. For a fleeting moment, it seemed that love shone brightly and I think Jesus would have liked that – a lot.

*If your family is keen to participate, why not put a jack-o-lantern out at the front door? Better still, put some chairs out with jugs of juice and candies all wrapped individually? Why not have treats that are allergy safe?*

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