

Redeeming Halloween

And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2).

On Oct. 31, we will turn our porch lights on, set out a sign, and hand out king-sized candy bars to hundreds of kids, moms, dads and teens. Some will grumble that we receive sinners. But they said this of Jesus too.

Light of the World

Many Christians believe that handing out candy on Halloween is not a good idea. They assume, "If I hand out candy, I am advocating all this day stands for and will therefore compromise my witness as a Christian." Yes, Halloween can stand for some really wicked things. Yes, it is a day when people worship Satan, demons and spiritual darkness. Yes, it is an excuse for unrepentant sinning. But we are the light of the world! Light is *intended* for darkness. Does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket (Matt. 5:15)?

The darker the day, the more the light stands out. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). Who needs to see the light of Christ? Saints? Or sinners?

"As Jesus was at supper in his house, many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples. For there were many, and they followed Him. When the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, 'How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?' When Jesus heard it, He said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance'" (Mark 2:15-17).

The gospel of Jesus Christ is for sinners. And how did Jesus, the Physician, engage those who were sick? He hung out with them, engaged with them, ate with them. If our Master, Jesus, spent time with sinners in this way, how can we think ourselves too “holy” to do the same? It was the Pharisees who saw themselves as too holy to engage with sinners on the ground level. Let us be like Jesus, not like those spiritually arrogant Pharisees.

Missional Halloween

For a moment, let's imagine Jimmy and I are missionaries in a foreign country. We have just moved in and are still getting a feel for the culture and daily life of this country's inhabitants. Very few know about Jesus, and ancestral worship is the most common religious practice. We have been praying about a way to get to know more people and have some opportunities to share about Jesus. Then we hear about a large ancestral worship festival in which all of the city will be attending. If you will only turn on your porch light, they will come to your door singing songs of praise to their ancestors.

As missionaries, we'd thank God for such a great opportunity! Instead of spending days looking for a single moment to get to know someone and talk about faith, we now have many who will come to our door with their mind already on spiritual things. I can't imagine a more perfect opportunity to get to know these foreigners and talk about my faith!

This is exactly what Halloween can be for the Jesus followers in this country. Hopefully, we are already being missional in our neighborhoods, seeking to reach our neighbors with the good news of Jesus. So what a perfect day to get to know the families that live around us! On top of that, there is already an air of spirituality on this day. Yes, it has an evil spiritual feel, but it's a perfect springboard to bring up the

topic of life, death, hell, heaven and a great God who has defeated Satan on the cross through the unbelievable grace of sacrificing His Son on the behalf of sinners like us.

Jesus received sinners, so likewise, let us receive sinners.

Turn It for Good

There is a way to engage people on Halloween without actually celebrating the day itself. We are very careful to not have any traditional Halloween decorations like ghosts, spider webs, monsters and so on. Instead, we are trying to brand ourselves as the “crazy-generous” house on our street, to make a statement about the generous nature of our God through sending His Son.

How are we doing that? We give out the good candy! King-sized candy bars! And when you’re giving out over 800 of those candy bars, people start asking, “Why?” And that question right there is an open door for the gospel. “Because we serve a generous God who gave His Son to pay the penalty of death I owed for my sinful arrogance and pride and gave me new life I didn’t deserve. So we long to be a small expression of His generosity to us.” I’ve already been able to share my testimony and the Good News of Jesus several times just in buying the candy.

Not only that, we are hoping to love people well. With the help of our college home group, we have a welcome team that engages people at the foot of the steps, looking for opportunities to talk about Jesus and ask for prayer requests. Those requests are texted to a team in our guest-room-turned-prayer-room. After being loved, welcomed and blessed with king-sized bars, each person will be pointed to Jesus through signs on the way out proclaiming Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

There is a song we love to sing at our church called "Sovereign Over Us" by Aaron Keyes that says, "Even what the enemy means for evil, You turn it for our good, You turn it for our good and Your glory." Halloween is a day that Satan has intended for evil, but we are leveraging it for the good of others through sharing the gospel and the glory of God by pointing to His grace.

We Are Sinners Too

"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst" (1 Tim. 1:15).

Let us not forget that the only reason we are saved is because Jesus condescended into the filth of our life, met us where we were at, and extended grace and love to us there. We are no less sinners than those we seek to reach. We are simply great sinners with a greater Savior! Let us not fall into the well-worn path of the Pharisees, thinking in our religious arrogance that we are better than those who don't know Him. For Jesus Himself said, "Truly I say to you, the tax collectors and prostitutes enter the kingdom of God before you [religious leaders]" (Matt. 21:31)

Let's remember our Lord's charge to us on Halloween, not to run from darkness but charge toward it with the loving light of the gospel. "He said to them, 'Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature'" (Mark 16:15).

Follow our journey to #RedeemHalloween2015 by watching for pictures and posts on our Instagram accounts on Oct. 31 (@kellyneedham and @jimmyneedham). Why not start a new tradition of becoming the generous house in your neighborhood?

*Taken from **Kelly Needham's** blog post, "Redeeming Halloween," . Used with permission.*