

A Pilgrim Thanksgiving



November 22, 1711
10:00 o'clock 'fore noon



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“THE PUBLICK EXERCISES WHICH EVERY LORD’S DAY CALLETH FOR”

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(The meeting house was unadorned, unheated, and uncomfortable. There was to be nothing in it which reminded the worshipers of the elaborately comfortable sanctuaries of England. Women brought heated stones in their bags to share with the congregation during the service. Families sat close together. Women and children processed first to be protected from animals and native people who still thought this land was their land.)

PRELUDE

*CALL TO WORSHIP

By Drum and “Conch” Shell

(Church led into meeting house by a “Beadle,” or parish constable, who was in charge of heralding the beginning of the service and placing the Bible on the altar. Followed by the “Tything Man” who keeps order during the service, and two deacons who sit on either side of the Bible. Last came the minister. A conch shell was blown to let the neighboring community know that the service was about to begin. Drums were beaten to remind the worshipers of the solemnness of the occasion.)

*THE GATHERING

Beadle

“Thus beginneth ye geathering of ye saints in worship of our Lorde. Geather in peace, & love, and holiness, and do not weary of hart and spirit.”

AFFAIRS AND HAPPENINGS

Thanksgiving Proclamation read

“Bills” of concern written out for the “Long Prayer.”

*PSALM LINING

Tything Man

Psalm 121

(See Insert)

(When the Pilgrims and Puritans sang from a Psalter which did not have music included in it, they “Lined out” the psalms. A leader would sing one line of the psalm and the people would sing back each line. On long Psalms, the process would continue for over an hour.)

ANTHEM

(During the anthem, Deacons collect Bills for Long Prayer)

THE "LONG" PRAYER

(Called "Long" because it often went over an hour, and included all of the suggestions gathered in the "bills" which were "put up" in the Affairs time. People generally stood during the entire prayer. The Pilgrims did not always use the Lord's Prayer because they were reacting to the use of it by the Church of England from which they had fled. But when it was used, it was not from the "King James" Bible, but from one such as the much earlier Tyndale Bible, printed below.)

LORD'S PRAYER (FROM THE TYNDALE BIBLE, 1534)

**O our Father which art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name.
Let thy kingdom come.
Thy will be fulfilled, as well in earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
even as we forgive our trespassers.
And leave us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power,
and the glory forever.
Amen.**

SCRIPTURE READING AND PROPHECYING Luke 23:33-43

(Always read and then commented on by a Deacon with a "stalwart and comely voice.")

HYMN "O Lord, Almighty God, Thy Works" (See Insert)

(This hymn, not a Psalm, was sung at the close of the meeting of the very first Synod of Congregational Churches in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1648. It was so enjoyed that it was added to the 1650 edition of the Bay Psalm Book. It was the first hymn to include music in the collection.)

SERMON

(According to the Puritan leader, Cotton Mather, sermons in New England usually reached "a good way into the second Hour.")

PRAYER

(A shorter prayer "...wherein he [the minister] recommends the Sermon, and the principal Documents of it, unto the Operations of the Holy Spirit

for the effectual Applications thereof unto the Hearts of the People,"
Cotton Mather)

QUESTIONS, PROPHECY, CENSURES

(Members would ask questions, speak as the spirit led them, and censure their sleeping neighbors.)

THE CONTRIBUTION

"Brothers and Sisters, now there is time left for the contribution; wherefore as God has prospered you, so freely offer."
(Currency was often scarce so people often gave food and supplies instead. The church often wrote supplies of firewood into the contracts of its early ministers.)

Offertory Music

*The Doxology

(The tune of the "Doxology" was first printed in the "Geneva Psalter" in 1551 at the direction of John Calvin. The Puritans first heard it when they fled to continental Europe from the repression of Queen Mary in the Sixteenth Century.)

THANKSGIVING PROCLAMATION OF GEORGE WASHINGTON, 1768

*CONCLUDING HYMN

"Come Ye Thankful People, Come" (See Insert)

BENEDICTION (Unison)

(Cotton Mather reports that this Trinitarian benediction was the most commonly repeated one in Puritan New England of the 1600s.)

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
The love of God,
And the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all,
Amen.**

POSTLUDE (Following Drum and "Conch" Shell)

**Where an asterisk appears, those who are able are invited to stand.*

MEDITATION THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

A Congregational-church, is by the institution of Christ a part of the Militant-visible-church, consisting of a company of Saints by calling, united into one body, by a Holy covenant, for the publick worship of God, & the mutual edification one of another, in the Fellowship of the Lord Jesus.

