

FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“FROM KIRK TO KETTLE”

Scripture Lesson: Revelation 21: 1-6

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, May 18, 2025
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

Revelation 21: 1-6

The New Heaven and the New Earth

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them as their God;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

4 *he will wipe every tear from their eyes.*

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.”

5 And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” 6 Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

From Kirk to Kettle

Leader: The word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

As good, reformed Presbyterians, and as people rooted deeply in our Scottish tradition, we do not shy away from using language—sometimes clumsy, sometimes sturdy. To be certain, the words and phrases we use, which harken us back to our heritage, can function for us a little like Scottish shortbread—a bit dense at times and requiring some work to swallow.

You may hear us refer to the Carriage House where Dr. Sutton lives as a “manse,” a word rich with Scottish ecclesiastical history and, as Peter will attest, occasional leaks during the fiercest of storms.

We use words like “Kirk” to describe the church and “Kettle” to evoke an image of a communal cauldron—a pot of provision around which a community of faith might gather. And when we put those two words together—“Kirk and Kettle”—hardly anyone knows what we are talking about!

I don’t want to put anyone on the spot, but I’d venture to guess there are a number of us here this morning who are still wondering how a Rally Day event, kind of like a ministry fair, evolved into a volunteer appreciation day—a “Block Party,” as we called it last year—and how it came to be known this year as “Kirk and Kettle.” What does that really mean?

It has been said that in the Scottish Highlands there was a practice of keeping a large iron kettle simmering over a communal hearth. It was filled with whatever each family could spare—potatoes, herbs, spices, meat, water. The resulting stew was probably different every time, but its purpose was always the same: to provide a place for the community to come and experience provision, sustenance, and fellowship.

In so many ways, we participate in a rhythmic and important spiritual progression this morning. We move from worship, from the Church, from the Kirk—we move from our praise and adoration to God, to community; from Word to Table; from faith to practice; from Kirk to Kettle.

In doing so, we affirm a bedrock principle of the Christian faith: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.” The Apostle Paul continues, “The body does not consist of one member but of many” (1 Corinthians 12). In other words, while we are certainly the Church individually, we are especially the Church when we are together.

The faith that unites us, the grace that empowers us, brings us together. It takes our individual gifts and makes of us, collectively, a tapestry that is beautiful in God’s eyes.

We gather here to praise God, no doubt, for that is what we are commanded to do: to remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy. But our faith inevitably leaves the sanctuary. Our sanctification eventually looks like service. Our homage to God begins to manifest itself in how we love our neighbors.

Today marks a turning point in our church year, a time of transition as we move from two Sunday services to one. This is how we will worship each Sunday from now until just after Labor Day.

And I must admit, from our vantage point, it is somewhat humorous to look out and witness the game of musical pews. Families who always sit in the same pew at the early service must now negotiate with those who always sit in the same pew at the late service. It is an exercise in forbearance. I dare say, it is an example of what it means to live together in community.

If we are being honest, God is always presenting new things to us. The Bible tells us that part of the role of the Holy Spirit is to remind us of the old and to teach us the new.

In Revelation, we are given a breathtaking view of what that newness of life will one day fully entail: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.”

A Scottish pastor and friend, Scott Burton, once told me that his role in the life of the church was to “hatch ‘em, match ‘em, and dispatch ‘em.” It is no surprise that our lectionary reading this morning often finds its way into services when we celebrate the life of a loved one who has transitioned from this life to the next. But do these words testify only to the end of earthly life—or only to the final chapter of God’s future?

Think of it this way: the new heaven and new earth that Revelation describes does not erase God’s creation; it renews it. God is not making all new things—God is making all things new.

That is why, in our Reformed theological tradition, we refer to the end of God’s story of salvation as “consummation.” Armageddon, the apocalypse, “the end,” as the world might call it, is more than that. When God makes all things new, he is fulfilling all that he began at the dawn of time. God doesn’t replace creation; he redeems it.

In Revelation, John goes on to say: “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them.” This is an affirmation of the truth of the Gospel revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord—the one who became flesh and dwelled among us, full of Spirit and Truth, who ascended into heaven and rules in power and glory. He will come again, and that will usher in a reign that sets all things right.

And praise be to God, when that happens, “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more.”

But is God’s act of making all things new only a future reality? Is God not doing that right now?

Consider Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” Paul does not speak of Jesus’ impact in some distant sense. He speaks in the present tense. Right now is the time that God makes of us a new creation.

And God’s renewing work is not limited to us. God is at work in the world. Listen again to Psalm 148: “Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars! Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps.”

Let not only God’s people, but all of creation, praise the Lord—not tomorrow, not at a more convenient time, but now. God desires this cosmic chorus to reflect his kingdom.

When we receive new members into our church family, we do not welcome them to a distant future endeavor. God doesn’t want any of us to be late-blooming flowers. The Scriptures do not call us to be “last fruits”—God wants us to be “first fruits.”

God wants all of us, new and longtime members alike, to unite in our present ministries of grace, to contribute our voices to the harmony of our shared life, for the praise and glory of God.

In Acts 2, we are told the early Church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” That was the Church. It waited for God’s consummation—as we still wait—but it actively waited. It gathered around the Word, it fellowshiped, it partook in the sacraments, it prayed. It lived the conviction that God is making all things new.

And God still is! Every time we worship, every time we gather, every time we are nourished by God's Spirit, every time we pray, we bear witness to the kingdom of God.

When we say, "Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done," we are reminded that we are not there yet. To be certain, no "Kirk" is perfect—but even in our worship this morning, God is restoring us in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Today, all are invited to savor a delicious meal in Molly Wier Hall after worship and enjoy various activities both inside and outside. But more than that, we are invited every day to give of ourselves—like vegetables in a kettle of grace—and add to the richness of God's great song of redemption.

We are invited to live as people who have heard God's voice from the throne and who know and believe that God is among us. One day, every tear will be wiped away. Every broken thing will be made whole. Every crushed spirit will rise up with wings like eagles.

The name of our event today—Kirk and Kettle—is meant to remind us of both the importance of worship in the life of Christ's Church and the importance of fellowship, community, provision, and God's everyday banquets of grace.

As we have considered this morning, moving from Kirk to Kettle is a way of affirming that our faith inevitably moves from in here to out there, from faith to practice.

This means that our life, and our life together, will by God's grace echo the praise of Psalm 148 and live the vision of Revelation 21—so that the life of Christ's Church in this place is not just worship, and not just a meal, but a foretaste of the heavenly feast still to come.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.