

October 23, 2016

Responding to Halloween

Deuteronomy 18:9-13

Opening words: Halloween is one week from tomorrow. It has always been an awkward day in the life of the church. Straddling between winter and summer, plenty and want, life and death, Halloween is a time of celebration and superstition. They tell us it all began in the ancient Celtic world, where they believed that the dead were permitted to return home one night a year, October 31. No one welcomed those dead visitors, so bonfires were lit, pumpkins were carved and costumes were worn to ward them off. At first the church tried to discourage Halloween, but it wouldn't go away. With no other option, Pope Gregory III created a new holiday the day after Halloween-- November 1, All Saints Day, to remember the martyrs and those who had died within the church. He hoped to balance it out. It doesn't.

The National Retail Federation reported last year, the average American spent \$74 on Halloween. That means as a country we spent approximately \$6.9 billion. That is a lot of scary decorations, candy, costumes and more. Like every other holiday, Halloween has become big business. The economics do not change the truth. The church still struggles with Halloween. It is the highest day on the Satanic calendar. I will be honest with you. I struggle with Halloween.

Our scripture lesson for today comes from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy. The word "Deuteronomy" means repetition of the law. Deuteronomy is a repetition of the book of Exodus. The story was written again because the generation who experienced the exodus was passing quickly. It was written again to underscore the importance of that experience and to pass the experience on to younger generations. The book itself, and other Old Testament books tells us the author was the great law giver, Moses. The book was written approximately 1400 BC in the territories of the Moabites, where the Jordan River flows to the Dead Sea. Our scripture reading for today comes from the eighteenth chapter. The theme is purity. Like ancient Israel, the church is to stay away from the dark practices of this world. Let me say it clearly. Halloween is very dark. Let me call this message *Responding to Halloween*.

Deuteronomy 18:9-13 When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. ¹⁰ Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, ¹¹ or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. ¹² Anyone who does these things is detestable to

the LORD; because of these same detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. ¹³ You must be blameless before the LORD your God.

What do these five people have in common?

Liberace

Marilyn Manson

Lady Gaga

Sammy Davis Jr.

Jayne Mansfield

The answer is, each one was or is a Satanist. Sammy Davis Jr. tried many religions in his life; Satanism was just one. (I thought he was Jewish.) Those names came from the internet, a website called Circle Rebel, so you know it is true ☺. If the whole topic of Satan worshipping bothers you, then say, "**Amen!**" It bothers me too. Do you know of anyone who has ever been victimized by Satanism? I do. This is her story.

It all began with a simple phone call. I was living in the Cleveland area. The year must have been about 1990. It was just one of a million phone calls. When I first picked up the phone, there was dead silence. When I said, "Hello," for a second time, an uncomfortable voice responded. It all began with the words, "I need your help." I answered, "How can I help you?" She said, "my story is complex". I explained to her that I was not a counselor. I am a minister, who has very little counseling training or skills. However, I said I would be glad to sit down with her as a friend. Her voice told me she was desperate, so she agreed. I asked her her name and she told me, "Pat." We agreed to meet at my church at a certain day and time. At the time, I thought nothing about it. It was just one of those random things that happens in the ministry. However, looking back, I must confess Pat changed my life.

At that time, I lived next door to the church. When the day came for our appointment, I looked out the side door of the parsonage. I spotted an old beat-up blue Pontiac LeMans sitting in the church parking lot. I didn't think much about it. I knew it wasn't Pat because she wasn't supposed to come for another hour. I was wrong. An hour later, I walked over to the church and Pat got out of the car. Everything about her said "victim". Her shoes were worn. Her jeans were old and rumpled. Her sweatshirt was shapeless and her hair was uncombed. When I saw her walking up the sidewalk in front

of the church, I walked up to greet her. I said, "Hi! I am Russ Adams and I am the pastor of the Hathaway United Methodist Church! You are Pat?" She didn't say a word; she just nodded her head yes. Something told me she wanted to run away. We entered the church and sat in a circle of chairs in the narthex. Unable to make eye contact with me, she stared at the dark sanctuary.

Our appointment began with me saying, "Tell me something about yourself." It was painful for her to speak, but in the next few minutes she told me her story. She was unmarried, worked in a nursing home and was estranged from her family. She was a cancer survivor who was suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome. I reminded her again, I wasn't a counselor, but she pushed on. About thirty minutes into our appointment, Pat jumped up and said, "I have to go!" She was gone in a flash. I was surprised when she called me a week later requesting to talk to me again.

When that appointment time came, it was the same story. Pat came early and sat in the church parking lot in the same old beat-up blue Pontiac LeMans. She was wearing the same old clothes. We sat in the narthex and she stared into the dark sanctuary. This time, she began by apologizing about running out in our previous appointment. I said, "That was fine. People run away from me all the time." Then she said, "I want to confess I lied to you last time. I was checking you out and wanted to meet you before you heard my whole story." I said, "Pat, what is your whole story?" I have had over twenty-five years to think about her story and it still shocks me.

