

Mon 24 October 2016



The celebration of Halloween is creeping into Australian life, one ghoul at a time. On October 31 a myriad of carved pumpkins will appear along with all manner of witches, vampires and ghosts who will roam our streets seeking a sugar rush that is every parent's worst nightmare.

This celebration fills me with dread and unresolved contradiction. As a parent, my kids want to dress up. As a pastor, I know that darkness isn't something to be trivialised (2 Cor 6.15-18). It's not much of a choice being the faithful party-pooper. Yet as a missionary, I wonder if there is an opportunity here to engage in a new way with people who don't know much about the best story in the world. What should I do?



Our churches have three choices, each of which speaks a lot about how we see ourselves as God's people.

As God's people we can choose to be offended at Halloween's rampant display of anti-Christian themes. We can see it as yet another example of how everything goes except Christianity. If all the zombies, witches and vampires say anything, it's not a message about eternal life. And if I am honest, I do feel somewhat smug and self-satisfied by grumping at how the whole thing is just another piece of un-Australian, commercialised junk.

Alternatively, as God's people we can choose to hideaway. It's easy to pretend that Halloween isn't happening. In most suburban streets, nothing will happen. A few kids will walk around and most will be disappointed by the slim pickings they're receive. Many kids

will stay in, watch TV and have dinner early. Many adults will turn all the lights off and pretend that no one is home. This is the safe way to avoid any uncomfortable conversations with any stray six-year old about why they're not getting a treat this year.

Personally, I'm more inclined to let the missionary side out this year. As God's people we can send out invitations for a dress up party, make up unhealthy party bags, carve those pumpkins for the porch, put the barby on the front lawn and break out the lemonade.

Why go to such lengths for something so dubious?

I'm coming to see that Halloween isn't really about devils and magic so much as it is about hospitality. Halloween is about offering something wonderful to complete strangers and not receiving anything in return. Above all else, Halloween is about my neighbourhood. Do I care who lives there? Or am I just another stranger to be feared? Do I want my neighbourhood to be the kind of place where kids and their parents can feel safe enough to ring my doorbell?

All our social anxieties and worries are on display at Halloween whether it is the undead, sugary treats or just frightful costumes. By putting on a funny costume, everyone laughs off their worries about dying and whether they're living properly. We dress up as something bad so we don't have to see the darkness that lives inside each and every one of us.

More than anything else Halloween reminds me about the light who is Christ (John 1.4-5). The light always shines in the darkness. The darkness doesn't get it but it also can't put the light out. The light will attract some. Those who come may not know why. Nor will they be the kind of people you'd expect or desire to have around.

Jesus always offered his hospitality to anyone and everyone. No body invited me, when I rang his doorbell. I saw his stuff on the lawn and it looked friendly, in a scary kind of way. He had a big bowl of wrapped goodies. I saw something called eternal life and asked for one. To my surprise, he poured out a whole stream, more than my bucket could ever hold. He said that my black costume was nice but that he had something far better for me to wear. The white robe he gave has been far better and longer wearing than I ever imagined. The light attracted me even though I had no idea who I was talking to or what I was looking for.

So why not let Jesus loose this Halloween?

By Archdeacon **Wayne Brighton**