



A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEKEND

27th October, 2023

This weekend's 'walk-on' was told...

...your heart is not right before God.

Acts 8:21

Driving along the A272 I was baffled by a sight just beyond Rogate. It took me a moment to realise that it was a field of pumpkins. The leaves having died away they looked like orange cobblestones, so crowded were they together, probably all destined for Hallowe'en... and then the dump. Who after all, makes pumpkin pie? (Sorry, maybe you do!)

It set me seeking a 'Hallowe'en walk-on', and Simon the 'Sorcerer' from Acts 8 seemed a good option. He *"amazed the people of Samaria"* with his *"sorcery"* (v.9), he *"boasted"* of his nickname, *"the Great Power of God"* (v.10), and revelled in his following (v.11). We're not told what he did and by what 'power'. Then, through the preaching of Philip, he *"believed and was baptised"* (v.13). But like all of us he was still 'work in progress'. When he saw the conferring of the Holy Spirit through the laying on the apostles' hands (v.17) he longed for that 'power' and offered money for it (v.18-19). He got a fright with the response (v.20-23) and we hope that God answered the prayers of the apostles which Simon begged for (v.24).

It's a tenuous link, but that field of Hallowe'en pumpkins led me to think of Simon the Sorcerer. Perhaps he, and certainly the 'owners' of the slave girl in Philippi (Acts 16:16), made a lot of money out of 'diabolical' activities. Similarly, today's commercial world has filled its shelves with scary stuff since September! What is it about the human mind that delights in evil (1 Corinthians 13:6) and seems to enjoy being frightened and horrified, whether by Hallowe'en or horror films? Stories of witches and warlocks and fearful fates abound in every culture, usually as moral tales of things to *avoid*; but Western culture seems to celebrate the macabre rather than taking the festivals and stories as what they were -driving evils away in readiness to celebrate good. Hallowe'en is, of course, *All Hallows Eve*, the day before All Saints' Day, 1st November, when we remember and thank God for all the good people and godly influences that have led us in our walk of faith.

So how do we respond to 'trick or treating' and 'Happy(!) Hallowe'en'? Perhaps with a gentle warning to children not to take it too far or too deep, and to remember the history of the scary lanterns, -driving evil away before welcoming the light and good of All Saints' Day. C S Lewis had some wise words to say about the powers of evil in our world (Ephesians 6:12): that to take them too seriously or not to take them seriously enough are equally risky. *"...do not give the devil a foothold"* (Ephesians 4:27). So, as the old Scottish prayer says:

From ghoulies and ghosties
And long-leggedy beasties
And things that go bump in the night,
Good Lord, deliver us!

And let's pause for a moment on November 1st, to thank God for the saints who *"fought the good fight ... (and) ... finished the race"*, especially those who led, taught and influenced us in our Christian lives. Check out William How's hymn, *'For all the saints...'*