

Last Tuesday we sponsored a Trunk or Treat event for the community, over 300 kids participated, the largest number we have ever had. Not only does it provide a way for us to get to know the community, but it also provides a safe place for kids to celebrate Halloween. "There is safety in numbers" as they say. Some people question why a church celebrates Halloween. I mean, why would a Christian church participate with monsters, witches, ghosts, etc. As it turns out, Halloween actually belongs to the church. Halloween is a corruption of the words "All-Hallows Eve." "All Hallows eve" is the evening before All-Hallows day. All Hallows day, in more modern terminology is called All-Saints day. It's our holiday. All Saints Sunday was the celebration of all God's saints, of All God's holy people, who have passed away in the faith and were now in heaven with the Lord. It's our holiday. --- The reason why the modern day "Halloween" with all the spooks and stuff, came about... is that over time, the world started focusing on the "death" part of All Hallows day. They corrupted it into a celebration of the Earthly side of death, of decay, of evil spirits. All Hallows eve, Halloween became a time of superstition, and a watered down version of this superstition, has been handed down to us as the American Halloween.

As Christians we retain the true meaning of All Hallows Day. We remember all those saints who died in the faith! We remember our loved ones whom we have had to let go to God. During our prayer time we will be remembering 30 loved ones, brothers and sisters in Christ, who have gone to be with our Lord. Yet this is a time not only of mourning, but of celebration. It is a time to remind ourselves that our loved ones are in a better place. It is a time of hope perhaps as we look forward to a wonderful reunion in Heaven. Because of Jesus Christ we have a comfort and hope of heaven. A hope which not only affects us in the future, but changes the very way we live now. Our Father in Heaven says we DO have a reason to celebrate. Amen

Today, I want us to come face-to-face with some tough thoughts. Death may not be something you want to think about. But it is important to remember that "how you view death" determines "how you live life" "how you treat others here on Earth." There are many aspects of death, but today I'm thinking more of the loss a loved one to death. Like, I know you know about God promises. But I want to know "Are you really okay with the idea of that we are "celebrating" the death of our loved ones?" Separation from a loved one can be a hard thing to deal with. This year alone we are remembering 30 brothers and sisters, (loved ones,) who have gone to be with our Lord. Some of us are still grieving the loss of loved ones from years past. How does one celebrate the loss of loved ones?

You know, sometimes I think about the future. I think about the loss of my loved ones. As I anticipate the loss of my loved ones in the future, "I" do not feel like celebrating. I ask myself - How can we celebrate such a thing? First of all, I want everyone to know that these feelings are natural. All men have had to deal with these feelings, since the beginning of time since death entered the world. not only feelings of separation and loneliness, but feelings of dread, as we are forced to deal with our own mortality, maybe even of anger, thoughts of "Why me?" "Why now. I'm not ready".

Scripture tells us the source of these feelings. Since the fall of Adam and Eve, when sin entered the world, death, and the fear of death, has had its way with all men. As a result, separation, loneliness, anger, and death have come to all men. In fact, the bible tells us that death is not just the end of physical life. As scripture puts it, sin brought spiritual death, eternal damnation, separation from God, God who is the source of all joy and good. Not only did it bring separation from God, but separation between one another, between loved ones. All the loneliness, the feelings of abandonment, the breaking of relationships between friends, between husbands and wives, between children and parents, is due to sin. Each separation, each split, a little death. Scripture says death is simply the wages of sin. Because of our sinfulness, it is natural: the separation, the loneliness, the anger, the fear; death. It is natural. In the eyes of this world there is, in fact, no reason to celebrate death, no reason to celebrate the loss and separation from loved ones.