—From The Cambridge Platform, the most important statement of faith and order used by the New England Puritans, written in 1648

Welcome

Good morning to Thee, this Lorde's Day! We hope that God's worde and the Holy Spirit will be withe you today and that Thee will benefit from this service of Worship. As you enter the sanctuary, please be aware of the needs of quietness and prayer of many of our worshipers especially during the playing of the prelude.

A Pilgrim Thanksgiving

For our service today, we are recreating many of the customs and practices of the church in America in the 1600s. For example, you were called to worship and sent away later by the beating of a drum and the blowing of a conch shell instead of a prelude or postlude. The one placing the Bible on the Communion Table is called the Beadle. The person with the long stick is the "Tithing Man." His stick is called the "Tithing rod." His purpose is to keep people awake during the more than three hour services which were common in Early America. You will also have the Psalm "lined" for you, which means a leader will sing a line and you will follow. The early church goers did not all have hymnals, so group singing of the Psalms was often accomplished this way.

There are some customs we will not attempt to recreate. For example, there would normally not be a choir. And normally you would have been advised to bring your fire arms to the service .

Enjoy the service. We pray that you not only learn about our Pilgrim and Puritan heritage, but also find comfort and worship in the service. Special thanks to all of those who participated in today's service. Too many to have your names included in the bulletin.

A Pilgrim Thanksgiving

Rev. Dr. Stan G. B. Duncan

1993, Rev. 2007

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Introductory comments:

- (1) Call to the service at church was given on a conch shell or by a drummer.
- (2) Congregation processed together to the church because of the need for protection. They left together for the same reason. Men leading, of course.
- (3) The meeting house did not have heat, so people brought hot stones in boxes; women put them in their muffs. Ministers preached wearing mittens and over coats.
- (4) Deacons sat on either side of the pulpit.
- (5) A "Tything Man" (sometimes called the "Sexton") would walk the meeting house during the sermon tickling the sleeping women with a rabbit's foot, and tapping the sleeping men with a brass knocker.

Objects needed:

- (1) Drums (one for each entrance to the sanctuary)
- (2) A Tything Pole (Pole with fur on one end [rabbit's foot, squirrel's tail, etc.] and a ball on the other. A tennis ball jammed onto the end of a poll of some kind would do).
- (3) Offering poles with baskets (long poles with a box on one end; used to take up the offering)
- (4) Pilgrim costumes
- (5) An Hourglass
- (6) Dozens of large white paper napkins with holes cut out of the center and slit on the sides, to look (distantly) like the chest aprons worn by the Puritans.

People needed:

- (1) Drummers (one per sanctuary entrance)
- (2) Tything Man (who wields the tything pole during the sermon) "A tithingman was "appointed to watch over the youths of disorderly carriage, and see that they behave themselves comelie, and use such raps and blows as in his discretion meet." By law, attendance was mandatory. "Tything men" were appointed each year by the town. Their function was to prevent dozing during the service. They did this by having a long pole that could reach anyone caught napping during the church meeting. It is believed that the pole had a squirrel tail on one end and a ball on the other. If a woman was caught napping, the Tything man would tickle the woman with the tail end of the pole, but if a man was caught napping, he would get a severe rap with the ball end. Unruly men and boys were kept in line by a whipping post and stocks located just outside the church door. ¹
- (3) Beadle (who carries in the Bible at the head of the procession and announces the beginning of the service. The Beadle also leads the recession out of the meeting house. A "Beadle" is the person who would walk before the king or the dignitary in a formal event or visit. In the same sense, in a church he walked before the congregation with the Holy Scripture.²
- (4) Collectors (should be deacons, one of which will announce the time of collection)
- (5) Liner (who can "line out" a Psalm musically, phrase by phrase)
- (6) Readers of scripture (each scripture was commented on by the readers).
- (7) People to fit worshipers with napkin "costumes" at sanctuary entrances (at least two per entrance)

¹ Alice Morse Earle, *The Sabbath In Puritan New England*, Seventh Edition
(<http://www.fullbooks.com/Sabbath-in-Puritan-New-England1.html>)

² Earle, *The Sabbath*,

“THE PUBLICK EXERCISES WHICH EVERY LORD’S DAY CALLETH FOR” The elements of the service with commentary³

BEGINNING PRAYER

“The Pastor, after the Bills which any of the Neighbours put up, desiring a Remembrance in the Publick Prayers or Praises, on their special Occasions, have been read—begins with Prayer.” (Mather) This is the Long prayer which was known to go on for over an hour. The congregation stood during it. It was “Second in importance only to the sermon, and was as formal as the sermon.”⁴ Almost any subject could be discussed in the prayer. Sometimes the pastor would pause so that the more weary could sit down and take a break. The Rev. Thomas Clap in his 1725 collection of sermons had an outline for prayers which contained five general divisions and 240 sub-heads.⁵ “Sewall in his ‘Diary,’ speaks of a fast-day service where, after three persons had prayed, and one had preached, ‘another prayed an hour and a half.’”⁶

