

Thanksgiving 2019

This year I was fortunate to spend time twice in one month in the seaside town of Chatham on Cape Cod. Chatham has a beautiful beach for walking, a lighthouse, many beautiful homes and a walkable Main Street. Chatham, I discovered, also has had a distinct role in early American history.

A group of Separatists from the Church of England, later named Pilgrims, left England on September 6th, 1620 with 102 passengers. After being at sea for 66 days they sighted the coast of Cape Cod and turned south and sailed past this spot, modern day Chatham, in an attempt to reach their original destination, the Hudson River. But just southeast of (what is today Chatham), they encountered the Shoals of Pollack Rip, and the Mayflower was forced to turn back and head north, in search of safe harbor, and anchored in what is now Provincetown Harbor.

Because the Pilgrims decided to settle outside the limits of their charter, they needed a written document for self-government in the new colony, and thus the Mayflower Compact was written. Only some of the men on board could sign it, for women and those who were indentured, did not have full rights. They stayed in Provincetown Harbor for 5 weeks, before sailing across Cape Cod Bay and establishing a permanent settlement at Plymouth.

Oh, what delicious irony! The Pilgrims landed first at Ptown. You've seen the huge monument that towers over the town. There's a plaque/ monument at the tip of the cape that points out the arrival of the Mayflower. Did those stern pilgrims have any inkling how much fun future generations would have there?

Life on this continent the first year was severe: almost half of that small community died of disease and the harsh environment. And, of course, they were not the first to arrive here. For them it was the New World, but there were others here first, indigenous people, and history would not bode well for them. It would not be the sweet land of liberty. History shows us that democracy is not a given, it is both sturdy and fragile, and it is a work in progress. It would take almost 400 years, but the strains of "My Country Tis of thee" would emanate in legislative chambers, and in front of the Supreme Court building, as marriage equality became the law in our commonwealth and in our nation. Democracy works when we make it work. And for this we are thankful.

During this harvest season we count and we recall blessings. We try to keep a grateful heart. Gratitude is our way of saying we are not alone in the world. I am moved, affected, and changed by what others bring into my life. My world expands through the love, compassion forgiveness, and understanding extended to me. When I am embraced and included and valued, I know I am God's beloved and I am grateful. When my heart is broken and my spirit languishes and life is burdensome, I trust there awaits something new, there is door waiting to be opened, there will be

healing and refreshment and rest. And when my song is joyous and my dance is spirited, I know the joy of the Savior who delights in me. And I am grateful.

Gratitude is empty without action. When we voice or give expression to gratitude, doesn't it expand our connection to the world? doesn't it move us to give what we have received? Think of the simple action of holding a door for someone else, usually a stranger. And watch yourself, and others, as they do the same for those after them. But it's about more than good manners. If we have benefited from God's generosity, it becomes our obligation to extend our generosity to others, or more precisely, to allow God's generosity flowing through us to those we encounter. Today's gospel passage ends with the Golden Rule: "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do so to them" ---and Jesus adds, this is the entire law and all prophetic teachings.

One of the challenges of keeping a grateful heart is to realize our welcoming of God's blessings with gratitude will never outstrip God's ability to bless us. For those who have nurtured the habit of gratitude, no matter how large a bowl we set out to receive God's blessings, it will always overflow.