

**Four Hundred Years Ago This Week
HUMC 21 November 2021**

This coming Thursday, many of us will sit down and eat the traditional Thanksgiving dinner with family, friends or neighbors. And what is noteworthy, this tradition originated 400 years ago this week.

This morning, I would like to focus on the spirituality of those who started the first Thanksgiving. Now if there were ever a people of the book or the Bible, it was them. Most Pilgrim families had their own copy and their relationship with the Lord Jesus was the most important aspect of their lives.

When I think of the history of these Pilgrims and see the pictures or drawings of these men and women, I think of the hardships and the way they endured was through the meditation of scripture passages such as these:

1 Thessalonians 5:18 In all things, give thanks, for this is the ^[a]will of God in Christ Jesus toward you.

1 Chronicles 16:34 - O give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; For His loving kindness is everlasting.

It is well documented on how the Pilgrims came to America. 102 men, women and children were crammed into the second deck of the Mayflower which is $\frac{3}{4}$ the size of this sanctuary in the worst of conditions. It was 80 feet

by 20 feet (1,600 sq. feet,) and the ceiling about five feet high

There were no windows or fresh air. No one bathed or changed their clothes. There was no running water. There was one public chamber pot which was like using one of those Porta Potty's which had not been serviced in a long time.

In addition to that, all hatches were kept closed because of the hostile Atlantic Ocean. With waves taller than pine trees, that kept the ship in a state of turbulence for hours at a time.

It was a difficult 7 weeks. The stench of body odor and vomit killed any appetite. Aboard ship there were no hot meals, only dried peas, pork and fish. Add to the aggravation was that children cried day and night.

We have to give Pastor William Brewster credit, he kept the congregation focused on the Lord. During those seven weeks, no one publically complained, maybe privately; but they focused their energy on prayer, hymns and scripture. That is all they could do.

I smile when I say this; but they had no Wi-Fi, internet, or cell phones to keep themselves entertained. And if one of us had to be the 103rd passenger, how would we do? I don't think so well.

But the Pilgrims found the secret for their endurance in at least these three scriptures.

Mt 6:33. But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added to you.

1 Thessalonians 5:16 - Rejoice always, pray without ceasing.

Colossians 4:2 ² Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

You and I will never go through what they went through, but we have our own challenges and obstacles. If we seek the Lord and give thanks under all circumstances, we would have a better measure of peace in our hearts and we would sleep better.

Now there were more disappointments that awaited the Pilgrims. When the Mayflower reached the new world, it was discovered that they were 100 miles off course. Already weakened by the 7-week journey on the ocean, colds turned into pneumonia. In that first harsh winter, 47 died which was half their population.

But the Pilgrims drew strength from worship.

Psalm 100:4 which said- Enter His gates with thanksgiving, And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him; bless His name.

Early on Sunday morning, the field drum would summon all the people to walk in procession led by the Governor Bradford, Pastor Brewster and Captain Myles Standish to the block house. It was a three-hour worship service of prayer, Bible reading, singing the psalms and a sermon. Then they would break for lunch. Then come back for a few more hours.

Now I know what you are thinking. Most of us today are finished after one hour, but the worship kept them focused. It was their spiritual food. Life in 1621 was precarious. With the harsh New England weather, the uncertainty of food and sickness kept everyone on their knees.

Though our difficulties are nothing to compared to what the Pilgrims' faced, let us stay close to our God both in the good times and in the bad. To draw upon the strength of the Lord when everything is going well. So that when trials come, we will have a spiritual reservoir to draw upon.

In early March, God answered the Pilgrim's prayer for help and a young brave named Squanto taught the Pilgrims the basic skills of survival. With a great food harvest, Governor Bradford to declare a day of thanksgiving to God and invited the Wampanoag Indians tribe.

You don't hear this very much, but historians tell us that Chief Massasoit and 90 of his braves showed up a day early. I can imagine the look in the faces of Pilgrim leadership and perhaps the inner panic on how to feed such a large crowd which would undoubtedly cut into their food supply.

But give the Pilgrims credit, they prayed and committed it to God. Leaving the situation to God, Massasoit commanded his braves to find food and they returned with 5 deer and 12 wild turkey.

That is what we need to do when things take place out of our control. It is not easy when we are emotionally upset, but the best course of action is to take a deep breath, look above for help.

As I prepared for this message, I thought of an incident that took place when I was worked as a Physical Therapy Assistant at Ft. Devens. What was great about Ft. Devens was that it was close to my home so I was home almost every weekend.

Well this is what happened. A friend of mine from my home church who had been paralyzed from a diving accident some ten years earlier and confined to a wheelchair, asked me to take him to a special needs school where he graduated from for a special

homecoming service. I accepted but I had no idea what I was getting into.

When we arrived, I got him out of the car, put him in the wheel chair and pushed him into the school. When we got inside, there were about 100 of the most severely handicapped people I had ever seen.

Some of the most heart rendering cases that I had ever seen were assembled under that one roof. Then there were other young people with conditions that I didn't know that existed.

But one of the highlights of the reunion was the Christian worship service. I stood because there were no chairs, everyone was either in a wheel chair or a litter type of gurney. But I was amazed to see these young people sing their hearts out. When it came time for prayer, none of them prayed for healing for themselves.

What they did was pray for their families, friends and staff. During the time of the joys, they thanked the Lord for being alive. I was perplexed because these were the most joyful and thankful people I had ever been around.

400 years ago, Pastor Brewster at that First Thanksgiving He thanked God for meeting all of their needs; for bringing the lives of those who died to their eternal

reward and for the friendship and the help of the Wampanoag Indians.

In closing may God help all of us as we stay focused on the Lord and remain thankful in spite of our difficulties.

Have a blessed Thanksgiving.