In the eyes of this world it is feared. Death is feared. "Coping with death" is a major component of every religion on Earth. Each tries to bring comfort in the face of death. Each tries to deal with suffering: loneliness, anger, fear.... Each tries to promise you some better place after death. And yet when you look closely, there is hollow comfort in the promises of the natural religions of the Earth. You wanna know why there is no ultimate comfort in the natural religions of the earth? For every Earthly religion, salvation depends on something you are expected to do. According to Earthly religions peace about death, about separation, about loneliness depends on us: our right understanding, our right actions and good works, our obedience to the right people, our proper meditation, before we gain peace. But imagine the fear which comes as one wrestles with the question, "have I done enough? or "Have I done it right?" Imagine the fear which comes knowing deep inside that the answer to those questions is "NO". "I haven't done enough." "I haven't done it right all the time." And I am left with no comfort. For if I am true to myself, I know that I am not enough. All Earthly religions recognize the fear of death. All earthly religions try to help people cope with death. But their solutions bring hollow comfort. For this reason, Scripture condemns all these religions. It condemns them as blind to God's ways. Those who follow those religions and put their faith in their own understanding, their own actions and good works, their own meditation. They live in a lie. They live in a lie, which has horrible consequences. They live in a lie which has horrible eternal consequences. What are they to do? What are we to do?

There is good news. God has intruded into this sinful universe with power and salvation. God, the creator of the universe, the creator of life has come in and provided for us, himself. Because God loved man, he has provided a way to life. God so loved the world that he sent his son Jesus, that whoever believed in him should not perish but have eternal life. God saw us in our helplessness and freed us from our bondage to sin and death. And Christ is the key. Revelations says: These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup> Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple Since Jesus died on the cross, the ultimate sacrifice has been made, once for all. A sacrifice was made which pays the wages of our sin, pays for our death. Christ is our temple, he is our high priest, our connection to God.

who has freed us from death and sin. We do not strive to find God through meditation. We do not strive to please God through doing the right things to gain his approval. For to seek assurance of salvation in the works that we do is a waste of time. Rather, salvation comes from one realization, and one alone. Jesus has already done it all for us. Put your faith in that and that alone. All those who have faith in Christ, have their name written in the book of life. All those who have been baptized into the faith which Christ has given us, have eternal life. We are now part of his kingdom. God has given us a great hope. God has given us a great vision of our future. And that future given to us by God affects us here today.

What we believe happens after death, affects what we do today, and this is especially true about death. Because of that promised future we celebrate at a time when the world can only mourn. We celebrate because when we talk about the dead, we not only remember the past, the shared experiences, but we also talk about the now, the future, what our loved one is doing now. The book of Revelation talks about what our loved ones are doing NOW.

<sup>16</sup> Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. <sup>17</sup> For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

God has promised that all that we suffer here on Earth will be made aright. All the imperfections and weaknesses of body and mind, consequences of this sinful Earth, will be removed. Cancer will be gone. Heart disease will be gone. Diabetes will be gone. We will live in Heaven with perfect bodies. We will return to the way it was at creation, in the garden of Eden, when Man and woman were able to stand before God without shame. Where God called all of it... good. This is the Heaven that God has promised that we will enter. This is the great promise of God which Christ has bought for us. This is the reason why we can celebrate. We celebrate All Saints Day, because we celebrate all those who now already experience that joy. The Good news of Christ has removed the sting of death in all its forms. We know that all those in faith whom we have lost are in a better place. Not only that but God says to us You will not be separated from your loved ones forever. Rather, I have created a place where you will never again have to endure the pain of separation from a loved one. a place where we will all meet together again in joy. We have a union which cannot be broken here on Earth, a union which cannot even be broken even by death. We know what all our brothers and sisters in Christ who passed away this year are doing right now. They are in paradise. This is why we, as Christians, celebrate on All Saints Sunday.

My brothers and sisters we are so blessed. When we come face-to-face with the reality of death, we have such a comfort in Christ. But there are 145,000 people within three miles of Immanuel First, who are afraid of death. In the face of the reality of death, they have no defense. They have no peace when faced with the separation, the loneliness, which accompanies death. At best they simply resign themselves to the sting of death, to the suffering and grief as a natural part of the circle of life. God is calling you to share the good news of Jesus Christ. You can give them a defense against the grief of death. You can protect them against the sting of death. Make friends with someone this week, who does not know Jesus.

Share with them the promises which God has given you. As they come to know you, they will come to know the Lord. Jesus Christ... Our comfort in this life. Our hope for the future.  
Amen