

“More Pilgrim, than Puritan”
 Pastor Sam Richards
 Sermon for 27 October 2024
 Texts: 1 Cor. 15:3-11

I assume that it is common knowledge, for instance, John Calvin was not a Calvinist just as Martin Luther is distinguishable from a Lutheran. The denominational stream known as Lutheranism, and the biblicists who came to be known as Calvinists were sixteenth century theologians along with John Knox were all distinguishable from several philologists, their contemporaries, Erasmus and Zwingli among them, who wrestled with the newly recovered original biblical texts (through papyri, scrolls, codices and fragments) in a quest for the original languages of Scripture. This quest for the truth of scripture was paired with the matter of authority. The word of God as our supreme authority on matters ecclesiastical (that is, church related) is heady and intellectual and, given the writings of our spiritual predecessors, and historical quest. And, of course, that still goes on in theological circles in our day. The essence of the historical gospel is still believed to reside within the pages as well as in the hearts and minds of true believers, **the faith that was passed on to me delivered I unto you . . . from those who were *ear and eye witnesses from the beginning, from the apostles onward:***

3 For I delivered to you [a]as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 7 then He appeared to [b]James, then to all the apostles; 8 and last of all, as [c]to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, [d]and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. 11 Whether then *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed.¹

Paul’s relation of the gospel of Jesus’ resurrection was a vital message for the Corinthians who were conflicted over the matter of resurrection. Similarly, I recently witnessed to someone who stumbled over believing in something she couldn’t see. To her I said, “Well, praise God we have a God who foresaw that we would have difficulty over this “seeing is believing” bit. I am sure you are aware that you can’t believe everything you see these days, pictorial evidence is too easily fabricated—edited, or created wholesale. Not only do we have lying eyes, we have eyes that are being lied to! Even scientists know not to believe what they observe and that accounts for endless revisions and second takes before we reach tentative conclusions. God knowing our difficulty gave us the gift of the incarnation, his son appearing in the flesh. Those who

1. Footnotes

- a. [1 Corinthians 15:3](#) Lit *among the first*
- b. [1 Corinthians 15:7](#) Or *Jacob*
- c. [1 Corinthians 15:8](#) Lit *to an untimely birth*
- d. [1 Corinthians 15:9](#) Lit *who am*

saw Jesus, saw God. As Jesus put it, **he who has seen me has seen the father.** (John 14:8) Jesus could not only be seen, he could be smelled, heard, touched, handled and experienced (physically and materially).

And, after he rose from the dead, the incarnation remained as an answer to those who confess they can't believe what they can't see. To resolve this, we might as well admit this truth: believing precedes seeing." God appeared to believable, credible witnesses and we have their testimony of those experiences inscribed in the book. We have the word of the apostles, the disciples and other witnesses (including antagonists, mockers, scoffers and unbelievers).

We are "Plimoth" Company, we are—actually, the settlers of New Plymouth known as "first comers," "forefathers," or "Separatists." The term *Pilgrim* was first used in America in about 1800. By the royal grant of King James I of England. Territory extending fifteen miles east and west of the Kennebec River was under the governance and authority of the Plymouth Company(1606-7). Next it went to the Council for New England (continuing the Plymouth connection) up unto its sale in 1661. Some fifty-five years of English colonial governorship under the terms of the Mayflower Compact here recorded:

IN THE NAME OF GOD, AMEN. We, whose names are underwritten, the Loyal Subjects of our dread Sovereign Lord King James, by the Grace of God, of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, &c(etc). Having undertaken for the Glory of God, and Advancement of the Christian Faith, and the Honour of our King and Country, a Voyage to plant the first Colony in the northern Parts of Virginia; Do by these Presents, solemnly and mutually, in the Presence of God and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil Body Politick, for our better Ordering and Preservation, and Furtherance of the Ends aforesaid: And by Virtue hereof do enact, constitute, and frame, such just and equal Laws, Ordinances, Acts, Constitutions, and Officers, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general Good of the Colony; unto which we promise all due Submission and Obedience.² (November, 1620)

² The document now referred to as the **Mayflower Compact** was written and signed by most of the male passengers on the Mayflower ship in November 1620 as they landed at Cape Cod. William Bradford recounts the event as "a combination made by them before they came ashore; being the first foundation of their government in this place."

In 1620, "Virginia" extended far beyond its current boundaries and the *Mayflower* was originally meant to land at its "northern Parts," specifically the Hudson River. When the *Mayflower* attempted to sail around Cape Cod to reach the Hudson, contrary winds and dangerous shoals forced the ship to turn around and instead anchor in modern day Provincetown Harbor on November 11, 1620.

