

Wow! Great Costume

November 5, 2006

(The Sunday after All Saints' Day - Year B)

Matthew 5: 1-12

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

Last Tuesday was Halloween.

And, on Tuesday, I had a meeting scheduled with our new Suffragan Bishop, the Right Reverend Dena Harrison, in her new office in Austin.

Now, I have learned that when I go to meet with a bishop, I put on one of my nicest dark suits and one of my crispest clerical collars.

But, hurrying out of Waco on Tuesday morning, I realized that I had not yet eaten breakfast.

So, I stopped in at the Whataburger on Valley Mills, because I love the breakfast tacos that they serve there.

I waited patiently in line at Whataburger,
And when I got up to the counter,
The man behind the counter said to me:

“Wow, great costume!
It almost looks real!”

Frankly, I had forgotten that it even was Halloween.

Then, the man said:
“Wait - are you *really* a priest?”
I replied: “Yes, I am.”

He became embarrassed and said:
“I am sorry, sir.

Most of the folks who have come in here this morning on their way to work have been dressed in costume.

I didn't realize that you are a *real* priest."

How many people do we encounter who think about us?:

"Wow, great costume.

You almost look like a real Christian!"

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus goes up the mountain, sits down and teaches his disciples about what real Christians really do look like.

Jesus teaches:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Blessed are those who mourn.

Blessed are the meek.

Blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, the persecuted."

Blessed are you when you do not just pretend to be a Christian.

Blessed are you when you are a *real* Christian.

For, you see: real Christians don't wear saintly costumes.

Real Christians live and believe in the promises that they make at their Baptism.

Today is the Sunday after All Saints' Day.

We have already had a wonderful celebration of All Saints' Day here at St. Alban's at Evensong last Wednesday night.

But, the Book of Common Prayer allows us to also celebrate All Saints' on the Sunday following.

All Saints' Day is a time for us to celebrate the saints of God, living and dead.

All Saints' Day is a time for us to celebrate those who don't just wear costumes, but those who live their lives as real Christians.

All Saints' Day is a time for us to welcome new saints into our community, through the sacrament of Baptism.

We do not have any Baptisms scheduled at St. Alban's today.

But, we renew our Baptismal Vows on those days set aside for Baptism. So, today, we will renew our Baptismal Vows in place of saying the Nicene Creed.

When we renew our Baptismal Vows, I will ask you a series of questions about how we promise to take off our costumes and live these vows as real Christians.

And, you will answer these questions by saying:
“I will, with God’s help.”

For example, I will ask you this question:

“Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?”

And you will answer by saying:

“I will, with God’s help.”

What this questions means is this:

Will you come to church to worship regularly, each and every week?

Those who wear Christian costumes tell other people:

“Oh yeah, I am a member of a church.

I go to St. Alban’s.”

But, if they were to look at their calendar and count up the number of times that they actually *do* attend this church and Sunday school, They will discover that they do *not* continue in the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, worship and prayers.”

A few Sundays ago, Susan and I were talking at lunch after church, and I told her:

“You know, we have a pretty good-sized congregation, if everyone shows up on Sundays.”

I do not tell you this to make you feel guilty.

Well, ok, maybe I do want you to feel a *little* bit guilty.

But, I tell you this because real Christians promise to go to church on

Sunday because...we need each other.
We *need* to worship *together*, as one big family.

For, when you are not here, our family suffers and is incomplete.
When you are not here, I miss you.
When you are not here, other people in the St. Alban's family miss you,
as well.

For real Christians promise, with God's help, that we will worship and
pray together, at least weekly.

After we renew our Baptismal Vows and promises this morning, then I
am going to invite you to come up and place your pledge cards on
the altar.

For one month now, we have been praying and talking about
stewardship, about how the use of our money reflects the
relationship that we have with God and with each other.
We have talked about the Feast and the future that God has laid before
us and about our monetary response back to God.

If you have brought your completed pledge card to church today, please
put that on the altar.

If you did not bring your completed pledge card today,
There are also blank pledge cards in the pews.
You may fill one of those cards out, if you like, and bring that to the
altar.

Or, if you have already submitted your pledge card, just bring a blank
card up and place that card there, as a symbol of your commitment.
Or, if you have already submitted your pledge card, and feel led to
increase it, you know that I will encourage that behavior.
And, lastly, if you like, you may mail your pledge card into the church
office.

Today is a good day to renew our Baptismal Vows.

And, today is also a good day to renew our commitment to God.

Those who wear Christian costumes act like they have made a monetary commitment to God,

But then, when the offering plate passes by, they only put a 1 dollar bill in the plate each Sunday.

Those who wear Christian costumes pay more money per year to their health club or their cleaning lady than they pledge annually to St. Alban's.

But, real Christians quietly give their money freely and sacrificially and foolishly back to God, not counting the cost.

Real Christians take 10% of their income and write it on their pledge cards, and then they hear a sermon, and end up doubling that amount.

Real Christians fully commit their lives to God and live the promises they make at their Baptism.

In the days ahead, I hope that people will *not* stop you and say:

“Wow, great costume!

You almost look like a real Christian.”

But, I hope that people will see you living out your Baptismal Vows and say:

“Wow!

You ARE a real Christian!”

AMEN.

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