



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

November 18, 2007

Kirkin' of the Tartans  
Pentecost 25, 2007

My name is Alan Sutherland. I have always been a Sutherland. My ancestors were of highland nature. O, in the good old days of their living they were looting and pillaging and always up for a good raid on their neighboring clans. Our shield and coat of arms has a black cat showing all its teeth and claws. Our motto is Sans Feur, Latin for 'without fear.'

I have always been familiar with the Sutherland Tartan, but my introduction to this wonderful garment called a kilt happened about 15 years ago. I was leading a tour of the British isles. Our last days were spent in Edinburgh. So on the last night the bus driver and I hired kilts with full evening dress. They did not have Sutherland tartan so I wore the Royal tartan.

The next acquaintance I had with a kilt was in my last parish. On the Thursday closest to St. Patrick's day we would have an Irish stew. I was the MC for the entertainment and I always made sure I told the Irish that St. Patrick was born in Scotland. The first year I was loaned a kilt by the visiting pipe band. It was a Stewart tartan.

We Sutherlands may be without fear but we have no pride.

The second year I hired a kilt from a costume store. It really was a skirt and everybody knew it but it was OK. We Sutherlands may be without fear but we are also without fashion sense.

The third year I bought my kilt. What surprised me when I went to Shelbyville and asked for my kilt in the Sutherland tartan, she asked what type of Sutherland tartan I would like. There was a choice between Sutherland Modern, Sutherland Old, Sutherland ancient or Sutherland Battle. I guess we have never really gotten over the looting and pillaging thing. So I chose the ancient. And now with pride I wear my Sutherland tartan.

It tells, to those who know tartans, what clan I belong to, what family I belong to. It is a link to my ancestors and brings with it a deep thankfulness, not the looting and pillaging, but for my heritage.

All of us have gathered here today to look back and give thanks. To remember days gone by and celebrate. To rejoice and reflect on ages that seem golden, heroic, romantic and very adventurous, including the looting and pillaging.

But we cannot simply gather and look back. When we look back we see only what has been accomplished. We see what has gone before us. What has already been done. When we turn our backs to the sun we see only the shadow of what lies behind and we do not see the possibilities of what lies ahead.

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*Established in 1847*

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The word Kirk means church and today we gather for the Kirkin' of the tartans, the churching of the tartans.

Today we each wear our tartan with pride and we identify with our clan and our family, our lands and our former kingdoms. But today we are asked to go beyond our clan, beyond our family, beyond our lands and beyond our former kingdoms. Today, as we church these tartans, we are called to be partakers, no not partakers, but children of another kingdom. It is a kingdom that has no borders. It is a kingdom that has no boundaries. It is a kingdom that has no exclusions. It is a kingdom that has no tartan except the tartan of Love. It is the Kingdom of God.

What God has done at Christmas, the birth of Christ, is to usher in the new kingdom of which we are all citizens. What God did when Christ was crucified was to draw all people reconcile all people to himself.

When God raised Jesus from the dead, when God sent his Holy Spirit, He was saying to his people, "Now is the time to build my kingdom."

God said of the kingdom of God-It will be a kingdom that is not built on the power of people.

It is not built by guilt or burdening rules and regulations. It is not built on the power of fear but on the power of love.

In my kingdom, because of love, those who have been made to feel unacceptable will be accepted.

In my kingdom, because of love, that which you thought was unforgivable will be forgiven.

In my kingdom, because of love, that which in you is deeply wounded can now be healed.

In my kingdom, because of love, those who are broken can now be restored and made whole.

In my kingdom, because of love, death is no longer to be feared as an end, but merely as a new beginning.

In my kingdom, because of love all people, all people are called to be my children. All people.

So today we look back and we give grateful thanks for all our heritages.

But let us also remember that today is our time in history and we have all been called to be children of God. We each wear our Scottish tartan with pride. As we kirk our tartans let us remember that the tartan we all share is none other than the tartan of love. The tartan of God. The tartan of a new kingdom that God has called us to make visible with the families he has placed us in, the clan he has placed us in and the communities he has called us to work and live in. With all people whom our lives touch.

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The ancient tartan of Sutherland tells the world I am a Sutherland. But the tartan of how I love tells the world I am a child of God.

It is the tartan of our hearts. It is the tartan of our lives. It is the tartan of love.

Amen.

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