

IN THE INTERIM

November means Thanksgiving. Golden maple leaves are falling and the time “falls back.” The oaks are turning their burnished red, and at the end of this month, we celebrate Thanksgiving Day. If we are fortunate, we shall celebrate this holiday with our family and friends, practice long-repeated patterns of entertaining or being entertained, and recall the journey of the Pilgrims almost 400 years ago to Eastham and Plymouth as well as their meeting Native Americans, who were already here.

To the family into which I married, Thanksgiving is not only Norman Rockwell’s famous painting of the great American holiday. For, they were Separatists, who made the pilgrimage to Plimoth Plantation and resided there until my parents-in-law were married. For them, history was taken for granted. Plymouth, presently the town with the largest land-area in the Commonwealth, was a diverse village with neighbors, who were Congregationalists, Unitarians, American Baptists, Jews, Italian-American and Cape Verdean Catholics. Their meetinghouses were built on holy ground next to the historic graveyard.

Thanksgiving for them was about giving thanks to God for the opportunities to be and do; be who we are individually as “the Lord’s free people” (Pilgrims’ Covenant, Scrooby, England, 1606) and as a community, as well as continue to do what Christ calls us to do to serve others in the village and beyond. In their homes, baby lullabies included verses about Squanto and Samoset; and so, I too sang those to our own son after he was born.

Today that journey across the Pond is informed by new historical lenses from a variety of scholars from within the academy as well as outside such as Oak Bluffs and Mashpee. Present-day tours and lectures offered by the Plimoth Plantation, and some libraries and community groups, balance the Pilgrim and Wampanoag points-of-view. (It reminds me of the same sensitivity displayed on board the USS Missouri, which is moored at Pearl Harbor and welcomes thousands of American, Japanese and Japanese-American visitors each year.)

But let us not get confused between the religious beliefs, hopes and dreams carried by the Pilgrims on the Mayflower to these shores, and the welcome and friendship embodied by the First Nation with what happened later in and around the Plantation. For, that original encounter and engagement, though not perfect, was more decent and humane.

It was only later after mounting numbers of English settlers brought increasing encroachment on Native American lands that the blood of King Philip’s War fell in Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts. It was only later that an American story-line was created, which discounted the Native American presence and worth, and the food industry invented the perfect Thanksgiving feast of turkey and fixings, which we all enjoy.

This Thanksgiving let us offer gratitude to God, who empowers us through the Holy Spirit, to be and do; to be Christ’s People and to continue to minister as God’s free people, who come from diverse backgrounds, are imperfect but forgiving, learn to be open and welcoming, and look forward to our next adventure.

Wishing you and yours a very happy
Thanksgiving,

Pastor Dianne