PSALM

Of the characters of the Reformation, Martin Luther stood at one end of the spectrum in regards to music. He considered it one of God’s greatest gifts and structured the Mass so that most of it could be sung. Ulrich Zwingli stood at the other end in that he felt that nothing should be in the service which was not specifically mentioned in the Bible, and no reference could be found of the use of music in the worship of the first Christians. In the middle stood John Calvin, who believed in keeping the bible strictly, but also believed in the value of music. So he taught that music should be used in worship as long as the words came from the Bible itself, particularly the Psalms. The Puritans and the Pilgrims are the inheritors of Calvin’s position, and published many books of Psalms metered for singing.⁷

The most famous is the *Bay Psalm Book*, and many people believe that it was the sole source of hymnody for the early Pilgrims. But the Pilgrims landed in the new world in 1620 and the *Bay Psalm Book* was not completed until 1640, and not used universally until the end of the Century. The book which they used in the first two generations after their arrival was *The Booke of Psalmes: Englished both in Prose and Metre*, written in 1612 by Henry Ainsworth for the English Separatists, who had gone from London to Amsterdam and then to Leyden. It was from the Leyden group that the Pilgrims came, and it was Ainsworth’s Psalter that they brought with them and used in the new world.

The early Psalters did not include melodies but were “lined out” by a Deacon or Ruling Elder with a “stalwart and comely voice.”⁸ That is, the leader would sing one phrase of the psalm and then the congregation would repeat it back exactly as he had sung it. They would continue through to the end of the Psalm, sometimes taking thirty minutes to complete one psalm. According to Mather, “Ordinarily the Psalm is read line after line by him whom the Pastor desires to do that service; and the People generally sing in such grave Tones, as are most usual in the churches of our Nation....More than a score of Tunes are heard Regularly Sung in their Assemblies.”⁹

³ Most of this order is adapted from the writings of the early Puritan leader, Cotton Mather in his *Ratio Discipline*, 1726, pp. 42-62, cited in Henry Martyn Dexter, *A Handbook of Congregationalism* (Boston, the Congregational Publishing Company, 1880, pp. 83, 84.). Also, Cotton Mather “Puritan Worship,” reprinted in *The Journal of Theological Studies* 1993 44(1):423-425.

⁴ John F. Hurst, *A Short History of the Church in the United States* (New York: Chautauqua Press, 1890), p. 49.

⁵ Hurst, *Op. Cit.* p. 50.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), p. 137.

⁸ Henry R. Rust, *Worship Through the Centuries: A Service After the Manner of the Pilgrims* (Brea, California: Educational Ministries, Inc., 1989), p. 10.

⁹ Dexter, following Mather, *A Handbook of Congregationalism*, p. 83.

THE LONG PRAYER

This usually went on for more than an hour (don't tempt me). People frequently added "Amen." They also wrote names and issues for the prayer; we might do the same.

SCRIPTURE

Always read by a Deacon, and always commented on by him afterward

SERMON

Sermons in old New England were "free" sermons without the use of manuscripts, which they thought blocked the flowing of the spirit. As a mark of respect, the people stood while the minister "gave out" the sermon. They were timed with an hour glass and usually reached "a good way into the second Hour."¹⁰ The subjects of sermons were expected to cover virtually every subject of interest to the community, and often did: local elections, taxation, war with the native Americans, and configurations of comets in the sky. Cotton Mather did an entire sermon series on comets, which was so well received that he later published it as a book.

On the other hand, the Puritans were also intensely theological, and the main message of the sermon was commonly the application of various principals of dogmatic theology to these affairs of the day. Discussion of fine points of theology during the week by the "ordinary" parishioners was common.

PRAYER

"...wherein he recommends the Sermon, and the principal Documents of it, unto the Operations of the Holy Spirit for the effectual Applications thereof unto the Hearts of the People."¹¹ The prayer following the sermon was much shorter than the "Long Prayer" which precedes it.

"QUESTIONS, PROPHECY, AND CENSURES"

Following the sermon there were often questions, bringing the lay people into the theological conversation and debate about the great issues of the day. Since religious discussion has been so thoroughly stifled in modern worship, the leader might consider "salting" the congregation with suggested questions in advance of the service. If the topic of the sermon on this occasion is the historical background of the Pilgrims and Puritans, the suggested questions in the resource section might be appropriate.