English colonies at the time required "patents" – documents granted by the king or authorized companies which gave permission to settle at a particular place. Since the *Mayflower* passengers had obtained a patent for Virginia, when they instead landed in New England this patent was no longer valid. Any sort of authority the group's leaders could have derived from this patent was therefore also suspect, and some passengers threatened that "when they came ashore they would use their own liberty, for none had power to command them, the patent they had being for Virginia and not for New England" (Bradford).

We should highlight: “for the Glory of God, and Advancement of the Christian Faith, and the Honour of our King and Country.” This distinctive, note the Protestant evangelistic emphasis(!) differentiates them from the more reforming minded Puritans who felt led to purify the church of the traditions of man, empty ceremonialism and strange doctrine. Their plan was to come to America, execute the necessary reforms, prove that they and local autonomy worked and to return to reduce the church there from popery(sic), corruption and heresy. For Separatists the state was extraneous, even out of order. The Puritans were better situated, educated and wealthier and by 1640 they outnumbered the Separatists 20,000 to 2,600.

The New England Congregationalism which was birthed between these two bodies resembled English Presbyterianism, rather than Anglicanism. Both parties sought to escape the religious wars of Europe—first the English Spanish conflict and then the later English French wars of succession. We know the later by the title French and Indian wars which lasted from at least 1673 to 1759.

I want to address what has been described as “a fleeting, cooperation with the Indian peoples,” (David Roos’, “What’s the Difference between Puritans and Pilgrims?,” HISTORY, A & E Television Networks, updated March 16,2021) And the posture of Illustrated History of Kennebec County, Maine which indicts the Pilgrim fathers thus: “They no made no effort towards ameliorating the hard conditions of their Indian wards; they gave them no teachers, either secular, or religious, but looked upon them much as they did the other inhabitants of the wilderness (meaning, I suppose, game and wildlife?!) When trade ceased to be profitable they abandoned them.” (p.23)

It is worth noting that there is no section of the spiritual/religious life of the Kennebec County apart from a highly sectarian, paean of praise for the French Catholic efforts to convert the Abenakis! To Catholicism which some on the other half of the church (Protestants) might dismiss as either unchristian or even as anti-christian *and not without their good reason*, We must remember that the Catholics exterminated Protestants as infidels as surely as the English returned the favor on savages, and devils.

In reaching out to the Indians, the best construction that could be put on either side is that there was a passion for the unreached to be touched by the gospel light and for the Kingdom of Christ to be extended. That care for souls was practiced on both the Catholic and the Protestant sides—it is not right to teach history as if only one side sought to advance Christianity. Jonathan Edwards³ reached out to the Mohicans in

³ “Jonathan Edwards had a great vision for the American Indians and America as a whole. In his time, so few of the Indians were Christians and the whole continent was yet to be settled. There were many Indians throughout the continent who knew not Christ. Edwards had all these Indians in mind as well as the whole inhabited land when he wrote, “And however small the propagation of the gospel among the heathen here in America has been hitherto, yet I think we may well look upon the discovery of so great a part of the world as America, and bringing the gospel into it, as one thing by which divine Providence is preparing the way for the future glorious times of the church; when Satan’s kingdom shall be overthrown, not only throughout the Roman empire, but throughout the whole habitable globe, on every side, and on all its continents. When those times come, then doubtless the gospel, which is already brought over into America, shall have glorious success, and all the inhabitants of this new discovered world

Stockbridge (1751) who were inveterate, historical enemies of the Algonquins and the Abenakis in the 18th century in our region.

The Mohawks had massacred six French missionaries a century earlier (in 1646) But in the 17th century we have John Eliot, “Apostle to the Indians,” whose “Indian Library” brought literacy and the Bible to those of Massachusetts language group. He founded “prayer settlements” and converted hundreds of Indians much to the credit of Protestant compassion for the lost. However, in the course of King Philip’s War most of these gains were wiped away. Christian Indians were imprisoned on Deer Island and suspicions and hatred carried the day. A grievous loss. And that same war, as we were part of the same company, or patent, greatly harmed the Indians of the Kennebec region and, being under the same governance—hurt us all, Protestant and Catholic alike! That is the true story, the real tragedy.

