



Lessons from Trick-or-Treating

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Happy Halloween! (As a religious leader, I mean that in the least celebration-of-evil-forces way.)

For the three hours that my daughter's neighborhood encouraged trick-or-treating, we tried to give away as much candy as possible. I got excited each time I saw a group of Mario Brothers, superheroes, ghouls, or princesses working their way toward her house. Then, for some reason, they'd skip us and go to the next house. It was both baffling and disappointing.

We opened the front door, leaving only the screen door closed, in an effort to look welcoming and ready for business. Nope. The little ones would run up to ring the doorbell of the house next door, and then walk right past us. We wondered if the prior owner had been a Halloween curmudgeon, with a reputation that deterred trick-or-treaters.

With the prospect of having 3 large bags of Reese's Peanut Butter Cups leftover, my daughter and I finally donned our onesies (I got to be a turquoise dragon with gold wings!), put the baby in his Simba costume, and headed outdoor to sit on the front stoop. It worked like magic! We could talk to people as they passed by. We noticed a few families with children in strollers who couldn't navigate the steps to the front door, so we ran out to the end of the driveway to meet the families. We commiserated with parents about how cold it was.

We were no longer waiting inside for people to come to us. We met them where they were, and we participated in what they were doing, building on a common experience.

You know where I'm going with this, right? The days are over when we should sit in our church buildings, waiting for the people to come. Even when we do what we can to make the church look welcoming and ready for business, to continue my analogy, the visitors don't come...at least not in significant numbers. When they don't, we question why they would go to the church next door but skip us. We're often left with bags of ministry resources going stale.

The challenge for us all is to head outside and meet our neighbors in the midst of their lives, rather than seeking to entice them to us. By sharing in their experiences, we are able to commiserate over frustrations and join in delights. We may even be able to break down some people's impression that the Church is filled with curmudgeons, if that's all they've known.

The "treat" we have to offer is so much sweeter than candy. I pray we will find ourselves in the streets, sharing the goodness of the Lord with all we encounter.

