

Signposts of Thanksgiving

During this Thanksgiving week many children will be watching the mile markers fly by on the interstate, knowing each passing sign represents one mile closer to turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes, and countless desserts. Exactly four hundred years ago during this same season of the year, there was another group of young children who were on their own journey. Rather than riding in a comfortable automobile for a couple of hours with iPad in hand, they were shut up in a damp, dimly lit, crowded room with hardly any privacy underneath the deck of the *Mayflower*, which was being tossed to and fro on the ocean waves for nine long weeks.

These children, as well as their parents, demonstrated supernatural patience and deference in these difficult circumstances. Much of the time was spent either listening to Priscilla Mullins tell stories or playing games with Mary Chilton. While there were no signposts on the water that marked their daily progress, there were two important events that reminded them of *why* they were making the trip: to give a better life to the next generation of believers. These two intergenerational mile markers were the births of Oceanus Hopkins and Peregrine.

The little boat ultimately ran into raging storms that sought to sink not only the ship itself but also the genesis of a new nation that sat within the womb under her deck. It seemed like all the agents of hell were conspiring together to land one crushing blow. But for every threat, there was an answer. When a main support beam cracked, God had already fortuitously ordained that a jackscrew had been placed on board, allowing the men to manage a temporary fix to the present danger. Almost immediately after setting the fracture, the storm ceased, seemingly as an ultimate acknowledgment to the Sovereign will of the Master of the Winds.

Several months later during the long winter months, the Pilgrims faced another battle in the form of a decimating sickness that wiped out half of their host. In the midst of that setback, God once again sent two more mile markers as a reminder of His promises to His people: Samoset and Squanto. Between helping the Pilgrims establish cordial relationships with the various surrounding tribes and helping them learn how to hunt and grow food, these two men were agents of God's sustaining grace to make it through the subsequent winter.

While the Pilgrims' story inspires us on many levels, perhaps none is greater than the stark reminder that God gives us sustaining grace and signposts during storms in our own lives. Just as God had His eye on that tiny dot of a boat in the middle of the vast Pacific Ocean and fifty people clinging for life during the ravages of winter, He also has all the hairs on our heads numbered. His word reminds us that He spies every single raven that falls, and we are much more important than they (Luke 12).

May this Thanksgiving season find us looking to Him for grace every day of our lives. May we cling to Him for our very existence just like the little band of believers during that first winter. May we similarly demonstrate deep appreciation for the signposts of His love, from His daily provision, to His direction in times of confusion, to His restoration after a season of loss, to deep and satisfying relationships with one another through Him. As we feast on a variety of physical food this week, may we find our greatest satisfaction in the Bread of Life for not only meeting our physical needs but also our greatest need, the need of salvation.



HEY, LITTLE BUDDIES!

It's **UNCLE RICK**, coming to you from the Little House in the Pasture—where you can hear the birds sing, the cows moo, the horses neigh and Uncle Rick talk to his little buddies!

Sorry I can't be at your house to tell you this story myself, but I'm writing it down so your dad or mom can read it to you right there at home. Maybe they'll read it to you on Thanksgiving Day! Or maybe another day would be better for your family's schedule. Anyway, I hope you will like it and learn some good things from it, whenever it's read. It's a great old story, a true story. And it's a story that I have loved ever since I was a little boy about your age. *It's the story of America's first Thanksgiving.*

When I was a boy, every American boy and girl knew about the Pilgrims and the first Thanksgiving. But today, schools don't teach history as well as they used to, so some people believe things that aren't true about it. There are even some books that will tell you that the Pilgrims held the Thanksgiving feast at the end of their first harvest in Plymouth to give thanks to the Indians who had taught them to farm and fish in the New World. That's not true, of course. The feast was a celebration the Pilgrims held to give thanks to God for a bountiful harvest. They invited their friends, the Indians to share their feast with them. For several days they gave thanks, feasted and played games together.



King James I

But to understand why the Pilgrims were so happy, we have to go back several years to England, the land the Pilgrims had come from. In England, King James I had been persecuting many Christians because they had their own churches and would not join the Church of England. The King was the head of the church in England and he wanted all Englishmen to be under his authority spiritually as well as being his citizens. Some Christians felt this was wrong according to the Bible and so they wouldn't join his church. They believed that churches should be independent of the government and choose their own pastors instead of having them picked by the King from his "approved" list.

These people were called "Dissenters." King James did not like them at all. He sent soldiers to break up their church meetings. He charged some of them big fines and put some of them in jail. Some had their property stolen and some were even killed. All for believing the Bible!

This had been going on for some years when, in 1609 a group of them left England and went to Holland where there was religious freedom. This group built a Christian community in Holland and settled down to live among the Dutch people. They established their own church and made homes for their families.

But after a while, these new settlers began to think of leaving Holland. William Bradford, who would one day be a gover-



Holland



Pilgrims getting ready to leave Holland.



Pilgrims depart from England on the *Mayflower*.

nor of the Pilgrim colony in Massachusetts, wrote that they left Holland for two reasons: one reason was because they felt that the ungodly young people of Holland were a bad influence on their children. The other reason was that they wanted to establish a new society that was built on the principles of the Bible. They wanted to build this new society in a new land and share the gospel with the people who already lived there.

