

**All Hollows' Eve: The Source Is with You**  
**Halloween Sunday, October 31, 2021, 11:30 a.m., All Saints Church, Pasadena**  
**The Rev. Dr. Sally Howard**

In the name of the Creator, Redeemer, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Happy All Hallow's Eve Day!

Did you know that the word "Hallows" means Saints?

Halloween begins the observance of All-Hallow-Tide, the time in the liturgical year dedicated to remembering the dead including saints or hallows, martyrs, and all the departed. We will complete our own All-Hallow-Tide, next week with the beautiful and solemn services of All Saints Day. But today is Halloween with its traditions rooted in "Sow In" (Samhain), the Celtic festival marking the end of summer. In the Celtic world, it was a liminal time when the boundary between this world and the Otherworld was thinnest.

And today, we carry forward some aspects of All Hallows Day that began long, long ago. For example, trick or treat has its roots in "soul-cakes" that were given to children to eat on behalf of the departed. Showing hospitality to the souls of the dead who are believed to return home on one night of the year is found in many cultures, including Dia de Los Muertos, that we will celebrate this Tuesday.

And of course there is "guising", the wearing of costumes when people of all ages went house to house in disguise singing and dancing in exchange for treats. In an interesting observation one insightful person wrote, "in dressing up as creatures who at one time caused us to fear and tremble, people are able to poke fun at Satan, whose kingdom of death has been plundered by our Saviour".

Indeed, Halloween can give us some sense of mastery over our fears, especially as children and youth. It can also be very fun to play with our identity and adopt a different one for the day. Even as adults! As you can see I am indulging an enduring affection for Princess Leia. I grew up with an early image of the first landing on the moon and dreams of worlds yet to be discovered in a galaxy far far away. I was a fan of Star Wars, which for me, took off right where Star Trek ended. A key difference was that in Star Wars, the heroes included a strong and resourceful young woman named Leia, who was savvy and sassy with a mind of her own and the ability to accomplish a mission. I took to her right away!

A woman with special powers of the Force, she helped create an intergalactic alliance of unity across difference. A worthy role model, she chose to align her power with the Forces of good, including destruction of the Death Star.

In our readings today—we got ‘em all—a witch, a ghostly presence, dry bones and a dead man wrapped in cloth. Each reading in its own way, speaks to power, to fear, to death, and to the source of life available to us now and for all time. They tell us what real power is and how to align ourselves with it.

In the reading from first Samuel, we are drawn into a pre-battle scene in which the ruler Saul, has come to seek guidance from a woman, a seer, later named the “Witch of Endor”. Of significance is that during Saul’s own lifetime, there was a final transition to patriarchy not only in religious matters but also governance in monarchy.

The people had begged God for a king so that they could be like other nations. God protests and at first resists, speaking through the words of the prophet Samuel. Samuel reminds the people that God is their sovereign and that they have all that they need with God at their center guiding them. He advocates forming a loving and respectful community that welcomes the stranger.

Samuel warns them that a human king will bring their sons to war and their daughters to widowhood and grief. Nonetheless they insisted, and God relented, granting them Saul as their king. In this new order, there was no longer room for women in sacred roles as in the older traditions. Those old practices threatened the authority of the establishment. Saul himself banned sorcery. Ironically, the woman he sought out, had been forced to practice underground.

It is an eerie juncture in the story when she calls the prophet Samuel back from the dead with his thundering denouncement of King Saul and the prophecy of his death and that of his sons. But it is worth noting that she is a woman of compassion who nurtures and feeds Saul, killing a young calf to feed him and his guards. This is the third time in the book of Samuel in which women nurtured and strengthened men, the first two instances being the rescue and nurturing of David, soon to be king.

Perhaps it also reminds us that we can find it convenient to make God and God's ways in our own image. We can arrogantly colonize other traditions without being aware of who we silence, push to the margins, or destroy.

Jesus reminds us that those doing good and healing work are our partners, not our competitors, no matter who they name as their source. The Spirit of God is a wind Who recognizes no false boundaries and blows where she will. And thank God, we cannot control Her.

As all of us know, that wasn't the last time our faith tradition used the name "witch" to address women who threatened the powers that be by moving beyond their expected societal roles, including gender roles. For example, until the 16th and 17th century, the practices of midwifery and obstetrics were exclusive to women. Many accused of being witches were also midwives or "wise women". Knowledge such as healing, birth control, and midwifery came in direct opposition to patriarchal interests and control of women's bodies. In the middle ages, the main targets of witch trials were lower-class women whom nevertheless had knowledge that was crucially important to the autonomy and integrity of their societies.

Patriarchal powers have always feared women who embody the potential for self-directed feminine power and pose the threat of sexual and intellectual freedom.

The witch became the perfect symbol for anyone who wanted to subvert the status quo and proclaim they belonged to themselves or to God, without a male intermediary.

We don't need to look back to witness the efforts of patriarchal powers to gain control over the reproductive practices of the population and the bodies of women.

It all sits in the hands of the Supreme Court as I speak, with two justices appointed by a man claiming he is the victim of a witch hunt in an election he lost. It's obscene!

But take heart my friends, because you just can't keep good women down.

The words from the valley of dry bones will forever in my mind be spoken by the voice of shero Alma Stokes, accompanied by the voices of our children singing on Easter Vigil. The prophet proclaims that the power of God Almighty is power that heals and puts flesh on bones. The very word religion comes from re-ligate which means to bring back together that which is torn asunder; it is the power of life over death and all that harms us.

God isn't interested in controlling us, but re-aligning and empowering us with the breath of life that we may be friends of God and guardians of God's Spirit in each other and all that exists.

Jesus of course, lives out the subversive power of love. How ironic is it, that Jesus raising a man from the stench of death, catapults those aligned with empire powers to snuff him out. Word of the raising of Lazarus got around and people were paying attention. Those in power were threatened. We truly do fear what we cannot control, and nobody could quell Jesus' healing power. Jesus life and power over death assures us that death will not have the final word for any human being. Jesus lived and died as one of us, and in mystery took care of what we could not take care of ourselves.

So this All Hallows Day, laugh, play, eats some treats and take a poke at death.

After all, the Death Star has been vanquished! Death has no ultimate sway and the love that defeats death holds you and all those whom you have loved and lost. It always will. The Source of Life is with you.

And today, the force is with me!

Happy Halloween!