

Weekend Word Friday 29th October 2021

Dr Heather Payne Consultant Paediatrician

It's our Wales rugby boys playing New Zealand tomorrow, but I'm not going to the game for this first match back since Covid- now we have grandchildren, tomorrow's family Halloween party has to take precedence.

This foggy, darkling autumn time, with summer drawn to a close, is a perfect match for creepy firelit stories, dressing up, pumpkins, ducking apples, and spiders webs – spooky, scary - but safe. Halloween is of course the eve of all Hallows or All Saints day, followed by All Souls day, when saints, martyrs and ordinary people are lovingly remembered.

Halloween itself is a bit marmite, with origins lost in the swirling mists of myth and religion. But cutting away the commerciality, I like the idea that the veil between this world and the next grows porous and cobwebby at this time - that idea is echoed in communities worldwide.

But are we whistling in the dark here – are we jangling skeletons around, and playing ghosts exactly because death really is final and frightening? Maybe our pretend play with the world beyond is our attempt to take some control over the thing we are most afraid of – not being.

Saying goodbye at funerals brings sadness but also, I'm increasingly feeling, awe at the reminder of mortality, and wonder, about what comes next. An afterlife- some form of heaven -is the offer of Christianity – like many other theistic faiths. But whatever form heaven takes, Jesus totally understood, and shared, this human fear – his answer was that his own overcoming of death, and subsequent perpetual spirit presence in our world, was gained through self-sacrifice and putting the needs of others before his own comfort, even as far as death. Life including Jesus offers the balm that soothes and heals when we come to the point of discovering that there is no cure for life. His blueprint for finding heaven in his combination of body, mind and spirit, was to go to hell and back, acting through love.

Halloween actually falls on Sunday, and I'll be in church, where I always find peace and calm in our regular prayer and worship- and in my lovely church community. But at our family party tomorrow my body will be disguised as Morticia Addams, my mind preoccupied with bobbing apple entertainments, but my spirit firmly fixed on the rugby in the Principality Stadium. I'm hoping we win – even if its only by a drop ghoul.