

## **Paige's sermon October 30, 2016 – 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Pentecost**

Scripture: First Reading: Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4; Psalm 119:137-144; Second Reading  
Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12; Gospel: Luke 19:1-10.

Holy one, help us to hear you in the midst of all busy-ness, all confusion, and all fear. Amen

Good Morning! “Trick or Treat? Happy Halloween! What a strange tradition. I did a bit of Goggling to research the origins of All Hallows Eve. Halloween was an ancient Celtic celebration after the Harvest time. The Celts believed the coming of winter also brought ghosts back to haunt them. To keep the ghosts away they would put food and drink offerings at the entrance to their homes to appease the returning spirits. And if they needed to go out they would wear masks so that the ghosts would think they were one of them. When the Christian Church spread to the Celtic British Isles over time adapted the pagan tradition and All Hallows Eve became a time to pray for those who had died. Children would in later times go door to door selling “soul cakes” like hot cross buns, in exchange for gifts of food, money and wine. It wasn’t until the 1950s that Halloween became a child centered, costume, candy eating event! It is now a \$6 Billion a year holiday. \$6 billion! Now that is scary! From the Holy to Hersey's!

Next Sunday we will honor both the Holy people, the saints of our tradition and the holy people of our lives who have died, yet live on in spirit. But this morning I want to focus on one of the most frightening realities of our day – cancer. Of course there are hundreds of other terrifying things in our world now and in our world before now. We each have our own list. But cancer is more likely to attack us than any terrorist bomb, any hurricane, or any drunk driver. As many of you are aware, three years ago I was diagnosed and treated for breast cancer. For each of you who have had the same shattering report from a doctor or who have then had to tell your family and friends, it is a memory which will never go away. I remember when my great-grand mother had cancer, no one talked about it. It was, I suppose, a belief that if the “C” word was spoken we would catch it too, or perhaps it was God punishing someone for his or her sins. Now, thankfully, there is a lot of conversation, awareness, and research and yet, the terror lives on in each of us.

A story: A man thought he had swallowed a monster, and nothing his doctor said would make him change his mind. So, finally, the doctor gave him an anesthetic and put him into a deep sleep. When he woke up, the doctor was standing beside his bed, holding a great big green monster on a lead. “Nothing more to worry about,” the doctor said. “We operated on you and took him out.” “Who are you trying to kid?” said the man. “The monster I swallowed was a blue one.”

Sometimes the monsters seem endless - the things we fear or worry about. Things we believe are more powerful than we are or even more powerful than God? Humm. Why is God always telling God's people “Fear not; I am with you ... do not be afraid”? The word salvation means we are safe! Safe! And yet, I forget! Why is that so hard to believe? Maybe believing being safe means that it is all up to God? Maybe we think we have no part in our relationship with

God. That we can just walk around in a Plexiglas bubble untarnished by the woes others experience? (If God really keeps us safe.) But in the world series of life, God is the coach, we are the team. We are up at bat, we are in the field. We are in the bullpen.

In Luke's Gospel this morning, Zacharias was one of those dreaded, hated, dirty low-down tax collectors, a chief tax collector, a Jew working for the Romans. In his heart he was a Jew. He felt drawn to Jesus and when Jesus asked for his help, his care, his hospitality, Zacharias says, "Yes" and not only "yes" but he offers to share his wealth with those in need and to rectify the harm he has caused. He acts, he responds to Jesus and Jesus proclaims safekeeping and blessing on Zacharias and his family. There is interaction. There is connection and there is give and take. Jesus was not afraid, nor was Zacharias. Those who witnessed Jesus in relationship with one who was seen as a sinner were afraid. Afraid of what: Afraid that their special status was threatened? Afraid that they might be called upon to house Jesus or even house Zacharias and give of themselves? Afraid of being asked to follow Jesus and not their own agenda?

This week I had a text from our Russian Church friend in Knoxville. He was asking if they might use our Parish Hall again for their local community (our neighbors). At first I thought: "No, that won't work, we have Sunday Night Out this Sunday night (tonight), so I texted back, we were using the church for our monthly pot luck and you are welcome to join us! ... and he said "Yes. What time and what can we bring?"! Then I went into, "Now what have I done?" And by the way, I was not planning to come to Sunday Night Out this month! But I am now!

Opening up to the stranger, to the unfamiliar can be fearful, risky, uncharted waters. But, on the other hand, it can be satisfying, heartwarming, and life giving.

This week we face the monsters of Halloween and the glory of All Saints. We face the neighbors coming for dinner and welcoming the stranger. We face memories and fears of cancer and the courage which comes from knowing that God is by our side, cheering and teaching, loving and even laughing with us as we walk through all our fears. As the ancient Scottish/Cornish prayer asks: "From ghoulies and ghosties and long-legged beasties; and things that go bump in the night. Good Lord Deliver us!"

Good Lord Deliver us! Amen