

Proper 14 Year C
Aug. 11, 2010
St. James, Wheat Ridge

By the Rev. Becky Jones

I saw something last week that filled me with disbelief.
It was August 1, to be exact.
And on that day, I saw ...
the first Halloween supplies being put out by stores.

On August 1!
Almost three full months before Halloween actually arrives!
Talk about being dressed for action and having your lamps lit.
If Episcopalians were as enthusiastic about being prepared for the Son of
Man's return
as retailers are about being prepared for Halloween,
well ...

As for me, I don't understand *why* it's appropriate
to start thinking about Halloween in early August.
But, to be honest with you, I don't understand why
our lectionary puts this particular gospel passage in early August either.
Seems like it would be more appropriate for Advent.
The whole theme of Advent is about being prepared, waiting expectantly.
But in the heat of August we just want to lazily drift through the days,
enjoy the last of the summer doldrums
before the pace of life picks up in September.

How come we can't have a nice passage about lilies of the field
who neither sow nor reap.
Now THAT'S an appropriate gospel for August.
But instead we get Jesus telling us to be alert, be ready.

OR, you know what time of year this passage REALLY fits ...
HALLOWEEN!
How funny is that. What a coincidence.
Go on, re-read that passage with Halloween eyes.

“Don’t be afraid, little ones.
It will be people’s pleasure to give you candy.
You’re gonna get so much candy, you’ll need strong bags to carry it all.
Dress up, and carry a flashlight.
And adults, be sure you answer the door
as soon as the trick-or-treaters arrive,
and be sure to give them plenty of candy.
Don’t run out of candy,
because you don’t know WHEN
the last trick-or-treater will arrive.

Don’t you see it?
Doesn’t it sort of work for Halloween?

I guess I’ve just got Halloween on the mind this week.
Halloween never used to be this big a deal.
I know when I first got old enough to stay home
and be the treat-giver rather than the treat-getter,
it didn’t take a lot of preparation.
I’d buy one bag of candy,
and that would last all night and I’d still have some left over.

So I was really caught flat-footed one year
when the house across the street from me –
a big, scary-looking old mansion –
was sold, and some new neighbors moved in.

I should have suspected something was up
when I watched Randy and April, the new homeowners,
dig a fresh grave in their front yard a few days before Halloween.
They added a mock headstone.
Then they planted a wireless microphone inside the dirt.
And on Halloween, when kids would walk by,
they’d speak to them and their voice would come out of the grave.
Plus, all kinds of weird noises and lights were coming out of the house.
And there was the guy hiding behind the tree in their front yard
who would jump out at passing kids and chase them with a chainsaw.
It was like living across the street from the Addams Family.

It was extraordinary.
And word spread quickly.
Kids came from everywhere to see that house.
Hundreds of them.
They just kept coming and coming and coming.
And often as not, they'd hit my house along the way!

I ran out of candy by 6 o'clock.
I started looking for other stuff I could give the kids.
I went through a bag of apples.
I went through about \$5 worth of quarters I had stashed.
By 6:30 I was handing out cartons of yogurt and cans of Diet Pepsi.
And the kids just kept coming.
I'd never seen anything like it.

Well, I learned my lesson.
The next year I had extravagant quantities of chocolate candy on hand.
Which was a good thing,
because the next year,
Channel 7 parked its news van in front of the house
and broadcast to the whole city
about what fun there was to be had
in the 2900 block of Perry Street on Halloween.

Some of the neighbors joined in the fun
and upgraded their own Halloween decorations.
One year, when Kate Marshall-Gardiner lived next door to me,
she went up to her sleeping porch
and dropped handfuls of cooked spaghetti
down on the unsuspecting trick-or-treaters
who came to her door.

Others of us began handing out candy on the sidewalk
because it was just more fun being outside on that block on Halloween
than being inside.
Outside, you could see everything that was happening
and feel like you were a part of it.

This went on for about 10 years,
until April and Randy moved away.

It's not like that now,
because April and Randy and their big old mansion
really were the heart of it.
I'm back to needing just one bag of candy.

You know, it was expensive, giving away all that candy.
But what a joy it was.
How good it made me feel.
It was my good pleasure to give out all those treats.
I miss those Halloween hordes.

And sometimes I wonder,
whatever made April and Randy do all that in the first place?
I think they just had some vision
of what *they* wanted Halloween to be.
And their vision impacted our whole block.
It only took one couple who were dressed and ready for action,
who weren't afraid of looking foolish,
who were anxious to generously share their gifts.
Just one couple to light a fire of enthusiasm and hospitality
and child-like joy
that spread up and down the block.

Well, this brings us back to this morning's gospel.
Jesus is right.
There IS no need for us to be afraid.
God's got a Kingdom for us,
and we're living in it every day,
if we want to.
All we have to do is open the door when our Lord knocks.

And I don't know about you,
but I'm not looking for any Second Coming.
I'm looking for the 10 millionth coming.
I believe Christ comes and comes and comes,
like hordes of candy-seeking children,
regularly, nonstop, into every life.

We just have to answer the door.

The thing is, sometimes Christ comes to us disguised.
Sometimes he comes disguised as the poor,
or as an immigrant.
Maybe he comes as a little child.
Maybe he comes asking us for something.

Many people may never recognize Christ when he comes.
But then again, maybe it only takes one or two.
One or two who are alert,
who are on the lookout for Christ among us.
One or two whose vision and passion and faith
help open the eyes and hearts of others around them,
so they can see the kingdom that's already here.
One or two can change a block.
Or a neighborhood.
Or a city.
Or a country.
Or a church.

Let's get dressed, people of Saint James.
Let's light our lamps.
And let our lamps be a light for this neighborhood,
for this city,
for this nation,
for this world.
Let's be ready for action.
Halloween isn't the only thing that's coming.
God's Kingdom is coming. And is here now.
And the banquet awaits us.
Don't be afraid.

Amen.