



Thanksgiving History

All of us have experienced Thanksgiving and have heard the stories of the Pilgrims and Indians first Thanksgiving since our childhood. We cherish our own special memories of this American holiday.

But, tonight let's look a little deeper into this well-known story.

Four years before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock there was a large tribe of Native Americans there called the Patuxets. All the members of this tribe, every man, woman and child, died of a mysterious plague. Neighboring tribes had refused to come to these grounds because they were thought to be cursed. The sheer miracle of the Pilgrims *even getting to* the New World is an entire story within itself, but the Pilgrims happened to land at the one part of land that was uninhabited because the previous residents had been wiped out.

New England winters along the coast are brutal. This makes the resolve of the Pilgrims all the more remarkable to establish their colony within the context of religious freedom in the New World. Of all of the times to arrive, it was in the undesirable month of December, 1620.

By the time March arrived the Pilgrims had lost forty-seven of their original number. They had been living primarily off of the finite amount of stored food from the ship's galley- they had depleted their supply of lemon juice - and a building that housed the sick caught on fire. Moreover, they did not know anything of the agriculture of America and only had English wheat and barley to attempt to cultivate come spring. The body can only endure so much exposure to wet, cold, and lack of vitamin C for so long and it was looking like things could not get much worse.

At about this time a Native American man approached the settlement and greeted them *in English*. The man's name was Samoset and he was driven by wander to come and greet the newly arrived settlers. He was from a tribe further north. He had learned to speak English from various fishing crews who had put in to shore near his village on the coast of Maine. Samoset would leave and return with another Native American man named Squanto, "and he was to be, according to Bradford, 'a special instrument sent of God for their good, beyond their expectation'" (Marshall & Manuel, 1977).

Squanto did eventually make his way back to Plymouth, however when he landed (approximately six months before the Pilgrims landed) he found that his native land was devoid of his people who had been previously wiped out by a plague. It was not until March when he met these poor, wretched, starving settlers that he knew why God had taken him on that long winding route back to his homeland. Squanto first taught them how to catch eels, then taught them something far more valuable. April was corn-planting month in New England, as well as Virginia. Squanto showed the Pilgrims how to plant corn in the Indian way, hoeing six-foot squares in

toward the center, putting down five kernels, and then fertilizing the corn with fish. Squanto helped in a thousand similar ways, teaching them how to stalk deer, plant pumpkins among the corn, refine maple syrup from maple trees, discern which herbs were good to eat and good for medicine, and find the best berries (Marshall & Manuel, 1977).

The agricultural knowledge of Squanto was critical to the Pilgrim's survival.

The Pilgrims were overflowing over with gratitude - not only to Squanto and the Wampanoags who had been so friendly, but to their God. In Him they had trusted, and He had honored their obedience beyond their dreams. So, Governor Bradford declared a day of public Thanksgiving, to be held in October. And so, the first Thanksgiving was a joint feast with the Pilgrims and their new found Native American friends who brought turkeys and venison.

In November 1621, just before the onset of winter a ship dropped anchor letting off thirty-five additional settlers who did not bring any food, tools or extra clothes. The joyous reunion was short lived.

Thus, they did enter their own starving time that winter of 1621-22 (with all the extra people to feed and shelter), and were ultimately reduced to a daily ration of **five kernels of corn a piece**. (Five kernels of corn-it is almost inconceivable how life could be supported on this.) But as always, they had a choice: either to give into bitterness and despair or to go faithfully to Christ. They chose Christ, and in contrast to what happened at Jamestown, not one of them died of starvation" (Marshall & Manuel, 1977).

The Pilgrims experienced a bountiful harvest the following summer of 1622. So great was their food surplus that they were able to trade with other northern tribes who had not reaped such an abundance. And so came the second Thanksgiving feast between Pilgrims & Indians - who again brought turkeys and venison.

There was one twist to the second Thanksgiving regarding the first course that was served: "on an empty plate in front of each person were five kernels of corn- lest anyone should forget".

1st Kernal - reminds us of God's Love

2nd Kernal - reminds us to Love One Another

3rd Kernal - reminds us of Our Family and Friends

4th Kernal - reminds us of the Beauty God Created

5th Kernal - reminds us of God's Blessings

What is Thanksgiving? It is a feast, yes. It is American history, that is true.

But it is the realization that **Christ is always enough.**

Thanksgiving is remembering the overabundance of things for which we give thanks,
but it is also remembering the times in which we had little to nothing,

and Christ in His mercy stood by us to provided and cared for His children. Source: Marshall & Manuel



