

*The Pumpkin Patch Parable* is a storybook written by Liz Curtis Higgs and published in 2006. A link to a read-aloud video is listed below in the activity suggestions. As a former farmer I am very tired of the "old white dude farmer" stereotype, but the ideas in the book have a lot of food for thought. I will share and expound on some of them here. The metaphor is rich.

Pumpkins come in endless sizes, shapes, varieties. Some are bumpy, some are smooth. Some are big, wide, tall. Others are short, squat, small. There are different colors, textures, types. They are all fruit, full of food and seeds. The book describes the farmer appreciating each and every pumpkin. When the farmer prepares a pumpkin, the pumpkin is washed clean. Then, a piercing is made. This is the end of the fruit's life as a plant and the beginning of its new phase, which it has been preparing for since it was just a seed. The slimy, some-would-say-icky part is removed, and goes on to enrich the soil to grow more plants. The seeds can be roasted and eaten, nourishing other bodies, or they too can return to the earth, where they will produce many many more fruits full of food and seeds.

This story describes the farmer lovingly creating a smiling welcoming face, and providing the light inside to welcome all. We are called to be lights in the world, after all, but our own human errors so often get in the way. (Romans 7:14-25 highlights Paul's struggle with this. It is summed up in verse 15: *I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.*)

Here are some more scriptures that can go with Jack-O-Lantern carving and this time of Halloween in general. Read them and see what is speaking to you this week, and what you might share with your children.

John 8:12 *"When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

2 Corinthians 4:6 *"For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."*

Matthew 5:14-16 *"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."*

This year has felt like a very dark time indeed. And yet the extraordinary beauty of this particular autumn greets us every day. Little kindnesses do, too. There is light in the darkness. As the first chapter of John tells us, *The light shines in the darkness. And the darkness did not overcome it.* The darkness, though very dark indeed, does not overcome the light. Amen.

Wishing you light, hope, joy, health,

Carolyn