

Getting to Know Jesus, the Christ

June 8, 2014 – Pentecost / Kirking of the Tartan

It's About the Kirking

Ps 103 and Acts 2:6-8
(65, 11, 69, 670)

Janet McDougall was the only grandparent I knew as I was growing up.
She lived in Georgetown, ON, about an hour NW of Toronto.
I have very fond memories of the large, warm house
surrounded by an equally large garden.
This time of year, the fragrance of the flowers
half covering the front walk was amazing.

Nana didn't have a lot of books.
Three were prominent –
The Bible, The Collected Poems of Robert Burns,
and A Man Called Peter,
the biography of Peter Marshall, the Presbyterian minister
who initiated the modern tradition of the Kirking of the Tartan.

Marshall wanted to get an isolationist America into WW2.
He was convinced that the entire world was threatened
by the tyranny of Nazism and Hitler.
Presbyterians, from the very beginning, have fought tyranny
in its various forms, ecclesiastical and political.
Marshall, standing in that tradition,
wanted to rally the clans in America to the cause of freedom.
This past week, as we have remembered D-Day,
we have recalled again the sacrifices made for that freedom at that time
and the gratitude of later generations.

But that war was fought for more than freedom.
It was fought for the community of all humanity.
Nazism, as a political ideology, divided the world
into the superior and the inferior.
The superior had to dominate.
The inferior had to be eliminated.
It's a twisted and terrifying way of seeing the world.

And it's still around in our day,
at times obvious, more often subtle.

If you ever find yourself thinking I'm better than 'them,'
you are carrying the virus.

It may not have become a full-blown disease
that can easily spread into an epidemic,
but the potential for infection is there.

My race is better than yours.
My clan is better than yours.
My views are better than yours.
My party is better than yours.
My religion is better than yours.
You get the idea.

That attitude of 'them and us,'
of 'superior and inferior,'
is all too common.

We have to be intentional and persistent about countering it.

That's how Marshall's faith and life was shaped by his Scottish Presbyterianism.

That's why he offered his support as Chaplain to the United States Senate
to Senator Arthur Vandenberg's work for the founding of the United Nations.
It was a vision of all the peoples of the earth living in harmony
as brothers and sisters under God's grace and in God's love.

Marshall was an ardent admirer of Robbie Burns,
as was my grandmother,
and as am I.

In his prayers at the opening of the Senate,
Marshall would quote or reflect the sentiments of Burns,
especially these familiar words:

*Then let us pray that come what may
(As come it will for a' that),
That Sense and Worth o're a' the earth,
Shall bear the gree and a' that.
For a' that, and a' that,
It's comin yet for a' that,
That man to man, the world, o're
Shall brithers be for a' that.*

This vision of community, of a commonwealth of God
in which **all** have equal dignity and worth as beloved children of God,
is powerfully illustrated in the account of Pentecost in Acts.

The world then, as now, is divided by race and language.
The Gospel of God's love, realized so powerfully in Jesus Christ,
cuts through and reaches across all those divides
and creates a community in which all are understood and valued.

That's the work of the Holy Spirit,
God's continuing presence in this world.
She has a special presence and influence in the kirk/church.

If these tartans are truly being 'kirked,'
they are being dedicated to serve this vision of a world-wide community
where true sense and worth will be our guiding values,
where the gifts of all will be woven into a blessing for all.

Take a close look at these wonderful tartans that stand before us.
They are glorious in their mixture of colours,
woven together into rich patterns
that please the eye and stir the heart.

We live in a world sorely divided by race and clan.
The cost is tragic.
That is not how God wants his human creatures to live.
His basic covenant with Abraham and Sarah laid out a different vision.
'I will be your God so you can be a blessing.'

To be truly 'kirked,'
that's how we are invited to wear our tartans,
as symbols of our commitment to
this vision of a community of love, justice, and peace.
It's a vision the church experienced on Pentecost
and that the church, at its best, has served down through the ages.

May that Spirit fill us afresh this Pentecost Sunday
so that we can weave through our lives new patterns of justice and peace
that bless our brothers and sisters throughout the world.

Amen