

St Thomas of the Air Church
Thanksgiving Day
November 26, 2020
rmcneely+

We give thee humble and hearty thanks for this thy bounty
--words from the collect for Thanksgiving Day

Those who do not know us might ask:

What are we all doing here this glorious Fall day
in the City by the Bay?

If you believe our culture:

This is a day that we should spend shopping
for 'holiday' (not Christmas) Gifts

This is a day that we should be home watching football

This is a day that we should be celebrating
the First Americans

The first nations of America

Don't get me wrong, none of those are bad things.

But they ignore an inescapable fundamental truth:

This is a day that draws us to church,
God's House

In response to our very human need
to Give thanks unto God.

It must be an odd feeling for the secularist non-believers

To be thankful to no one in particular.

Christians see this in public places and institutions

People being thankful "in general".

Who do they think they are thanking

And for what?

We all learned the origin of this day in grade school,
the first Thanksgiving

The pilgrims

New England

The Turkey and all the lore surrounding it.

Today we celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Plymouth Rock landing.

Almost 400 years to the day.

The events of 400 years ago bring a message

But one that is no longer taught in our public schools

And hardly present in our culture

Having been re-written to please secular aspirations

So I'd like to take you back to 1620.

To discuss the facts of the matter

And to make the point of the Day.

Lets go back to England of the early 1600s:

James I is king—the same king that ordered the creation of the King James Version of the bible.

At that time and place, it was the custom and perhaps the law that all loyal subjects of the realm were to worship God in the Church of England—the ancestral church of the APCK

There was a small group of Christians who did not share the doctrine, theology or liturgy of the Church of England and they would have none of it.

Fearing the consequences of their conscience, they fled to Holland,

First to Amsterdam

And then to Leiden

They didn't thrive there and the Dutch were not hospitable to the radical sect.

So after 10 years, they returned to their homeland, where at least they felt part of the country and culture and language.

But in the ensuing years, the religious imprimatur had not changed much and they were not welcomed. They felt threatened and needed to leave again.

By then the colonies in America were taking a foothold on the New World and they were drawn there.

They pooled all they had and managed to acquire 2 old ships, the *Stillwell* and the *Mayflower*. They sacrificed all they had to provision the ships for the journey and a new life.

By early September 1620, all was ready and they said good bye to all they knew and chanced everything on America.

The trip across the Atlantic should take about 23 days.

And they provisioned food and water for the trip leaving little room for the 100 people, their belongings and what they could load onto the ships for their new life in an unknown land.

But *Stillwell* foundered. She was all they could afford,
 but she was not seaworthy
 and their lives were threatened
 as she struggled to remain afloat.

Stillwell reversed course and all aboard hoped she could make it back to the safety of England...

She made it, but half of the people and provisions of the group never made it to the New World.

Mayflower pressed on.. They had left late in the season hoping to arrive in mid late September at the latest, just before the weather in the Atlantic turned nasty. But the weather turned

And the North Atlantic storms swept southward.

The timbers and planks of the old merchant ship

Were pounded by the high winds and

Giant swells

Turning the trip into a cold, wet, watery hell.

They had food and water for the 23 day trip.

But it took almost 3 times that long.

The *Mayflower*, not much bigger than this building

Was slowed by the weather

Water poured into the ship

Pumps could barely pump the water out faster than it
poured in

The seawater threatened to contaminate their food and water,

Already made scarce

They had food for 23 days but the crossing took them
67 days.

The 23 day food and water supply was rationed

They were sea sick, starving, cold, diseased, battered, thirsty and
weak.

It was hardest on the very young and the very old.

Some did not survive the trip.

They had planned to land in Virginia, where an established colony
could welcome them with food, water, warmth and shelter.

But they landed at Plymouth near Cape Cod on November 6, 1620.

Where there was little for them

But winter, cold, disease and starvation.

They remained on the *Mayflower*, their only semblance of shelter.

Their English food exhausted

They sent scouts to shore to hunt
and to forage for their survival.

They built crude homes, storage barns, and a fort.

By the end of the Winter almost half of them had died

Of starvation, exhaustion and disease.

An Indian they call Squanto came to their aid and

helped them plant corn and other crops.

Helped them learn the secrets of living in that land

It grew warmer

The crops grew. The people healed

By November of the year after their landing
They had shelter, food,
They would survive

After
The *Stillwell* ran for its life

After
A violent voyage
that was three times longer than anticipated

After
The fear of being lost to the cold and bitter Atlantic
The hunger and thirst of the crossing
the agonizing deaths at sea

After
Landing at a hostile unexpected harbor

After
Half their number died a gruesome death

On November 26, 1621: The survivors who would later be known
as the Pilgrims

Gathered the harvest
The life sustaining harvest
that many must have thought they would never live to see

And the first thing they did
they thanked God

They held a banquet
And they thanked God

Surely the message of their salvation
As the word spread across the colonies
The message of their devotion
Their sacrifice

Rang loudly around the world.

Almost two hundred years later
 After its time of trial in war and tribulation
 A new nation
 By its new President
 Declared a National Day of Thanksgiving
 To commemorate that first Thanksgiving
 President Washington began the tradition in 1789
 The church, included the propers we say today
 In a communion service
 of the first American Prayer Book
 Honored the Pilgrims and the first Thanksgiving
 Can we appreciate the irony.
 The Pilgrims who fled the Church of England
 Were commemorated in the Book of Common Prayer.
 Substantially written in England for the Church of
 England, the Pilgrims found a place in the Church
 service that had shunned them.

Later Abraham Lincoln
 In the days after the Civil War Battle of Gettysburg,
 The turning point of the war
 Issued his own Presidential Decree
 He proclaimed:
 “A National Day of Thanksgiving and Praise
 To our beneficent Father
 Who dwelleth in the Heavens”.

That
 in the days when our Presidents were not denigrated
 for expressing their faith
 and who knew the Bible
 And the King James authorized version at that.

Each President thereafter has made the proclamation
 Until 1941 when Congress got into the act
 And legislated that
 Thanksgiving will be a National Holiday
 To be celebrated on the second to last Thursday of November

Today is 400 years
 Since the Pilgrims
 First gathered to give thanks to God
 For their very existence.
 After harrowing losses
 Bitter hardship and sacrifice.
 They knelt and gave thanks to God.

When life is good it is easy to give thanks to God.
 But when things turn around
 when life is not so good
 we tend only to seek His grace
 These are those times.

So today may be celebrated in shopping malls,
 In stadiums and Television football broadcasts
 And in memory not of the Pilgrims
 but the First Nations of our Country.

But here
 Despite the threat of the virus and the lifestyle it has imposed upon
 us, and the hardships we have endured,
 In this little oasis of God's love
 In the midst of secularism and a fallen world
 We take time to recall what the Pilgrims endured
 400 years ago, and
 We celebrate and give thanks and praise
 To God
 For creation
 For the bounty of our lives
 For the manifold blessings and grace
 bestowed upon us
 For the love of God
 For the blessing of this precious Church
 And for its loving and magnificent people

We give thee humble and hearty thanks.