



Halloween – Being Scared

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As we approach Halloween I notice, as I am sure you do too, that the availability of horror movies increases. *Freddie Krueger*, *Last House on Elm Street*, *Chain Saw Massacre*, to name just a few are shown nonstop. I have not seen one of these movies nor do I intend to (though I saw *the Exorcist* in Spanish one time, by accident when I was in Mexico, it was actually quite entertaining). I am intrigued however why there are such classics horror films that seem to attract a wide range of followers. We seem to have a need to be frightened, which of course our materialistic, capitalistic society has made us believe is associated with this time of year and in particular with Halloween as the ultimate scary, evil time. I remember, several years ago being interviewed by the local paper when a group of people, mostly Christians, were attempting to stop Trick or Treating from occurring in Fitchburg and Leominster. Halloween was being given a bad rap as an evil, pagan, devil worshipping time. And the movement to stop it was making news. I was glad to be called and I tried to put a more positive spin on why we dress in costumes as disguises, and was explaining about the deeper connections to change and transition which we can find mirrored in nature, and about the essential emotional spiritual need we have to face our fears. Especially to

positively confront and challenge those things that go bump in the night and make us afraid.

When I was a young adolescent, there were many things that in my mind did go bump in the night and make me afraid. One instance I remember was the long-standing fear that I had about the imagined monsters in my room under the beds. It was so real that I did not even like to put my hands under my pillow for fear my hand would relax and fall making it easy to grasp by the monster. I suspect that some of you might also have had this same or similar imagined fear. Am I, right?

I shared a bedroom with my sister, who was a couple of years younger than I, but who was a strong willed, and shall I say, sometimes-stubborn kid sister. Rearranging our room was one of the areas that was bound to bring out the worst in both of us. The room was long and narrow with windows at one end, closets along one whole wall and a narrow sloped ceiling on the opposite side of the closets. The options for rearranging were not too many. We would fight over who got to be near the window, the room being too narrow for both beds to fit under them. But I was the oldest so I got to be near the windows. We would then fight over how near the door to place the bureaus, this of course would lead to fighting over who had cleaned or not cleaned the room last and who had left the dirty dishes upstairs and all manner of disagreement, such as why had she borrowed my clothes yet again, without permission and not sent them to the wash. I did not always have the fear of things that go bump, I was fearless, but one day I do not know why, I began with my imaginary irrational fear and could not bear to shut off the light on one end of the room and walk to my bed on the other. I had to face my fear, talk to my sister about my fear, confess my weakness and tell her that I did not have the answer to every problem and that I too struggled to find solutions, and worst of all, I had to ask for her help in rearranging the room so that I never had to put my feet on the floor once the light was out. We managed to negotiate a really cool way of getting to my bed by setting chairs, the bureaus

and the beds in a way that let me walk upon them to my bed. This meant we had to keep the bureaus clean, stuff off the chairs and to accomplish this help one another. I learned that to overcome my fright of things that go bump, I needed to address my concerns directly and openly and ask for help.

And you know what, this is the same thing I do now when I am afraid. Most of us know that when we were younger we all had fear of those imaginary things that went bump in the night, and then we grew up a bit and the real fears came when we began to interact with the world. Now we need to learn how to address these fears and concerns directly. To ask for help is one of the only ways that we can address the fears, concerns and horrors we face today. Fears, concerns, horrors, like illness, loss of health, this election, job, home, terrorism, war, oppression, racism, economic insecurity, environmental degradation, global warming, despair when we look at the shape the world is in and we feel powerless to change it. But we are **not powerless** if we remember that with others, joined together for common purposes, discussing solutions and ideas together, sharing camaraderie, and becoming a part of spiritual and faith communities we can lessen the fears and learn new ways of being.

When I was cleaning up downstairs of the church in readiness for the floors to be sanded, I happened across a book in the library called "Ghost Stories". I thought it would be fun to look for one to enact today and/ or for me to get in the mood for Halloween. I thought that if I went back to some old stories I would find ones that gave a clue into some of the scary tales from the last century. The stories in the book Ghost Stories is a compilation of ones written by: Bram Stoker, Washington Irving, Henry James, Guy de Maupassant, Robert Louis Stevenson and Elizabeth Gaskell. All writers from the 1800's. My assumption was that they would be delightful and far less upsetting than the movies I could watch and that are being made now. Well I sure was wrong about that. They are truly terrifying stories, I read one before falling asleep one night, called 'The Judges House' by

Bram Stoker and spent an agonizing night hearing everything that went bump in the night and wishing I had my sister in the bedroom with me to talk me calm.

Halloween has long been considered the time when the veil between our world and the world of the invisible is very, very thin. Too often it has fallen into a commercialized version of let's see how gory, awful, scary and horrible we can act and dress to inflict terror or threat upon others. This perversion of Halloween has made us forget that Halloween, for our ancestors, was considered the time when the new year began. Halloween is when we adjust for the shorter daylight hours and the darkness and an opportunity for us to negotiate a gateway into the insecurity of winter. This insecurity breeds fear and the customs of Halloween, the trick and treat, the dressing in costume, the assuming the masks of what we fear, and seeing those who dress in costumes can remind us that confronting and facing the monsters and the things that cause us fright requires developing tools and tricks to get us together and that once we are joined together we can become committed to one another's physical, emotional and spiritual safety.

At the dentist on Friday, the hygienist, a UU from Groton, was asking if I had my sermon ready yet and did we do anything about Halloween here in Leominster. I was telling her I was wrestling with the concept of being scared and what we need and can do about this. She said she hoped I had some answers. Then she told me that she is a person who has a lot of fears in general and that this time of year they seem to surface more. Plus, she told me this weekend she was going to a place called Witch's Hollow, or Witches World, I didn't get the proper name. She told me that her daughter is working there and that she "had" to go. I told her those same things I told you earlier. Let me repeat -if you are afraid admit it, ask for friends, family, loved ones to be with you during the most frightening of times, be willing to face the fears head on and do all you can to regain a sense of personal control. The one thing that fear can take away from us quicker than anything is that we have or will lose control. When we lose control, it feels overwhelming and like we are sucked into a vortex or stuck in a tsunami of

emotions that are very negative. I am of the opinion that sometimes if we can find just one thing we have control of, like my hygienist asking friends to go with her to the Witches Hollow or my early fears of asking my sister to help us creatively work together, and/or getting up in the middle of the night after I had read that terrifying story and going outside and seeing the stars and the beauty of the night, well then we can regain control and overcome the fear of things that go bump in the night and other fears. Don't let those fears define you- share them and talk about them, learn how to face them and know that you are not alone.

We are about to begin a new year on this Hallow Eve, the veil is thin, and I encourage you to use the time to see beyond the known and visible into the vast mystery of the universe that might creak and screech and whoosh but that ultimately is immensely fascinating and loving.

So mote it be. Blessed be