

Scripture Focus

"All things came into being through the Word, and without the Word not one thing came into being." - John 1:3

Reflection

I wasn't here that long when someone said, "Have they told you about Halloween?" They hadn't. Turns out I live on one of those roads that gets closed down on Halloween so the kids can trick or treat. The whole road gets into it; it's our yearly neighborhood street party. While this year's celebration is, of necessity, a little more safe and subdued than usual, it is still happening. I'm glad. I love Halloween. Behind the mask, it is our little not-quite-Christianized Samhain, a liminal space between the dead and the living, and, along with All Saints and All Souls, its own Triduum; its own inverted Easter. I love it when the kids come up to the candy I lay out on the table, always the good stuff - small, name-brand candy bars, no bargain lollipops, you know who you dum dums are - and perfunctorily shout "trick of treat!" And then I get to ask them who, or what, they are. (In the movie V for Vendetta, the protagonist comments on the paradox of asking a masked man who he is.) I love the kids that just silently reach for the candy while the other ones are talking away. They don't tell me who they are, so I don't ever know if they know. I don't make them talk. Unlike many holidays, Halloween isn't some forced family march. I let them have the candy anyway.

People are asking these days, "Is this the apocalypse?" I think yes, in the sense that the word means revealing or unveiling. It took a few different viruses, of which coronavirus is one, to unmask long-hidden dysfunctions in our lives: systemic racism, income and wealth inequality, and inequality in our healthcare system, to name a few. Masks may protect our identity, but masks also reveal who we are, and we wear them, mostly, I think, to try to scare off what scares us: our insecurities, our fears, our resentments, our selves. It was this night, after all, that Martin Luther, an unmasked anti-Semite, chose to start his Reformation; a time between what was, what is, and what will be.

These days find us in a similar time. We would do well to remember that no matter what's behind the mask of the future, all things came into being through the Word, and without It not one thing came into being. All things are holy; and all people are, too - yes, even him - no matter how many masks we wear to try to prove to ourselves, and others, otherwise. And, as Luther may have been pointing toward, even if he never fully made it there, all things and all people are redeemed. Yes, even him. If this isn't true, if you have to tell who you are to get the candy, then grace isn't grace. Whether or not we lift the mask, no matter what's under there, we're already forgiven. In Jesus, God laid out the good stuff for us to take freely, and be saved from what hides us from each other, and from ourselves. Once you come to understand that, believe it, trust it, know it, then the masks can start coming off, and the naming can begin. It's possible for everyone. Yes, even him.

Prayer

God known and unknown, hallowed be your name. Bidden or unbidden, you unmask me. Thanks for giving me the treat already, anyway, no matter what. Amen.

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