

**Pentecost 24, 2006, November 19
Kirkin' of Tartans
St. John's**

It was at a very young and tender age when I first heard the word sacrilege. It was in the early 1960s when I was preparing for a major transition in my life: the move from the single digit age of nine to the double digit age of 10. We had a show on TV called 'Top of the Pops', so every Thursday we would gather around our TV and watch some of the singers and groups who had a record that was in the top 20.

It was during one of those shows that I recall hearing for the first time the word sacrilege. You see when I was nine there was a different kind of music being played by groups who had long hair and wore different kind of clothes. Names like the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, the Kinks and the Yard Birds. I remember the comments about these groups like, 'you can't understand a word they are saying!' 'There is no melody to that!' 'Its nothing like music.' 'EEE, isn't it terrible.'

It was during one of these times that one of the 2 oldest members of my family called the new kind of music sacrilege. And at the tender age of nine, soon to be ten, that sounded pretty bad.

A number of years later when I began attending church I heard for the first time the words desolating sacrilege.

Now that must be really bad, I thought, because not only was Jesus talking about a sacrilege but a desolating sacrilege. This was obviously more serious than the Rolling Stones replacing Frank Sinatra on the 'Top of the pops.'

Many, many years later when I got to seminary this passage was one we studied pretty deeply. I came to find out that the desolating sacrilege that was set up where it not ought to be was a reference to the book of Daniel. Daniel referred to an altar being built inside the Jewish Temple by a man called Antiochus Epiphanes in 138 BC. The altar was dedicated to the Greek God Zeus.

The desolating sacrilege was that in God's temple an altar to worship another God had been placed. God's worship had been defiled. Holy ground had been tainted.

The sacrilege was the defiling of the Holy place. The desolation was that the people of God were now unable to do what they had already been doing in their worship and their sacrifice.

This was something that was not of God and not intended by God. Because they could not worship in a temple that had been defiled, it made them unable to fully be the community that God wanted them to be.

Now as I read much deeper into the gospels and come to know more of a Jesus of a living faith, I

understand that synagogues and temples were important places to him.

But when you read more closely and see more deeply who Jesus is, the real desolating sacrileges to Jesus are not what you find in buildings or in places. The real desolating sacrileges are what you find in peoples hearts.

Jesus did not give a lot of significance to outward stuff. He said the temple would be destroyed but he could build it in 3 days. He said it was not the outside of person that counts. It is not what you do outwardly but how you are on the inside that matters. He said you should treat all people like you would want to be treated. In his life and in his actions he treated people all the same. The women, the children, the leper, the blind, the lame the sick, the hurting and the broken, the well and the whole.

He talked about being a servant to others, about changing your heart towards one another. He talked about not looking for the bad in other people unless you first acknowledge it in yourself.

He talked about being careful about your words and your thoughts and your actions.

Jesus said that in all your life let God live and let God love and let God be glorified.

And when those things that Jesus told us of do

not happen then there is sacrilege where it ought not to be -let the hearer understand.

You see Jesus was more concerned with how we are to each other than anything else we can think of.

And it is a sacrilege when we are anything less than that.

We gather to Kirk out tartans and give thanks for not just our Scottish heritage but for all our heritage and especially our heritage as children of God.

Yes we can all look back and see the glory of our ancestry, the pride of our families, the goodness of our nations. But in among that we also see the not so good, and God asks us to learn from that to make today better in our lives, with our families, our friends, and in the communities in which God has placed us. To become people and communities who reflect the love of Christ.

And it is sacrilege when we are not what God has called us to be.

And it is a desolating sacrilege when people come to seek community, to seek forgiveness, to seek acceptance, to seek welcome and they find none.

What they find is a community that is lonely, forlorn, and comfortless.

We gather today because we have been called by God to be who he has made us to be. We have gathered today to honor the heritage and traditions of our past. But we have gathered in a place that asks us to take a good look at where we move and live and have our being and ask ourselves a simple question.

What do I need to do to make my life a life where love lives and love acts and love is present and love is offered and received?

All of us, outside of our choosing, were born into a family, a clan, tribe, a nation.

Yet all of us are called individually by God. Jesus said I chose you, you did not choose me.

All Jesus asks of us is to live a life of a higher heritage and a deeper tradition.

40 years ago the Beatles and Rolling Stones were sacrilege in my home.

What was then considered sacrilege for good or not so good changed the direction of music. Today they are almost household names.

2000 years ago Jesus was accused of blasphemy and sacrilege. What was then considered sacrilege, his message of God's love for all people, changed the course of history.

We gather to honor our heritage as clans, as

tribes, as peoples of difference, but let us always remember that we are each called to a deeper heritage. A call that honors not our differences but our unity. The call that God gives to every single one of his children. 'Love one another as I have loved you.' Anything less than that is a desolating sacrilege.

As God's children we are each called to live a life of love.

Amen.