



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

September 27, 2009

## Pentecost 17 2009

On June 13 2003 I was summoned to appear at the United States District Court of Eastern Kentucky. It was the end of a fairly long process and I was not scared to go because I knew the outcome would be good.

When I got to the court I joined another 62 people representing 39 countries. Together in court, on June 13 2003, in front of a judge, we renounced our citizenship in our countries of birth and were naturalized as citizens of the United States of America.

Up until that point, for 20 years I had paid taxes, driven on the right side of the road, obeyed all the laws and fulfilled my duties as a green carded resident alien. But I was not able to vote and that to me was important.

I remember the judge who led the impressive swearing in ceremony talked of the rights and privileges that were being bestowed upon us as US citizens. Freedom, liberty, opportunity, voting. All the rights and privileges. But I also knew deep down that with any rights and privileges there is also duty and responsibility.

On June 13 2003 I became an American by choice. I, unlike you who were born here, am an American on purpose. I chose to give up my allegiance to Great Britain, its sovereignty and it's Queen. I chose something new because I believe in the American way. I chose to become an American on purpose.

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*Established in 1847*

210 North Main Street Versailles, KY 40383 859.873.3481 [info@stjohnsky.com](mailto:info@stjohnsky.com) [www.stjohnsky.com](http://www.stjohnsky.com)



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We come here today not because we were born as Christians. We may have grown up in Christian families, but we were not born Christians. For most of us the Episcopal Church is a new community of faith but something has drawn us and we stayed. We chose to stay. We are Episcopal on purpose.

But more importantly we chose to be Christian. To follow the steps, the life, the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. We chose that. We became Christian on purpose. When we come to share our Christianity in a community of faith we begin to enjoy the rights and privileges that we are offered. Worship, Christian formation, bible study, fellowship, outreach, a place to learn guitar, meet with our 12 step groups, just come and have a coffee.

All these are rights and privileges that we enjoy and rightly so.

But along with the rights and privileges comes duty and responsibility.

So we offer our time to share in worship, Christian formation, and outreach. We offer our talents in teaching, in serving at the altar, in singing, in work days, to name just a few. The right and privilege of worship, Christian formation and outreach would not be possible if it were not for those who also saw the duty and responsibility to serve, to altar guild, to teach, and to organize outreach projects.

We hopefully enjoy the ministry of a priest, the bulletins each Sunday, books kept in order, music at services, an organist and pianist, a clean, heated and cooled and well maintained building. That just does not happen. Those are rights and privileges only enjoyed when people assume the duty and responsibility of offering not just time and talent, but treasure also.

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You see it is our treasure that pays for the heating and cooling. Our treasure that pays for our musicians, the music and the bulletins. Our treasure that pays our staff. Our treasure that maintains the buildings keeps up the grounds and allows us to open the door to the wider community.

It is our treasure that determines exactly what we can do.

Several years ago Judi and I decided to tithe. At times it has not been easy, but for the most part it has been the most rewarding financial effort we have made. Our giving became something spiritual, not something we just felt we had to do.

We tithed first. Not out of what was left but out of what we had. We really believe that god gives us everything and that all we have is gods so it is from what we have that we give. We see it as a duty and responsibility so that we can share in helping all of our community enjoy the rights and privileges of St. Johns.

I encourage you, if you do not already tithe, to begin to work towards a tithe. Set a percentage point and move up each year so that you eventually tithe. Or just be like Nike and do it.

Next week we begin our annual stewardship event when each family and individual will be asked to prayerfully consider time talent and treasure for 2010.

It will not be a long process but I believe if all of us are prayerful about striving to tithe the outcome will be worth it.

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I want to finish with a story that it is very appropriate for us today.

There was a village in Italy and all the families in the village grew grapes to make wine. Every family was involved. Each year each family would give 10% of the fresh wine to be put into the community vat. This wine was used for the sacrament and for the village festivities. One year one family did not do so well and they feared that giving their share would affect their livelihood so instead of giving wine they gave water. After all they thought no one would notice that they gave water and that their offering would not make a difference.

So years later they came to open the spigot of that particular community vat.

The village gathered, the mayor said some words and the priest prayed the blessing. When the spigot was opened out came, not wine, but pure water.

Every family that gave to that vat had thought that they had a bad year and every family thought that if they gave water it would not make a difference.

Believe me, you make a difference. We are the people who enjoy the rights and privileges of the community of faith. All of us are called to pray about our duties and responsibilities. Our time our talents and our treasure.

Amen

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