So in 1620, these believers left their homes in Holland and sailed back to England. There they joined up with some other Christians who had stayed in England but were finally ready to leave the homes they knew and go to a new land where they could worship as they chose and live in more freedom. They also wanted to get to know the Indians who already lived in America and teach them about Jesus.

The believers from Holland had bought a ship called the *Speedwell* and on July 22, sailed from Leiden, Holland to Southampton, England. There the combined group got on board the *Speedwell* and another ship, the *Mayflower*, and set sail for America in November of 1620. They ran into trouble right away. The

Speedwell started leaking! They returned to England for repairs but it turned out that the *Speedwell* just wasn't a strong enough ship to be safe for a long voyage clear across the ocean.

So the Pilgrims and some other passengers, called "Strangers" by the Pilgrims, all crowded into the little *Mayflower* and sailed for two months across the Atlantic to the New World. It was a



The *Mayflower II*, a replica of the original ship that brought the Pilgrims to America.



The Pilgrims' first winter in America, 1620-1621.

very hard trip. Everybody was crammed together with little chance to keep clean and get healthy exercise. The weather was bad, with lots of powerful storms that blew them far off course.

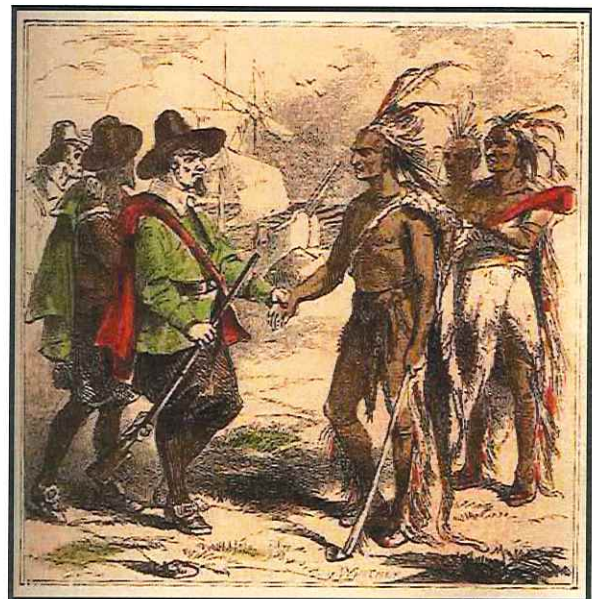
Finally, in December of 1620 the lookout spied land on the horizon. The Pilgrims had reached America! But they weren't in Virginia, where they had intended to go. The storm winds had blown them far north, to what is now Massachusetts. So there was no Jamestown Colony with houses and food and the other things they needed. The poor Pilgrims

landed on a cold, bleak shore where no food or shelter or friends awaited them.

The women and children spent most of the next two months still living on the *Mayflower* with the captain and crew while the men built huts and cabins for them to live in on shore. They ran low on food. The men were unfamiliar with hunting and fishing in the New World, so it was hard to get more food for their families. So even after they moved into the cabins on shore, life was still very hard.

That first winter was a very sad time. Their new homes were poorly built, cold and drafty. The people were hungry. Many got sick. It was so bad that about half of the settlers died before spring came. How awful!

But finally it came and the Pilgrims got out the seeds they had brought from England and began to plant their gardens and fields. They met some friendly Indians and learned from them how to hunt and fish. They traded trinkets and tools to the Indians for food and other things they needed. One of the Indians, a young man named Squanto, was a great help as he showed



Pilgrims met friendly Indians and made a peace treaty with them.

them how to grow crops, fertilizing them with small fish caught from nearby waters.

Spring and summer passed. The Pilgrims had nearly starved in the early months of their settlement but now they began to eat the fruits of their fields and the game and fish they took from the forests, streams and ocean. They got to know the Indians better and made a peace treaty with them that lasted for over half a century.

In the autumn, when the harvest had been gathered in, the Pilgrims found themselves better off than they had been in the entire time they had been in the New World. It had been a long, hard year



The Pilgrims' abundant harvest, 1621

but they had made it with God's help. They decided to dedicate a special feast for giving thanks to God for a good harvest.

The Pilgrims invited their Indian friends to eat with them and celebrate the harvest. The Indians brought some deer they had hunted in the forest to add to the feast. The celebration went on for days with feasting, prayers, games, and contests. The Pilgrims knew they still had hard times ahead of them, but God had brought them through the dark days of the voyage and the sad, hard winter when so many of their friends and loved ones had died.

That was the first Thanksgiving celebration in America, but not the last. Although the holiday wasn't set on the fourth Thursday of November until the twentieth century, there have been many special days set aside for the giving of thanks to God in America. It has been celebrated each year since the Civil War.

I hope you have a wonderful Thanksgiving Day at your house this year. We will have a big celebration at my home, with my children and grandchildren. That's a big group! And as we give thanks for the many blessings that God has so kindly given us, one very special blessing for me is knowing that I have little buddies like you all across America listening to my recordings. Thank you for listening to me. I hope you will continue to do so for a long, long time. And maybe I'll get to meet you in person some time! I do travel around the country a lot, you know.

I'm thankful for you.

Love,

Uncle Rick www.underickaudios.com



THE FIRST THANKSGIVING • 1621

"The First Thanksgiving" was painted circa 1912-1915 by Jean Leon Gerome Ferris (1863-1930). Image is courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.