And, while we are here, we might as well face together the fact that when trade languishes (ceases to be profitable) prosperity abandons us all. The scarcity of fur, or of provision and grain cause everyone to suffer and embargoes, wars, conflict all contribute their piece to depression and affliction. Famine stalked Indians and Settlers. What shines in such times is the kindness, the help the sharing and rescue that also accompanied hard times. The Illustrated History singles out “Puritan heretics” (p. 25) being opposed by Good Jesuits (Black gowns) so it is with relief that we read of collegiality among priests and ministers at Plymouth and at Cushion (p.27)—Father Druillettes was treated hospitably in both places (c. 1646)! He was guest of William Bradford, John Winslow, agent and trader (Cushnoc) and John Eliot, too (Plymouth). Fr. Druillettes had built the first chapel a league north of Cushnoc, at Gilley’s Point—possibly being the earliest “church” in Augusta.⁴

shall become subjects of the kingdom of Christ, as well as all the other ends of the earth: and in all probability Providence has so ordered it, that the mariner’s compass, which is an invention of later times, whereby men are enabled to sail over the widest ocean, when before they durst not venture far from land, should prove a preparation for what God intends to bring to pass in the glorious times of the church, viz. the sending forth the gospel wherever any of the children of men dwell, how far soever off, and however separated by wide oceans from those parts of the world which are already Christianized.” (p. 284 – *The History of Redemption*) He also wrote especially concerning the Indian population of America as he saw them at that time and what they could be in the future. He said, “Then shall the vast continent of America, which now in so great a part of it is covered with barbarous ignorance and cruelty, be every where covered with glorious gospel light and Christian love; and instead of worshipping the devil, as now they do, they shall serve God, and praises shall be sung every where to the Lord Jesus Christ, the blessed Savior of the world.” (p. 314 – *The History of Redemption*) He saw this great population of native Americans at that time of being ignorant of the gospel and true righteousness. He longed for the day when they and all of America would embrace Christ and the whole land would be a land where Jesus would be honored and served.”

<https://www.oneplace.com/ministries/watchman-radio-hour/read/articles/jonathan-edwards-missionary-to-the-american-indians-11809.html>

⁴ I discovered an interesting way to approach authorial bias in secondary sources. Both Roos (whose characterization of Congregational worship) and Kingsbury/Devo (who erroneously attribute the Christianization of the Kennebec region to the Jesuitical priesthood) have to be read for inadvertency. By inadvertency I mean to designate information extraneous to their main theses, or bias. Roos was uninformed about the biblical preaching of the word in Congregational societies—confusing them with Quaker meetings possibly. Kingsbury/Devo are

I choose to close on the question: what caused the outbreak of war in Plymouth? Spiritually speaking, the cause of war was sin in the household of God and I have the sin of John Sassamon in mind because it would appear that covetousness, the greed of this man who was so delicately placed—between the evangelistic pursuit of the Company as seen in the outreach of John Eliot (getting the gospel into their language, into their hands was a major effort!). It was a hard slog frankly, so many of the English Christian issues were idiosyncratic to them, to their church history. The Indians had no church history, no line of corrupt bishops, or popes—if something were a tradition of man, they would have great difficulty distinguishing it from church paraphernalia, psalters song sheets. Their orality was an issue. Not because they *thought mythologically* whereas the English though logically—there is no such discriminating cultural factor. The whole barbaric, savage, native thing as an inferior, or more primitive “humanity” is bogus, a philosophical fiction, because we are all oral, and we are all mythological and we are all scientific humanly speaking—our material environments and our technologies do differ but the skills needed to engage are all present, accessible.

So John Sassamon sinned (out of weakness, greed and/or apostasy) took advantage of his literacy, tricked parties on both side of his interpretative universe, practiced duplicity (in land speculation) and that behavior, from the Indian side, proved, or decided that all Christians were liars, thieves and deceivers; they were untrustworthy, dangerous shoals. Having been betrayed, King Philip ordered the self-serving “traitor” executed. It was Indian justice. His executioners were then seized, imprisoned and, after an English trial, they were put to death (executed as murderers) . . . for loyalty to their king. Outrage fueled the outbreak of hostilities and the evangelism effort was scuttled—for a season. The cost and attrition, on both sides (English and Indian) was horrifying! Fifty years of peaceful coexistence terminated in war. **Take care, beloved, a little leaven leavens the whole loaf!** Galatians 5:9

Amen

so eager to approve of Roman Catholicism that they essentially exclude the Protestant evangelistic efforts from treatment. Fortunately, wider reading supplies a corrective. Here a more valid picture: evangelism (Roman Catholic style) came to the Kennebec region from Canada (Quebec and the Maritime provinces), from the east under Plymouth governance and later through Baptist and Methodist ministerial outreach and from the south and west from Puritan influences church/state influences. It is not insignificant that state-mandated churches (Congregational) were part of the settlement mix. The confluence of these influences, sweeping wave-like through the region that contributed to denominational conflict/diversity subsequently. The turbulent sea of doctrinal controversy, resulting, can be viewed positively (a quest for truth) and negatively (as leading to divisiveness and quarreling); but there is no questioning the excitement and passion that attended the theological discourse. Yes, fanaticism and extremism had to be dealt with—still does!—but the fight goes on.