

Yankee Steve's Column
for the week of November 26, 2009

Dear Reader,

On October 3, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln designated the final Thursday in November as Thanksgiving Day. This has been traditionally associated with a feast that took place in the summer of 1621. I will now speak of it now in the hope that we may realize once more that God watches over those who look to Him for guidance.

The Cure for Anxiety
Thanksgiving Message

Native Americans who lived in the Northeast of our country sighted a ship off the coast. Weeks passed before it anchored in what is now called Massachusetts Bay. The official date for the landing has been given as November 11, 1620. The ship was the *Mayflower*; and the passengers on board were called Puritans. Now it is the custom to call these sea wayfarers "pilgrims," but they only wandered about as pilgrims because they were first of all Puritans. A Puritan was a deeply religious person.

Driven from their own homeland to Holland because of their unshakeable convictions brought with it a number of challenges, not the least of which was their need to provide for themselves and the need to bring their children up in the reverence and admonition of the Lord. The New World would give them the opportunity to establish the community they envisioned, one that would become an example to the rest of the world, a city set on a hill.

Plymouth Governor William Bradford [1590-1657] who was aboard the *Mayflower* wrote that they had **"a great hope and inward zeal . . . of laying some foundation, or at least to make some way thereunto, for the propagating and advancing the gospel of the kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world; yea, though they should be but even as stepping-stones unto others for the performing of so great a work."**

The Puritans cannot be explained apart from their religious zeal nor can America be explained apart from their influence.

Recently a popular movie star took exception to the way the people in one European country openly fornicate. She said that she guessed it was the Puritan thing in her. No doubt she is right, but the influence of the Puritans goes far beyond sex. Dr. Samuel Zwemer [1867-1952] wrote, "The Pilgrim Fathers of New England left a large legacy of high ideals, noble vision, and of bed rock principles which are our common heritage."

The Puritan contribution to America cannot be fully explained in one column, but one of their sayings provides us with some insight into the way they thought. "Pray devoutly, but hammer stoutly." That almost summarizes the American way of looking at things. The European, on the

other hand, shuns both prayer and work. In other words that would make him out to be a Socialist.

A hard winter lay before the weary Puritans. A letter written back to England some ten years later shows us that by the time they set foot on shore snow had fallen. The ground was already frozen and unsuitable for planting. Who would take care of them? They were academicians and merchants. They had never been taught how to “set corn;” they could not know where to fish; they did not know if the natives would murder them. They were all alone in a wilderness. Another ship, the *Fortune*, would not arrive until the following November one year later. What would happen to them? They had come here Tocqueville said to “make an idea work,” but would their fragile community last?

The Puritans had considered traveling to Guyana in South America where they knew it would be warm with abundant fruits and vegetables and a considerable distance from any of the Spanish settlements. But after being promised by the King of England that they could follow their religious conscience they sailed for what we now call New England. Their arrival in the New World more than any other event can be used to explain modern history.

The one thing that stands out as a characteristic of these people is their drive and tenacity. Naturally we want to know where or from what source did they derive their courage and determination? **The Puritans had a firm faith in the universal providence of God.**

That is another way of saying that the Puritans were not Deists.

A Deist is someone who believes that God at one time began the universe but after doing so left us alone. Deist Isaac Newton believed that he could demonstrate that the universe had been constructed along mathematical lines, and if that is the case then there is a God. However, before you credit Newton with real faith I would caution you.

Newton refused to accept the idea that Jesus was God incarnate. He fully understood that the incarnation is the last nail in the coffin of Deism. In the Bible, Jesus is called Immanuel, or God with us [Isaiah 7:14]. The incarnation demonstrates to us that God is not “up there” or “over there,” but right here with us. In other words “Providence” is not just a city in Rhode Island.

Words like providence, to a Deist, carry no import. They are utterly without meaning. This is why George Washington, who seems to have been a Deist, did not know how to interpret some of the events surrounding his own life. During a decisive battle in the French and Indian War everyone was struck dead around him; Washington was the only survivor.

Did providence show its hand? Why doubt that it did? Washington went on to be our greatest president, the one man that more than any other who set this nation on the right course refusing any and all offers of inequality, a true lover of freedom who kept the newborn United States from becoming an oligarchy or a dictatorship. Napoleon, after he *seized power* was heard to say, “They wanted me to be another Washington.”

The Puritans centered their lives round providence. They wanted to go through life believing that God was with them. It is as if they looked out at the world through a lens that had been crafted for them by the writers of Scripture who viewed at all things from the standpoint of a superintending God. The biblical writers did not believe that God was off somewhere doing His own thing. No and in fact, they believed that God was “at hand” or as we would put it “within reach.”

