**Pilgrim, Crusader, Foreigner, Stranger
Psalm 21, Matthew 7:1-11
Rev. Dr. Julia A. Carlson
November 23, 2022 - Thanksgiving Eve**

As most of you know, a group from the House of Hope was on pilgrimage in Ireland recently. We arrived on several different flights on many different days and we all managed to meet at the airport at the appointed place at the appointed time with luggage]. It felt like a miracle. We met our driver, and at the appointed hour we all started following him to the bus. On the way there three of us lost the thread of the group and had to call for help. Once we were on board the bus and on our way to Clonmacnoise two people started singing Be Thou My Vision and we all sang this beautiful hymn, the theme of our pilgrimage, as we left Dublin with high hopes.

But doubts started to creep into my thoughts about an hour out of the city. Unfortunately, the bus company did not tell the driver that we were supposed to stop for lunch. So we reached our tour destination a bit early and hungry. Phone calls were made and an alternative lunch was planned and somehow it felt like we were always supposed to be at the restaurant in an old barracks near a strategic bridge over the river Shannon. Still, not the beginning I’d hoped for.

Each and every morning from there on, I hoped for a reset and each and every day from there on provided us with yet another challenge, including Covid. Such is the way with being a pilgrim.

Tomorrow is the day of the pilgrims in our country. The sermon title comes from the Old French word: p*eregrin*, which means pilgrim, crusader, foreigner, or stranger. The French was of course influenced by Latin “peregrinus.” As time has passed and because of Thanksgiving, the word pilgrim in the US has come to mean “an original settler.” As Manifest Destiny and the movement West progressed, the pilgrim became known as the “tenderfoot”; the stranger or the one who doesn’t know our ways.

The word in the old Latin is reminiscent of the peregrine falcon which is described as “a cosmopolitan bird of prey.” This bird hunts from very high altitudes, diving at up to 240 miles per hour for its prey.

In the Celtic world, *peregrin* is used to describe people who are on a spiritual journey. It became common for monks in particular, but also, ordinary people of faith to set out by carriage, on foot or in small boats called coracles, a vessel with a sail but no oars, to seek the place God wanted them to be or to work. They were known as the *peregrini*. In Celtic spirituality, peregrination was then and is still known as “seeking the place of one's resurrection.”

I think that could describe the pilgrims that we celebrate tomorrow; they came to the Americas to seek a place of resurrection. They were looking for a place of religious freedom and new life. The story of the first Thanksgiving is one of our history’s illustrious peaceable gatherings, a shining example of great humanity, gratitude, and hospitality.

But, the decades and centuries beyond that first Thanksgiving are fraught with troubling results. History now shows that one people's place of Resurrection can become the place of another people's demise. When Joann Lee returned to preach here this summer she began stating, “I acknowledge the Hopewell culture and the Dakota and Ojibwe tribes who are the indigenous inhabitants of this land.”

The native Americans were already in their place of resurrection and now centuries later, we are all moved by the wisdom and spirituality of their ways. It’s important, don’t you think, to recognize that the first pilgrim settlers were not the first inhabitants. In the pattern of Colonialism, European immigrants many of whom were Christians, we went from *peregrini* seeking resurrection to something more like that Urban falcon seeking prey.

I am drawn into all of this today because of a recent Pew Research study. According to their findings, on a new topical survey, “45% of Americans say they want a Christian country.” “60% believe the founders originally intended this to be a Christian country.” Both of these numbers are higher than I would have expected, but, the study then acknowledges that we do not know what the word ‘Christian’ means to respondents.

So, in further questions, 77% believe churches/pastors should NOT endorse candidates for office, and 67% believe churches should stay out of politics. When asked, “Should Supreme Court justices bring their own religious views into how they decide major cases? 15% said ‘yes,’ 85% said ‘no’.”

The article on the Pew Study stated this: “While some people who say the U.S. should be a Christian nation define the concept as one where a nation’s laws are based on Christian tenets and the nation’s leaders are Christian, it is much more common for people in this category to see a Christian nation as one where people are more broadly guided by Christian values or a belief in God, even if its laws are not explicitly Christian and its leaders can have a variety of faiths or no faith at all. Some people who say the U.S. should be a Christian nation are thinking about the religious makeup of the population; to them, a Christian nation is a country where most people are Christians. Others are simply envisioning a place where people treat each other well and have good morals.”

Like the original pilgrims, I think a lot of us want to live in a country where we share more humanity, gratitude, and hospitality along with religious freedom and safety. It was Abraham Lincoln who initiated the Thanksgiving Holiday in the midst of the Civil War. He felt people needed to be reminded of a hopeful and gracious moment in our history to carry them forward. Perhaps that is also true for us today.

Our gospel reading says so very many things but what it comes down to is this: “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” We hear this from the voice of Jesus affirming the Jewish teaching that encompasses the teachings of the Old Testament. But what about writings beyond the Old Testament? Mohammad’s writings included these words, “No one of you [truly] believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.” “In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self,” comes from Jainist texts. The Hindus put it this way, “This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you.”

We are still pilgrims on this journey and sometimes we need to try to reset the day. As Maja Angelou once said, “Do the best you can until you know better. Once you know better, do better.” If we continue to claim the original Thanksgiving as an example of humanity, I hope that includes an invitation for us to listen to and reconcile with Indigenous Peoples, African Americans, and BIPOC neighbors, as the Native peoples say, “Live in harmony, for we are all related.”

All of this has reminded me of a poem by Judy Chicago:

And then all that has divided us will merge

And then compassion will be wedded to power

And then softness will come to a world that is harsh and unkind

And then both men and women will be gentle

And then both women and men will be strong

And then no person will be subject to another's will

And then all will be rich and free and varied

And then the greed of some will give way to the needs of many

And then all will share equally in the Earth's abundance

And then all will care for the sick and the weak and the old

And then all will nourish the young

And then allwill cherish life's creatures

And then all will live in harmony with one another and the Earth

And then everywhere will be called Eden once again.

May the humanity, gratitude and hospitality of the first Thanksgiving be yours to both share and receive in the coming days.

Amen.