

St Nicholas Parish Church, Prestwick

The Thought for the Week

Sunday 1st November 2020

I was terribly sorry to hear that our children were being advised not to go out guising on Hallowe'en this year because of the Pandemic. I hope that they can have some sort of fun nevertheless.

Nowadays, of course, it is called "Trick or Treat", but when I was a wee boy, it was called "guising" – you put on a disguise, an outfit that was usually made by your Mum using odd bits of clothing from around the house. There were no fancy dress outfits of your favourite character to buy in the shops, and often our outfits were made from cardboard boxes and one of your Dad's old shirts!

In those far away days, my Mum would spend the afternoon making tablet and toffee apples to give to those who called at our house, and when they came in, they were invited to tell a joke, sing a song, or say a poem and they were then given some money and a bag of homemade tablet and a lovely toffee apple wrapped in grease proof paper.

We dooked for apples, bobbing around in my wee sister's baby bath, and Dad would tie a string across the sitting room with scones covered in treacle and we had to try to take a bite, ending up with really sticky faces.

Dad would also gouge out a turnip and make it look like a scary face, and put a candle inside. Nowadays it has to be a pumpkin, because that's what the Americans do!

It was great fun and totally unsophisticated!

Halloween, All Hallows Eve, the night when we have great fun dressing up and it is all very harmless and innocent. There is nothing unchristian or pagan about it, despite the protestations of some folk!

I recall the year after I came to Ayr, I got prepared for guisers on Hallowe'en. I bought a vast array of sweets from Woolworths and apples from Malcolm Campbell's and put them in bags with a selection of nuts and a 50p. And I waited...and waited...and waited....and not a soul came. I was very disappointed as there were several children in the street and in the neighbourhood.

The following year, I didn't bother, and yes, you've guessed it, they came in their droves!

It is a great family time, a time of togetherness and making memories, of laughing and telling jokes.

Halloween, 31st October, "All Hallows' Eve" is the night before All Saints' Day, the 1st of November.

This is the day that the Church has set aside to remember all those who have tried to follow Jesus down through the Christian centuries.

On 1st November, we remember all the believers in the family of God who have gone before us – Saint Peter, Saint Paul, St Columba – lots and lots of them whom we hear about from the past who were disciples of Jesus and tried to put His teaching into practice in their lives.

The Bible tells us that we are part of their family, part of the family of faith.

It is great to belong to a family.

I so love that programme on TV called "Who do you think you are?", tracing the genealogy of famous people. Often they are deeply moved and inspired as their family story unravels.

One of my projects when this awful Covid business is put to rest, is to try to search my family tree – I already have part of my Dad's family tree, tracing his mother's roots away back to the mid eighteenth century to Glasgow, where some of my Fraser ancestors were weavers! I have still to trace the Aitken side who were Paisley Buddies for as far back as can be remembered!

I also have part of my Mum's family tree and I can go back to my great great grandfather's birth in Roxburgh in the Borders on one side of the family and another great great grandfather who was a joiner in the village of Stewarton in the mid nineteenth century. And we ended up in Johnstone from the 1870s onward!

I didn't know them as they were long dead before I was born, and I have some sepia photographs on top of the piano of a few of them.

And I am proud to belong to their family.

In Church, All Saints' Day reminds us that we belong to the family of God, and that family goes back a long way too – back to Abraham and Moses and all the disciples of Jesus. The Bible is our family tree.

What is a saint?

Well, it is someone who is pictured in the splendid colours of our stained glass windows, yes.

But, more importantly, a saint is someone who is set apart for God's special purposes.

And everyone who believes in God and who wants to love and serve Jesus is a saint.

And that includes you and me!

I recently read this about those who are saints.

"Saints are big dreamers. They believe that God is on their side and no one and nothing can stop them.

Saints are go getters. They don't wait for someone else to do good first. They jump right in.

Saints are love bringers. They try to see Jesus in every person and in every situation.

Saints tell us what matters most in life is not what we earn or what we own, not the job we have or the people we know. What really matters is how much we love God, others and ourselves, and how well we show that love in all we do."

Already I have met lots of saints in this congregation, though they would be the first to dismiss that notion.

But, they are!

The Bible tells us that they belong to the family of faith, even when we make mistakes. And I find that very comforting.

Did you know that the saint whom we celebrate next month, St Nicholas, the Patron Saint of our Church, once punched somebody? He was at an important Church meeting, and there was a lot of arguing and discussing and Nicholas got so annoyed with someone, so mad, that he just punched the guy.

Now, that wasn't a very kind thing to do, but it lets us remember that even saints can make mistakes. And I must confess that there were a few times in the past years at Church meetings, when I felt that I wanted to do what Nicholas did! But I would have been arrested and carried off to King Street, which would not have made a very happy headline in The Ayrshire Post!

Today we remember Nicholas and all the saints of old and those whom we have known who are no longer present with us.

We honour their memories by living up to the best that they lived as they sought to follow Jesus.

O yes, I definitely want to be among that number when they all go marching in!

The Revd Fraser R Aitken

Locum Minister