COLLECTION

"And the Ecclesiastical expenses of the Churches are defrayed, or at least, assisted, out of these Contributions."¹²

BENEDICTION

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God, and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all."¹³

(Note: "in many Churches the Reading of Chapters [of the Bible] in course, with a short prayer for a Blessing on it, is one of the Publick Exercises; nor is any Offence taken in others at them for doing so....Yea, the Practice obtains more and more."¹⁴

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 83

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.* Cf. Mather "Puritan Worship," p. 425.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

RESOURCES

LORD'S PRAYER FROM TYNDALE NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE (1534)

The "King James" Bible did not make into this country for over a generation after the first Puritans arrived. The Bibles in English that Elder William Brewster and others preached from were either the Tyndale Bible or the Geneva Bible. Below is the Lord's Prayer from the Tyndale Bible.

O our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Let thy kingdom come.
Thy Will be fulfilled, as well in earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, even as we forgive our trespassers.
And leave us not into temptation: but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory forever. Amen

THANKSGIVING PROCLAMATIONS:

Many Thanksgiving services use the annual president's official proclamation of a day of thanks during their worship. Those can be found through your elected officials, Post Offices, and county court houses. The first presidential proclamation was George Washington's in 1789. It is reproduced below in two forms. First, as it first appeared, and second in a shortened form set as a responsive reading for congregational participation.

THANKSGIVING PROCLAMATION OF GEORGE WASHINGTON, 1789

WHEREAS it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits and humbly to implore His protection and favor; and

WHEREAS both Houses of Congress have, by their joint committees, requested me recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness;

NOW THEREFORE, I do recommend and assign Thursday, the 26th day of November next, to be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be; that we may then all unite in rendering unto him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country, previous to their becoming a nation; for the signal and manifold mercies, and the favorable interpositions of His providence in the course and conclusion of the late war; for the great degree of tranquility, union and plenty, which we have since enjoyed; for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been enabled to establish Constitutions of government for our safety and happiness and particularly the national one now lately instituted; for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed, and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and, in general, for all the great and various favors, which He has been pleased to confer upon us.

And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations, and beseech Him to pardon our nation and other transgressions; to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually; to render our National Government a blessing to all the peoples, by constantly being a government of wise, just and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed; to protect and guide all sovereigns and nations (especially such as have shown kindness to us) and to bless them with good governments, peace and concord; to promote the knowledge and practice of true

religion and virtue, and the increase of science among them and us; and, generally, to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as He alone knows to be best.

RESPONSIVE FORM OF THE PROCLAMATION FOR CONGREGATIONAL USE

Leader: WHEREAS it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits and humbly to implore His protection and favor; and

People: **WHEREAS both Houses of Congress have requested me to recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness;**

Leader: NOW THEREFORE, I do recommend and assign Thursday, the 26th day of November next, to be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be;

People: **that we may then all unite in rendering unto him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country, previous to their becoming a nation;**

Leader: for the signal and manifold mercies, and the favorable interpositions of His providence in the course and conclusion of the late war;

People: **for the great degree of tranquility, union and plenty, which we have since enjoyed;**

Leader: for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been enabled to establish Constitutions of government for our safety and happiness;

People: **for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed, and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and, in general, for all the great and various favors, which He has been pleased to confer upon us.**

THANKSGIVING PROCLAMATION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN, 1863

(This has been taken from Howard Rust,¹⁵ who notes that though Washington was the first to make a proclamation for a day of thanks, Lincoln's was the first to make it a national statement. He issued it just before going to Gettysburg to deliver his famous address. Notice the more ethical tone in Lincoln's proclamation, commending to God's care "all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners, or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife.")

It has seemed to me fit and proper that (our bounties) should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged, as with one heart and voice, by the whole American people. I do, therefore, invite my fellow citizens...to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a day of Thanksgiving and prayer to our beneficent Father, who dwelleth in the heavens, and I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him, for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners, or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation, and to restore it, as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility and union.

¹⁵ *Worship Through the Centuries*, p. 8

SUGGESTIONS FOR "QUESTIONS, PROPHECY, AND CENSURES"

If you preach an historical sermon on the pilgrims and how they arrived, these questions can help you during the questions Prophecy, and Censures" time which follows. Make copies and "seed" them to allies in the congregation.

1. Why didn't John Robinson Join the Pilgrims in the voyage to America?
2. If we had a Geneva Bible why did they translate the King James Bible?
3. Why was King James so opposed to the Geneva Bible?
4. Why didn't the early church ordain Elder Brewster to be their minister instead of waiting for the church back in England or Leyden to send them a minister?
5. Why did the Pilgrims and the Puritans not like pictures, saints, icons, crosses, and all that?

SOURCES

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