She came, to say the least, from a dysfunctional family. Both of her parents were severe alcoholics. Every summer the family vacationed in Canada. Her parents spent that time drinking. They entrusted Pat to her uncle. It was her uncle who victimized her at every level. He was a Satanist. Either Pat's parents didn't know or they didn't care. Later, they said she made the whole thing up. Over a series of years on those family vacations, Pat endured the worst that one person can do to another. Like cracking a door open into a world I wanted to ignore, Pat told me about the dark side. She had been raped countless times. Drugged and photographed in pornography. She had been buried alive in a casket with only a small plastic tube to supply air. All of that happened for one reason, to please Satan. I wasn't wrong. She was a victim and she was trying to put the pieces of of life back together again.

I felt completely unqualified to help her. So, I asked, "Pat, how can I help you?" She told me she had been seeing a psychologist, who wanted her to find a minister. The psychologist hoped I could fix her theology. She ended by making two confessions. First, she was cutter. She rolled up the sleeves of that shapeless sweatshirt and exposed her scars. Some were fresh. Pat pulled a knife out of her pocket to show me her weapon. Second, she suffered from multiple personalities. I discovered later Pat had seven different personalities living within her body. For the rest of my time in that church, I met with Pat. Do you know what I did? I went through the confirmation material with every personality, and I gave Communion to each personality once she (or he) had completed the course. I met with her psychologist regularly to keep him updated and to keep me going. As I wrote this message and thought back on my time with Pat, I discovered it was the most rewarding thing I have ever done in the ministry. Because of her, I have never looked at Halloween the same way again. She taught me too much. If you find Pat's story tragic, say, "**Amen!**"

Satanism has been part of our world for centuries. However, the source of modern day Satanism can be traced back to one man, Anton LaVey (1930-1997). He authored several books to promote his dark work, *The Satanic Bible*, *The Satanic Rituals*, *The Satanic Witch*, *The Devil's Notebook* and *Satan Speaks!* Those books were vital in the creation of his new church, The Church of Satan. The best way to explain The Church of Satan is that it runs contrary to the church of Jesus Christ. It is like a parallel universe where everything is opposite. Our congregations are called churches; their congregations are called covens. In churches, we strive to know and accept everyone. In covens, fellow members are unknown because their identity is hidden. In churches, we worship in public. In covens, they worship in private. Churches worship during the day; covens worship in the middle of the night. In church, we talk about our eternal reward. In covens, they talk about temporary gain. In church, we sacrifice for strangers. In covens, they sacrifice and misuse the stranger and those who are weaker. In church, we encourage and love. In covens, they intimidate and hate. In church, we worship Jesus. In covens, they worship Satan. Satanism is a sinister parallel universe. The hardest thing for me to accept during my time with Pat was that Satanism is real. If you get nothing else out of this message, then accept this fact. Satanism is real and countless people are being victimized. If those two statements upset you, then say, "**Amen!**" Let me state the obvious.

My experience with Pat changed my understanding of Halloween. Until that point in my life, I saw Halloween as something harmless and fun. I have wonderful memories of trick-or-treating with my friends with an old bed sheet over my head. I stopped trick-or-treating in the fifth grade because I thought I was too old. However, when I was in high school, I remember being jealous of the grade schoolers because I still wanted to trick-or-treat. In college, I went to several Halloween parties. When my children were young, I remember carving pumpkins and cooking the seeds. The more salt the better. I remember escorting my children through the neighborhood to collect candy wearing a gorilla mask. I remember eating some of their candy when they went to bed. I still like passing out candy to the youngsters because the small ones are cute. Last year, Kathryn and I watched all the classic horror movies; Frankenstein, The Bride of Frankenstein and Dracula. I will admit it. I like Halloween, so I am not going to ask you to protest or boycott Halloween. However, I am going to ask you to remember all the darkness of that day. Halloween is the highest day on the Satanic calendar. Can you do me a favor? Please just take a few minutes this Halloween and pray for someone, like Pat, who has been or who is being victimized by Satanism. There is nothing fun about it. Satanism is a part of our world. If you promise to pray for the victims of Satanism, say, **"Amen!"**

The last time I met with Pat, the routine was the same. She came early in her beat-up blue Pontiac Lemans, wearing clothes that had seen better days. We sat in the narthex of my church and she stared into the dark sanctuary. It was during those last few minutes with Pat, she did something new. She looked at me and smiled. She said, "Russ, I want to thank you for taking so much time with me. I want to give you a farewell gift." I tried to refuse it, but she insisted. She said it was something she didn't need anymore. She reached into her pocket and gave me the knife she had used to cut herself. She pulled up the sleeves of her shapeless sweatshirt and showed me her wounds were healing. Then, she said, "Russ, can I ask you a question?" How do you get the light on the cross to shine like that?" I said, "Pat, there is no light on the cross. The room is dark." She said, "No, the light has been on the cross every time I came. It is on now. When I look at it I feel safe." To my eyes, the cross was dark. To Pat's eyes the cross was lit. I didn't disagree with her, because she saw something I didn't. I'm glad Pat saw the light. She had lived in the dark long enough.

Will you pray with me?