

## **Halloween**

### **Masks**

I wonder how many of you know what Halloween is about? Halloween is a night when all the restless souls that had died and hadn't found a place outside of Hell, wander around on the air trying to find rest. They had lived such a rugged life, that their rest is being denied. And it is a night when those restless spirits, cut off from Eternal fellowship with God, are roaming the earth, scaring the likes of us. And it is said that this is a night when they are so real, when you walk down the street you will see one coming toward you. You will see a face, and there may not be a body attached to it. The spirits are restless.

I like Halloween as a concept because it sends the message that you can't raise hell on earth all of your life, and go somewhere to heaven just because you die. Halloween tells me that there is a whole working out of this thing that has to take place, and a lot of Spirits are restless on the wind. And in our own time, we still like to put on the mask and see somebody frightened.

The case I am making this morning is very simple. Our society doesn't need a Halloween. We already wear a mask, so we really don't need to buy any. If we just study our face in the mirror and think about the journey that the face we look at has come, we begin to see the awful onslaught of living, and the extent to which we have had to struggle with the mask that would take over the true countenance that would shine forth, revealing the indwelling Presence of God.

Halloween is a time of masks. Gibran said this morning in the reading that Jesus was more searing against mask wearers than anybody else in the New Testament. He called them hypocrites, a word that seems very out of date to us. If you look in Matthew at the 23rd Chapter, you will find an amazing scripture that seldom gets preached. It is what they used to call "the seven deadly woes".

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!  
Because you shut the kingdom of heaven against  
men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow  
those who would enter to go in.”

What is he talking about? You know who the scribes and Pharisees were, they were Church folk. He said they were not going into the kingdom and they were blocking others. That is a strange message to the Church. This was Jesus preaching to the people he knew about.

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.”

We have gone all over Africa and Asia, converting others to Christianity, to join a hellish Church; a Church that condoned racism; a Church that condoned classism; and a Church that condoned all of the evils of the time. We asked them to convert and join with us. A Church that condones anesthetizing sweet niceness, that wants nothing to do with any of the problems that confront human beings, while people save their own little souls and feel holy. It would be better that they would be what they were, and what do we call them – pagans. A true pagan is much more exciting. A good sinner, much more exciting than a compromising Christian.

“Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘If any one swears  
by the temple, it is nothing; but if any one swears by the

gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? And you say, 'If any one swears by the altar, it is nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath.'

You blind fools! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred?"

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy, and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and

swallowing a camel!"

This is Jesus. He says you ought to do tithing but you have neglected the weightier matters after the tithe. These are the weightier matters according to Jesus: Justice, Mercy, Faith. These should be done without neglecting the tithing.

And he goes on. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Chapter of Matthew, you ought to study it. Now why do I say you ought to study it? Because I believe hypocrisy is one of our contemporary evils. I believe that easy accommodation, robs us of a certain virility of our own personality that allows us to be open to the religious life. In other words, I believe, very simply, that what Jesus rails so against, in Matthew 23, is a kind of hypocrisy that has now become for us a national norm. It is continuous Halloween.

It is a reverse, Halloween, however. Cover-up is the law of our culture. Cover-up: The nation has adopted it as a new form of understanding between us, and our leaders.

I call reverse Halloween because the mask is not grotesque; it is a kindly face, a smiling face. It is a face that is prepared to cover-up the grossest kind of operative evil in public life. We have made the hypocrite acceptable. Is this a moral issue or isn't it?

Let me go a step further. Watch hypocritical living. It has some salient features you can always chart. It is pious. The hypocrite is always pious. By definition the hypocrite covers and wears the mask of the saint! It is one thing to remember; whenever you see super-piety, you are in the presence of some trouble. It is the highest form of arrogance for one to reflect to another that they are so close to God that they are of superior quality. The hypocrisy of our age numbs our critical faculties, and we go on with it to our peril.

Jesus was right. Hypocrisy has done its thing, and it is working its way. It is like a worm. If we do not deal with the hypocrisy of our time, we will increasingly learn to reflect it in our own personal life. And we will find that the mode of the culture seems right for us, and we will cover ourselves, and we will find it expedient to keep from revealing who we are. It is death to religious living.

There cannot be God, who can make mutual compact with persons who will not deal with themselves. What is Salvation other than a person becoming increasingly aware of the fact that he or she is a representative of God on earth, and searches there through the in-dwelling of the Spirit of God in them, to know the will of God and to do that will. What else could it be? And how could it be that you can have that going on when you are not foundationally honest?

A dishonest age runs the risk of making hypocrites of us all. I am talking about wolves in sheep's clothing. That's all. That is where we are. You don't know what to believe anymore. Your leaders are not only talking out of both sides of their mouths, they are wearing masks.

Let's be very careful that we do not make too easy accommodation with a society wherein cover-up is not only the norm, but the way that our leaders use to

get over on us. If we go along, as they say, just to get along, I think we place in peril our own souls.

Halloween. We wear the mask too much of the time. The concept of judgment in the Gospels says, you will be asked to take the mask off. As you stand before the Bar, and I don't think that is in heaven, I am talking about on earth, the moment will come when you will be asked to remove the mask. God will say, I want to see you as you are, because I want to check-on what you have done with what I have given you.