

Sermon 11-4-18
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W. Hempstead, NY
All Saints Sunday

From Darkness to Light

We've just come through Halloween. It used to be a children's holiday begging door to door for candy in costume. But it's pretty much an adult holiday now, another excuse for partying – again in costume. A jack o'lantern on the porch used to be all the decorations necessary. But now whole graveyards appear on front lawns complete with zombies, ghosts and skeletons. As some commentators have noted, we live in such blessing that Halloween has become a time to mock death.

But Halloween has other dimensions. From very ancient times November 1st has been recognized as a sacred pagan festival day, as has February 1st, May 1st and August 1st. These four dates are the so-called four corners of the year. In the northern hemisphere on November 1st we enter 91 days of darkness – the shortest days of the year. On February 1st we enter 91 days of rapid change from darkness to light. On May 1st we enter 91 days of light – the longest days of the year. On August 1st we enter 91 days of rapid change from light back to darkness. Halloween and All Saints Day occur on October 31 and November 1. Groundhog Day is February 2nd. We don't celebrate it here, but in other parts of the world Mayday, May 1st, is a day for parades. August 1st is mostly ignored these days.

The ancient pagan sacred festival day of Samhein was celebrated by Europeans in pre-Christian times on October 31st/November 1st. This was a time of connecting with the dead, the spirits of ancestors. It was also a time of incantation and spell, working with the unseen powers of the universe to ward off evil. When Europe was won to Christianity, people were still enamored of Samhein. Therefore, to combat pagan practices, the church turned November 1st into a Christian holy day – All Hallows. That's why the evening of October 31st became known as All Hallows Eve, eventually contracted to Halloween. The Christian festival of All Hallows, known to us as All Saints Day, celebrates two groups of people – first, those who have died in Christ Jesus and have gone to their eternal holy reward in Him, and second, Christ's Church on earth. More on this in a bit.

First, we consider that in the modern west, one hundred years of atheistic Philosophical Naturalism in the public schools has wiped out basic Christian teaching on the origin of the world, the meaning of life, godly morality and human destiny beyond death. As we've noted many times, all forms of paganism have exactly the same root – denial that there is an uncreated, eternal, infinite Creator God. Instead, the root doctrine of all paganism declares that the universe itself is uncreated, infinite and eternal. In effect the universe is God. Because it teaches precisely this, atheistic Philosophical Naturalism is a modern form of paganism.

Now, Philosophical Naturalism denies that there are any powers in the universe except "natural" ones. Matter and natural law are all that exist.

However, human beings become spiritually restless under such teaching because it denies any kind of ultimate meaning in life. It cuts us loose morally. And the only destiny it can give us is oblivion in the grave. Therefore, in contemporary culture there is a spiritual restlessness that seeks some kind of resolution, some kind of meaning, or at least an escape from the anxiety.

Research has revealed that socialism/communism with its false promise of utopia on earth has become a popular way of resolving the spiritual restlessness among young people. The gaining of utopia by overthrowing all the perceived injustices aligned against it – racism, sexism, desecration of the environment and such – has become a life force for a number of people. This is where our holier-than-thou social justice warriors come from. It's where our angry burn-down-the-worlders come from.

But there are other ways of dealing with spiritual restlessness. An age old standby among humans is hedonism – the pursuit of abject pleasure to dull the pain of meaninglessness. Hedonism is the very real reason we're in the midst of an opioid epidemic. It's also behind the pursuit of luxury and celebrity. For, if this life has no real meaning, then we might as well indulge ourselves – eat, drink and be merry. Contemporary hedonism has also taken a technological path. It's behind the addiction to virtual reality and gaming as well as addiction to porn and much more.

Yet another way people are dealing with their restlessness is spirituality and spiritism – a return to the ancient pagan modalities of understanding the universe. Ancient and modern paganism teaches that the eternal universe has unseen spiritual powers within it with which we can interact. Christianity agrees with the part about spiritual powers. However, there's a huge distinction. Paganism accepts forms of interaction with these spiritual powers that the Word of the Creator God forbids. For, the Word of God declares that many of these powers have corrupted themselves and are in open rebellion against their Creator. All who would follow them join them in their corruption and rebellion. These powers were the source of ancient idolatry. And they're the source of the modern idolatry we now have in the movement toward spirituality and the occult. For a number of people, modern Halloween also celebrates a return to the ancient observances of paganism.

Since Philosophical Naturalism has scrubbed much of Biblical Christian teaching out of public life, even churchgoers have gotten caught up in tolerating or even embracing the occult as a way to satisfy our desperate need for meaning, morality and hope beyond death. Some see no problem going to psychics and mediums to supposedly contact dead loved ones or seek life choices. Still others seek out life choices through horoscopes, tarot cards, Ouija boards and the like.

But it's time for God's people to rid themselves of such ignorance and rebellion. For, in God's Word we have the truth concerning our origin, our purpose, true morality and our true destiny. In a word, we need to let go of pagan Halloween and embrace what Christian All Saints Day is about. It's about Jesus.

