

Generation to Generation by Rev. Lisa Ann Moss Degrenia¹

Halloween is classically known as All Hallows Eve. (You can see how the words were combined to make Halloween.) We don't use the word *hallow* very much anymore. It means *holy*, as in the Lord's Prayer: Our Father who art in heaven, *hallowed* be thy Name. It is a holy evening because it is the evening before All Saints Day.

Some Christians would argue that we shouldn't celebrate Halloween. In the sense of celebrating evil or the occult, I would agree. In advocating greed and trickery, I would also agree. But, as in the case of so many things, there are ways to claim this day for God. It all depends on how you approach it.

Idea #1: On All Hallows Eve we can give sweets and dress up as a way of laughing in the face of death. We laugh knowing that on All Saints Day we celebrate the power of resurrection offered to us through Jesus Christ. Death has no victory! We are not afraid! We claim again the hope and promise of heaven and eternal life.

Idea #2: All Hallows Eve is followed by All Saints Day which is followed by All Souls Day. On All Souls Day we remember the departed faithful, the great cloud of witnesses, the saints who have gone before us. On Halloween we can dress up and celebrate their stories.

Whose faith inspires your faith? Maybe it is a person from the Bible: Joseph's integrity, David's courage, Mary's faith. Maybe it is a super saint from church history: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's faithfulness in the Nazi concentration camp, Francis of Assisi's work with nature and the poor, Fannie Crosby's hymn writing and mission work. Maybe it is ordinary people who shared Jesus with you through word and deed: the teacher, the coach, the family member.

Their devotion and perseverance encourage our faith. That is worth celebrating and remembering. They passed the faith to us. Now it is our turn to pass it to others. What would it be like to go from neighbor to neighbor sharing how the person we are dressed as inspires our faith?

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Idea #3: The Protestant portion of the Christian family tree made an important addition to the All Hallow's Even, All Saints Day, All Soul's Day celebrations.² They reminded us that anyone who follows Jesus Christ is a saint. The people of God are referred to as saints over 60 times in the New Testament. This celebration gives us a moment every year to look at our lives and rededicate ourselves to that role.

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

¹ This sermon was offered November 1, 2009 while Rev. Degrenia was serving as the pastor of Allendale United Methodist Church in St. Petersburg, Florida

² For more information on All Hallow's Eve, All Saints Day and All Soul's Day, please visit Jan Richardson's wonderful blog *The Painted Prayerbook* <http://paintedprayerbook.com/2008/10/26/feast-of-all-saints-a-gathering-of-spirits/>

As Christians we are part of the priesthood of all believers. Each and every one of us is set apart by God's grace "as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries." (1 Corinthians 4:1) We each have a calling, a purpose, a testimony to share (not just the missionary or the pastor).

Many of us are uncomfortable with the idea of being priests and/or saints. These people are holy! They live their lives fully devoted to God as "set apart" people. These people do mighty things for God and make mighty sacrifices. Exactly! In baptism we are all buried with Christ and raised to new life. (Romans 6:4) We must embrace our new life in Christ fully. As the faith was passed to us, we are to claim it, live it, and pass it to the next generation.

Psalm 78:1-7

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. He established a decree in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children; that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and rise up and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments...

Think of passing the faith on to others like a relay race. You may have the best runners in the world, but if they drop the baton they will lose the race. The race is won in the handoffs.

God decided the faith would be passed person to person, generation to generation. Christianity is always one generation away from extinction. Think about it. The age of Christendom in American ended in the last 1960's. Over the next decades, Christianity lost its place of privilege and the society became more and more secular. If a married couple in the late 1960's stopped practicing the faith then it's likely their children do not practice the faith either. Their children are now in the 30's and 40's and they likely have children of their own now. It's possible that these children will be having children of their own before too long. That makes four generations away from faith in what feels like the blink of an eye.

What are you willing to do to offer Jesus to the next generation?

1. It will take creativity, innovation and intentionality to reach people for Jesus. We will hold on to the truth of God that does not change yet express that truth in ways people will understand and embrace. (A wise person once said: to get something you never had, you have to do something you never did.)

- Midweek education, worship and service opportunities in addition to Sunday programs
- Creative Collaboration between churches, especially those that are serving the same communities
- Giving up buildings in order to focus more resources and time on people

2. It will take being personally involved in ways many of us have never experienced. We are in a missionary age! It is time for us to claim our roles as saints and priests and get serious about passing on the faith. We must know what we believe, why we believe it and how to share it in winsome ways.

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