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What Does a Pumpkin Have to Do with Heaven?

By The Rev. J. Randolph Alexander, Jr.

As we enter the fall season, thoughts of Immanuelites predictably turn to pumpkins, to apple crisps, and to soups. The pumpkin patch is a vital part of our parish life together, and a witness to the community. Yet everything we do as a parish should be readily explainable as part of our overall mission, and of our hope in Christ. How does the beloved pumpkin patch fit into our mission? How does it build up the Kingdom of God?

The most immediate answer relates to what we do with the proceeds. Indeed, the proceeds from last year's patch represented approximately \$84,000, all of which went to fund our outreach budget. Over more than 30 years of the pumpkin patch, well over a million dollars has been raised and strategically invested in outreach.

These funds contribute to education, to feeding ministries, to environmental initiatives, to international ministries in strife-torn areas, and to advocacy, to name but a few emphases. The funds earned from the patch are serving God's children, thus this herculean effort does relate directly to our mission.

As Our Lord said, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40).

Just as important, all the work we do together in the patch also strengthens our church community and our fellowship. You can get to know someone better when you are selling pumpkins together, or peeling apples, or clearing away rotten pumpkins. As the Psalmist says, “Behold how good and pleasant it is when God’s people dwell together in unity” (Psalm 133:1).

Our Pumpkin Patch is also a very public witness and example of a church that cares and is involved in the world. The Pumpkin Patch is an evangelical witness to the love of God that we experience in Jesus Christ, as we do it all in the name of Jesus and as we invite customers seeking a church home to come join us. Several of our members have found their way to Immanuel at least partly through the patch, so let us be bold in our inviting and our proclaiming and our welcoming! As many in Scripture said as they brought people to Jesus, “Come and see!” (John 1:46).

Yet, where is this all pointing, ultimately? What is our foundational Christian hope? The Book of Common Prayer (p. 861) defines it this way: “The Christian hope is to live with confidence in newness and fullness of life, and to await the coming of Christ in glory, and the completion of God’s purpose for the world.”

Christians have been waiting for the return of Christ in glory since the very early days after Christ’s Resurrection. We know that the world is fallen, and far from God’s dream, yet it is infused with God’s love and beauty and ripe with possibility.

One classic way Christians have thought of the good work we do is to remember that we are called to cooperate with God as God brings in the Kingdom, “the completion of God’s purpose for the world,” until Christ’s return. We can see signs of the Kingdom regularly in our life together, and certainly in the patch.

This is how our humble pumpkins relate to our hope for Heaven.

See you in the Pumpkin Patch and in Church!