

Faithful Gratitude for the Future

Matthew 6:25-33

Let's pray: Lord Jesus, we thank You that we are gathered here together. In this time, may I speak through the Christ who dwells in me, and may the brothers and sisters who are listening hear through the Christ who dwells in them. May we look to You together, enjoy Your presence, and be filled with Your Spirit and the spirit of gratitude. We pray in Your name. Amen.

What comes to your mind first when you think of Thanksgiving Day? Turkey, family gatherings, Pilgrims? For me, the Pilgrims are what come to mind first.

Before moving to Wisconsin, I lived in the Boston area. For a few years, I lived close to Boston, and later I lived about an hour to the west. About 50 minutes south of Boston lies the town of Plymouth, where you can see Plymouth Rock, where the Pilgrims landed, and a replica of the Mayflower ship they sailed on.

Whenever we had guests from out of state, we would take them there. The replica Mayflower is the same size as the original and is seaworthy. When I first saw it in person, I couldn't believe that such a small ship had carried 132 people—102 passengers and about 30 crew members—across the Atlantic. The ship is about 100 feet long and 25 feet wide, and as a cargo ship, it had no cabins for passengers. It's said that the original Mayflower had never sailed across the Atlantic before.

The first time my family visited Plymouth, the ship was under repair, so we couldn't go inside. However, I later took some guests there and had the chance to board the ship. I was struck by how cramped it was, wondering how people had managed such a voyage.

Among the 102 passengers, only about half were Puritans. The rest were others seeking a new life in the New World. Why, then, did the Pilgrim Puritans embark on such a perilous journey, one that became the origin of Thanksgiving? Around 400 years ago, in England, faith was confined to the system of the Church of England. The Puritans faced oppression and persecution. Seeking freedom to practice their reformed faith without the king's control, they decided to find a new land. They first went to the Netherlands but faced challenges there too, so they returned to England, acquired a ship, and set sail.

Before disembarking, the Pilgrims wrote and signed the *Mayflower Compact*, which outlined three purposes for their journey to the new land: first, "the Glory of God";

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second, “the advancement of the Christian faith”; and third, “the honour of our King and Country.” They pledged to establish a community governed by laws, rules, and order for these purposes and solemnly committed to upholding them. This document became the foundation for the first self-governing agreement in America, independent of the British government.

The first month of their voyage was relatively calm, but the remainder was fraught with storms and severe trials. They landed far north of their intended destination, the New York area, and faced bitter cold and disease. Within four months, nearly half of them had died. Massachusetts winters are as harsh as those in Wisconsin. Amid these hardships, the Puritans cared for one another and even for those who were not part of their faith community, touching others with their love.

Despite burying almost daily loved ones and those who had become like family during their journey, they did not lose their faith and hope. They firmly believed that God had called them to this journey to bless them.

The Puritans’ faith held that God would not simply hand them a new land but would grant it through trials. They believed in the perseverance of the saints, likening their faith to that of Abraham, who endured in Canaan after leaving his homeland and even faced the test of offering his son. Faith, to them, was about enduring trials with steadfast perseverance.

Faith was not a means to avoid suffering. They believed suffering was essential for the strengthening of faith. This mindset set them apart from other settlers who had come before them. Thanksgiving, then, is the fruit of their endurance.

In the spring, they were aided by Squanto, a Native American who spoke English. He taught them how to grow corn, how to fish, and how to cultivate the land. Through him, they connected with Chief Massasoit of the Wampanoag tribe, whose help was crucial for the survival of their community. In Plymouth, you can see statues of Massasoit and Governor William Bradford facing each other, symbolizing their cooperation.

A year later, after their first harvest, they celebrated Thanksgiving with the Native Americans. But their gratitude was not merely for the harvest. They thanked God for enabling them to establish a new community with a shared vision for God’s glory and the advancement of the Christian faith. They were grateful for God’s assurance in their new beginning and for the community that embodied their ideals.

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If they had simply arrived safely, settled, and farmed peacefully, that would have been good. However, without the harsh weather and trials that bonded them in faith and love, their story would lack the powerful witness of faith they demonstrated.

Similarly, Abraham's faith would not have been evident if he had become younger after receiving God's promise and had a son effortlessly. Instead, as he aged and grew weaker, his faith in God's promise deepened, showing the world a testimony of faith.

The true meaning of Thanksgiving lies in giving thanks for a new beginning for both America and us as God's people through this day. Therefore, Thanksgiving is not merely about gratitude for the past but a forward-looking gratitude that embraces vision and hope in God.

The Pilgrims believed in blessings for their descendants, modeling their faith on Abraham's covenant faith. They fully embraced God's promise to make Abraham a great nation and a blessing to all peoples. Today, America sends the most missionaries worldwide, spreading the gospel. Missionaries also came to Korea, where many gave their lives, bearing the fruit of the gospel.

When the Pilgrims declared their community as one for God's glory, they were embodying God's covenant. It was not just about living well for themselves but about God blessing their descendants so that they would become a blessing to all nations.

In Matthew 6:25, Jesus says, "... do not worry about your life, ... or about your body." The Pilgrims did not seek a life for their own survival or for their bodies but sought first God's kingdom and His righteousness (Matt 6:25, 33). They believed that "all these things will be given to you as well" and proved it through their lives.

Jesus tells us to consider the flowers of the field and the birds of the air. What should we see through the created world? Through creation, we not only see the Creator but also the promise of God's blessings in our lives.

There are undeniable deficiencies in our lives. However, these deficiencies should not hinder our faith; rather, they call for our faith to grow stronger. During times of financial difficulty, I found comfort and hope by watching sparrows. I also remember gaining strength from a seagull early in the morning. Watching the seagull, I thought, "Hey, you're flying hard to survive, too. I should not give up like you."

We can also see God's care through one another and the community of believers, as we are created in His image. This is evident even in the faith of the Pilgrim Fathers, who are

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among our spiritual ancestors. Romans 4:17 testifies that the God Abraham believed in is the one “who calls into being things that were not.” May you trust in God as the Pilgrim Fathers did, holding on to Abraham’s kind of faith.

As we give thanks in our worship today, we embark on a new journey aboard the ship of faith called the Mayflower. The true Mayflower we are called to board this Thanksgiving, the one that will bring spring flowers to our lives, is the ship of Jesus Christ. We dream of establishing God’s glorious kingdom, advancing the Christian faith, and producing many descendants of faith through us at the end of this pilgrimage voyage. No matter what trials or storms the ship may face, may our faith in God, gratitude, and hope within never waver. All God’s people say, “Amen.”

Let’s pray: Gracious Heavenly Father, we thank You for the faith and perseverance of the Pilgrim Fathers, who remind us to trust You in any circumstance, and for the witness of faith we learn from the flowers of the field and the birds of the air. As we journey through life’s trials, help us to fix our eyes on Jesus, the true Mayflower, who carries us through trials toward the new vision of a community that glorifies You, advances the Christian faith, and blesses future generations. In the name of Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith. Amen.