I repeat, the Puritans believed in the universal providence of God. As a matter of fact they made the journey to America from Holland because they knew that God would be here waiting for them when they arrived. He was with them in Holland where they had spent 11 years in exile, being English by birth, so why would He not accompany them to the New World?

Have you ever wondered, are there places where God does not go, so that if you are there you will have to make a go of it on your own? Years ago I heard a humorist and preacher say that there was one place God does not go and that would be a Louisiana wrestling hall. No Puritan would have thought that a possibility.

So I ask you, was God with the Puritans? Not if you count their numbers after their first winter; about half of them died. But the Puritan goes on believing in a provident God. He or she is steadfast. As a matter of fact one of the Puritans said, **“We cannot be robbed of God’s providence..”**

Were there ever more comforting words spoken than that? Just to know that God will never leave us transports us to heaven itself.

Look what God did for our fathers. Gov. Bradford relates that a marvelous providence attended them. They were sustained through that first winter because of a cache of food supplies left behind by the Indians. He wrote in his journal,

And here is to be noted a special providence of God, and a great mercy to this poor people that hear they got seed to plant them corn the next year, or lest they might have starved, for they had none, nor any likelihood to get any till the season had been past . . . Neither is it likely they had had this if the first voyage had not been made, for the ground was now all covered with snow, and hard frozen. But the Lord is never wanting unto his in their greatest needs; let his holy name have all the praise.

Should we overlook the fact that the Puritans paid the natives for what they had used that would be no small omission. Compare that fact to the way in which the Spanish Conquistadores ravaged Mexico.

After surviving the first winter and reaping the Lord’s bounty during the summer of 1621, the Puritans gathered with the Indians who had befriended them. They feasted for about three days; it was a splendid affair. Gov. Bradford said that many wrote letters “. . . to their friends in England, which were not feigned but true reports” because they did not have to exaggerate.

God's Ways Are Past Finding Out

Many times the help that God is going to send us will come from an unexpected source. In the case of the Puritans it came from the Indians and one in particular a certain Squanto.

“But about the 16 of March [1621] a certain Indian came boldly amongst them and spoke to them in broken English, which they could well understand, but marveled at it. His name was Samaset; he told them also of another Indian whose name was Squanto, a native of this place, *who had been in England* and could speak better English than himself.” [Bradford, *emphasis added*]

Some four or five days after Samaset had been introduced to the English, Sachem the leader of the Indians (also called Massasoit) met with them. He brought with him some other chiefs. Squanto accompanied them presumably to act as an interpreter. Gifts were given to the chief, and a pact was agreed on which lasted by some estimates up to 50 years. Who was this Squanto? He was a living proof that God had planned ahead and that nothing takes the Lord by surprise.

The United States of America is not the kingdom of God, but no one can doubt that an angel has been sitting on our shoulder. The contribution Squanto made to the fledgling community was considerable.

Bradford said that he was “. . . a special instrument sent of God for their good beyond their expectation. He directed them how to set their corn, where to take fish, and to procure other commodities, and was also their pilot to bring them to unknown places for their profit, and never left them till he died . . .”

To the dismay of the Puritan community Squanto did die, just two years after they had landed in America, but not before he had accomplished God's purpose.

“Squanto fell sick of an Indian fever, bleeding much at the nose (which the Indians take for a symptom of death), and within a few days dyed there; desiring the Governor to pray for him, that he might go to the Englishman's God in heaven, and bequeathed sundry of his things to sundry of his English friends, as remembrances of his love; of whom they had a great loss.” [Bradford]

Is the God of the Bible Still Around?

Is God with us, too? Can we prove God like the Puritans? Why not, or were the Puritans just fortunate? Are the Communists right; is religion the opiate of the people?

The psalmist provides us with an example of what faith can do. As a matter of fact, he found the cure to anxiety by taking into account the fact that God can only be provident. Listen to him.

“Lord you have been our dwelling place in all generations . . .” [Psalm 90:1] The psalmist and the Puritans were no exception to the rule. If God was with them, He will be with us. Believe it and live free of anxiety.

Permit me to paraphrase Philippians 4:5b-7.

The Lord is at hand; He is not up there or over there, but right near you or within reach of everyone. So don't be anxious. Let God hear from you. Pray about anything that concerns you. I mean be specific when praying and while praying do not forget to give thanks. Remember that if you forget to give thanks, and you only ask for this, that, and the other, you will not be praying as you should.

If you pray like you should, I assure you that the peace of God that passes all understanding, that peace which you will never be able to explain to others or even to you self because by all accounts you ought to be anxious, will keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. You will not be terrified. You will have the same kind of peace that God has; you will not only think about things as God does, you will feel as He does. His peace will be yours.”

I wish all my faithful readers a happy Thanksgiving, one that is free of fear and anxiety.

Ever yours,

Yankee Steve Cakouros
oldlineconservative.com