

*St. John Lutheran Church*

*The Sermon*

*Rev. Andy Rutrough*

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Sermon, October 30, 2022

Romans 3:19-28, Reformation Sunday

Halloween is a lot of fun. If you want to be a witch and cackle, you can! If you want to be a werewolf and howl at the moon, you can!

Now, some churches don't like Halloween because they are concerned that, if you pretend to be a witch, then that witch energy might take you over and you'll become a witch. If you pretend to be a werewolf, then that werewolf energy might take you over and you'll become a werewolf. Therefore, you have to purge away all witchy energy, all werewolf energy, all those bad, unpleasant kinds of thoughts.

Now, these churches have a point. Some people take Halloween way too seriously. For example, if you're pretending to be a witch, then please do not lay curses on people. It's not good for them and it's not good for you. If you're pretending to be a werewolf, then don't bite. We all learned that when we were two years old. No biting.

On the other hand, the Lutheran Church, which grows out of the Protestant Reformation, sees Christians as both saints and sinners. That is, we do not try to purge away all the bad and all the unpleasant because if we did that then there'd be nothing left of us. Every part of us is both sinner and saint.

Every part of us was made by God. Every part was created good. Only, we twist those parts of us, those kinds of images away from their original good purpose and toward evil. When we are Baptized, God turns us back toward the good. And this doesn't happen just once. It happens every day of our lives.

For example, when we are being a witch, we need to refrain from cursing people, yes. At the same time, we kind of need that witchy energy because, to be a good grandma, you can't just smile all the time and serve milk and cookies. You have to stand up for what's right. You have to call people out when they're doing the wrong thing. In addition to serving milk and cookies, you have to be an old bitty, right? So God turns our witchy, cursing energy to the energy of an old bitty.

Halloween serves a purpose in this, because if we can pull that witchy energy out and look at it, play with it a little, then we can see how to avoid the evil and turn it to good. Because if there's anything the devil doesn't like, it's being pulled out in the open, seen clearly.

Likewise, if we can pull out that werewolf energy, where we go wild when things get a little crazy, like at the full moon, or when our boss is driving us crazy at work, or when we are afraid because our mother is sick, then we can recognize that things are a little weird. So, when our five-year-old spills her milk, all of our frustration at our boss or fear about our mother doesn't come exploding out in anger toward our daughter. Instead, we can say, "Hey, why am I so mad about a five-year-old spilling her milk? Five-year-olds spill milk. It's a thing. I'm overreacting. What's going on? Oh yes, I'm really furious because my boss is driving me nuts, I'm scared for my mother." We can acknowledge the strangeness, the chaos of the world, just as a wolf acknowledges the strangeness of a full moon.

After all, if we can't howl at the moon sometimes, if we can't handle the weirdness of the world, if everything has to always be the same, then nothing changes. We never grow, we never learn, we never feel surprise. We never laugh. We are zombies.

So, instead of biting people, or blowing up at our five-year-old, we might howl at the moon. Try it sometime. It might do you some good.

God turns all our kinds of energy back toward God's life. And this is not something we do on our own. Jesus came to us at the cross. Jesus still comes to the places in our world and in our souls that are like the cross, that is, in the places that aren't pretty, that are brutal and cruel and ugly. Jesus brought the love of God to us there, at the cross. Jesus still brings the love of God to us there, at the cross.

This is the journey of Baptism. God continually turns us back away from evil and hatred and resentment and laziness and greed, back toward God's life. We

continually walk a journey of repentance and forgiveness, the journey of the cross, the journey of resurrection, the journey of hope.

In a little while, we will baptize little Emily Gaddie. We will bring her on this journey of hope with us. Then, she will come with us as we follow Jesus, as we seek to bring the love of God to the places in our world, and to the places in our own souls where we are least pretty, least benevolent, most cruel. That's why we work with refugees and homeless people. That's why we listen to and pray with each other—to be a part of God's love working in this world, here.

So, have fun this Halloween. If you're going to be a witch, don't curse anyone, but be an old bitty. If you're going to be a werewolf, don't bite, but do howl at the moon.

And remember, no matter how scary things might get, Jesus is there, always. Jesus is with us. Thanks be to God.