

It's spooky

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

October 31, 2010

Lions and tigers and bears. Oh, my!

That movie has been around for a long time. It had already been around for a long time when I used to watch it as a child. It was my favorite movie, maybe because it was one of the few movies my parents allowed me to watch. But I do have to tell you -- I used to have some bad dreams about flying monkeys! They were spooky!

There will be lots of spooky creatures out and about tonight, maybe not flying monkeys, but surely a good share of witches and ghosts and goblins and monsters of various sorts. Yes, there will be princesses and ladybugs and superheroes knocking at your door, but really, Halloween is about the spooky stuff.

Halloween is about the spooky stuff. We decorate our houses with spider webs and bats and scary jack-o-lanterns. We visit haunted houses and watch scary movies. We love being scared. We pay good money to be scared! The new movie, *Paranormal Activity 2* made over \$41,000,000 in its first week!

Why? Why do we like to be scared? Why do we like spooky stuff? Why do we still celebrate Halloween?

Halloween has its origins in the celtic celebration of Samhain. Samhain was celebrated at end of summer, a time when the celts thought the divide between this world and the other world was especially thin. They wore masks to disguise themselves, so that any evil spirits crossing over from the other side would mistake them as one of their own and leave them alone.

We don't worry about such evil spirits anymore and yet we still wear masks and we still celebrate Halloween. Why? Well, for the same reason we celebrate any holiday -- to make money! We celebrate this holiday to make money for costume and candy makers!

But, really, I think part of the continuing attraction of the holiday is that it allows us to dabble in the dark side, harmlessly. We love to scare ourselves silly, knowing that none of it is real. We wouldn't flock to the theaters if there was something there that could really hurt us! It's a way of disarming our fears by making fun of them, maybe something not so different, after all, from what the celts were doing.

Most of the spooky stuff is just silly, just fun. We don't take any of it seriously. We watch monster movies and even supernatural thrillers as much to laugh as to scream. In fact, the movies I find most scary are not the ones with gruesome creatures or lots of blood and guts. I won't watch those movies at all anyway.

No, the really spooky movies are the films like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, where everything that appears to be normal isn't, where people are not what they seem to be, where you don't know who you can trust and who you can't.

A figure appears, descending from the heavens, surrounded by a host of mighty angels, wielding a flaming fire and delivering to all who oppose him the punishment of eternal destruction, hell.

Pretty spooky stuff. Fantastic. Surreal. Out there. And, most of the time, most of us take this about as seriously as we take ghosts and witches and vampires. It's part of the story, part of our Christian mythology: heaven and hell and a day of final judgment. We pass on the story, but it's not something we think about, not something that affects to any significant degree the way we live from day to day. Like Halloween, we tell the stories, we celebrate the rituals, and then get on with our lives.

Now that's really spooky! Because you don't dabble with the holy God!

How can we offer the living God -- the living God! -- just a token, just the expendable leftovers, of our money and our time and ourselves?

How can we claim to be loved by the creator of this universe and not be utterly consumed by that love?

How can we claim to be Christian, to take for our own the name of the One who gave himself away for the sake of the weak and the poor and the sinful and then turn our backs on the weak and the poor and the sinful?

How can we claim to be people of faith, but base the important decisions of our lives on what is convenient, on what is of most benefit to us, on what makes good sense, on what everybody else is doing, on anything and everything but faith?

How can we gather here, in the presence of the holy God, the One who holds our lives, body and soul, in his almighty hands, but leave here to fear, not him, but everything else -- what people will think, what people will do, what the future might bring?

That's spooky ...

People who are not what they seem to be.

People who start down the road of faith, but do not finish it.

People who claim to believe in God, but live as if there is no God, as if there is no absolute right or absolute wrong, as if there is no justice.

But God is! And God is just! That's what Paul wanted the Thessalonian Christians to remember: God is just! God will do what is right!

Life was hard for them. Life is hard! They were believers, new believers. Life is hard for believers, too, especially for believers! They were persecuted for their beliefs. They were ridiculed, slandered, ostracized. They were pressured to conform to what everybody else was doing and thinking.

Life was hard for them, but Paul encouraged them to continue to endure and believe. Endure and believe, because God is just, because God will do what is right!

God will bring relief to those who suffer and suffering to those who oppress. God will turn the world upside down, because it needs to be turned upside down! The world needs to be turned upside down to be made right! The last will be first and the first will be last! The humble will be exalted and the exalted will be humbled! Those who believe will be given eternal life, and those who reject the Good News will be given eternal destruction.

Does this idea of the justice of God disturb you? But look closely, listen carefully, and you will perceive the stunning fairness of this justice: we only get what we choose. Those who choose to reject God, those who choose to live on their own, by their own means, by their own rules, apart from God, get what they want. They will be -- forever -- apart from God, separated from God's glory.

Don't make that choice! Don't make that choice! You will get what you want!

No. Believe! Endure and believe! Hear the Good News and obey it. Live it, live by it, all the way! Don't dabble with the Holy God. Don't play at being a Christian. Don't poop out or cave in when the going gets tough.

Finish the road you have started down. Go all the way, with God's help, with Jesus to guide you, with the Spirit to comfort you.

Because at the end of that road there is ... glory! We will share Jesus' glory!

The glory of living beings made in God's own image ...

The glory of children loved and cared for forever by the Holy God ...

The glory of being worthy, of being something, someone that matters, in God's eyes ...

The glory of taking delight in God and of God taking delight in us ...

The glory of living in and with the Light that outshines the sun and the stars and any created light. The glory of dancing and singing and working and playing in the Light forever ...

Oh, my!