

FROM THE HEART – October 24, 2002

Just Say BOO!

Pastor John Hicks

A woman was asked by a co-worker, "What is it like to be a Christian?"

The co-worker replied, "It is like being a pumpkin. God picks you from the patch, brings you in, and washes all the dirt off of you. Then He cuts off the top and scoops out all the yucky stuff. He removes the seeds of doubt, hate, greed, etc., and then He carves you a new smiling face and puts His light inside of you to shine for the entire world to see." (author unknown)

About 1600 years ago, Christians took over the festival of Samhain from the Druids. The Celts celebrated the beginning of their new year, November 1, with bonfires, animal and vegetable sacrifices, and well-wishing prayers to those that had died throughout the previous year. They believed that the souls of these departed friends and family members spent New Year's Eve being judged as to what form they should take for the next year (good souls entered other human bodies at birth, they believed; bad souls entered animal bodies). On November 1, New Year's Day, they traveled to their new abodes.

Christian missionaries quickly took over this pagan celebration, transforming it into "All Saints' Day" or "All Hallows' Day," a holy day to honor the lives of the saints of the church and to remember individual Christians who have passed on to join the Church Eternal.

But it is hard to keep a good pagan down. The Celtic celebration simply shifted the time this soul's rite of passage took place. The "soul wondering" now occurred on New Year's/All Hallows' Eve, October 31. All of Halloween's traditions -- disguising ourselves in costumes, welcoming strangers at our doors with "treats," keeping special jack-o'-lantern vigil lights – have come from these ancient traditions and needs to try to understand and keep the forces of death and darkness at bay. Over the years Halloween has continued to grow in popularity. We can't help but be in the middle of it.

So how should we respond? In the face of all the specters of death conjured up on Halloween night by human fear and guilt, in the midst of

Halloween with all of its witches, goblins, devils, vampires and ghosts, Christians should rejoice in their freedom to "Just Say BOO!" As members of the family of God, we need not fear any of the creatures of darkness. Even more, in the midst of darkness we are called to be lights to the world.

There are times in our lives when we have opportunities to reach out and touch people in a special way. Halloween can be one such opportunity. There was a man in the neighborhood where I grew up who made snow cones every Halloween for all of us trick-or-treaters. I remember him. More than that, I remember how special he made each of us feel. It inspired within me a desire to one day, if at all possible, to do what he did – to make and hand out snow cones on Halloween -- to make good memories by touching the hearts of children and youth in special ways.

We can redeem Halloween. Some churches have fall festivals and Halloween alternatives where children and youth can go celebrate in a fun and safe environment. These are great! I have chosen to do my outreach at home. If you come to my house on Halloween, you will find pumpkins carved in special ways, bowls of the best candy, -- and yes, a snow cone machine running and the light of Christ shining.