So to those who seek spiritual realities, we say fine. Let us tell you of the reality you seek. You have an origin. You are the offspring of the Creator God, Yahweh. He, and He alone, is the uncreated, infinite, eternal, personal being who has created all realities both seen and unseen. He has created you in love for an intimate

relationship with Him and with those who love Him. That is the meaning and purpose of human existence.

Yahweh's will and purpose for the behavior of everything in His universe as originally created in perfection is the source and origin of everything good. Evil is anything contrary to His original purpose and will. Therefore, the will of Yahweh as revealed in His Word to us is the source of all morality for humanity. This is why we are creatures with consciences that respond to good and evil.

And concerning the great question of destiny – genuine love is a two way street exercised in freedom. Love is love only if real freedom exists to walk away. Therefore, our Creator arranged things at the very beginning of His universe so that the first two human beings would have a choice to love their Creator, or walk away. Adam and Eve had a choice to have Yahweh's righteous will and purpose as their own will and purpose, or they could walk away and create a will and purpose for themselves. Their destiny and the destiny of their descendants would depend on their choice. Yahweh warned Adam and Eve that walking away would ruin them and ruin the perfection of the created order. Walking away would permit physical death to enter creation and thus render everything meaningless.

Nevertheless, despite the Word of God's command and His warning, Adam and Eve listened to an angel who had already walked away from Yahweh. They chose against Yahweh. They chose to be their own gods. They chose to define good and evil for themselves. In doing so they brought down upon themselves every consequent judgment. They fell from being made in the Image of God to only having the likeness of God. And we, their children, are bereft of meaning because the grave appears to be our only destiny.

Yet, because our Creator is love, their choice was not the end of everything and is not the end of everything. For, on the very day Adam and Eve fell into sin, Yahweh made a promise in their hearing. A male human being would be born who would endure the sting of the rebel angel's bite but would crush both the rebel and his rebellion (Genesis 3:15). This is the Messiah.

In due season, the Messiah appeared, fulfilling everything prophesied about Him for over a thousand years. So we read in Philippians 2:5-11, "5... Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." The valiant suffering of the innocent Messiah as a criminal upon a cross re-opened the gateway to an eternal relationship with our Creator to all who believe in Jesus, the suffering Messiah. Jesus conquered death and the grave for us.

And in His suffering Jesus did something that all those enamored of the new spirituality should know. It's found in Colossians 2:15, "... having disarmed the powers and authorities, he [Jesus] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." These powers and authorities are the rebellious ones in the unseen realms – fallen angels, demons and whatever else is out there – who would

have us worship them or worship ourselves instead of our true Creator. Jesus – the second Adam – has crushed all rebellious powers by His obedience to God on the cross. Therefore, those who would align their lives with any idolatry, ancient or modern, will also find themselves crushed – if they refuse Yahweh’s gracious invitation to repent of their sin and turn to Him.

Consider Colossians 1:13-14, “13 For he [God] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” As can be seen, we are tenderly invited to confess sin and put our faith in the righteous work of Jesus Christ so that we might receive forgiveness of our sins and be rescued from this present darkness by God Himself. This is the will of Yahweh for all people.

But there is a present spiritual darkness. And we must recognize its power because it plays a significant role in our personal destinies.

Because our first parents chose to walk away from Yahweh, all of us are conceived and born alienated from our Creator. This is the spiritual darkness we all inherit. Nevertheless, Yahweh has made His extravagant loving mercy to us rebels known through His Son, His suffering servant, Jesus. At great cost He has purchased our lives, so that by His Spirit we might believe and be reconciled to Yahweh in eternal light.

However, a Day of Judgment will come for all who reject God’s mercy and love the darkness, either upon death or at Christ’s return. They will receive the full separation from their Creator that they have knowingly or unknowingly desired in life. And totally separated from Yahweh they will fall fully into the total darkness of eternal evil. That is a dreaded promise given by Jesus Himself.

But, Yahweh says in Ezekiel 33:11, “... ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live.’” And we need to keep this verse in mind as we consider the days ahead. For, we at Trinity are called precisely for this purpose – to proclaim the amazing destiny Yahweh desires for all. We’re to call many out of the darkness and into the Kingdom of God. We’re to invite many to be reconciled to God through Messiah Jesus. We’re to call the lost back to the knowledge of their origin, the knowledge of their meaning and purpose in life, the knowledge of what is right and true versus what is not, and the knowledge of the destiny their Creator desires for them in His Son, Jesus Christ.

We close meditating on a most blessed promise given to us in our second lesson for this All Saints Sunday. 1 John 3:2, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he [Jesus] appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” These words mean that the details of human existence after the return of Messiah and the resurrection of the dead are not yet known. However, we shall be fully restored to the Image of God by our wonderful Lord Jesus so that we can stand holy and righteous in Yahweh’s presence forever. Of this we can be sure. It is in anticipation of this great destiny that Christ’s People have for centuries allowed God’s Holy Spirit to set their agenda for this life. Let it be so for us. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the NIV.