

Lessons from Thanksgiving: The Native Americans  
Acts 8:26-35  
November 15, 2009

It's hard to believe that Thanksgiving is less than two weeks away. Soon we will be watching parades and football on TV and enjoying a turkey dinner. As we prepare ourselves for this day, I thought it would be interesting to spend some time looking at the main characters in the first Thanksgiving.

Who were the Native Americans and who were the Pilgrims? What lessons can we learn from them? Next Sunday we will explore the Pilgrims. Next Sunday will also be the day we bring in our commitment cards for 2010. As we will see there is a natural connection between Thanksgiving, the holiday, and our pledging to the church.

Today it is the Native Americans we look at. When the Pilgrims arrived in 1620 they were nervous about the threat the Native people posed. Lucky for the pilgrims, the Pawtuxet people were peaceful. The first significant contact with a Native came on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1621 when Samoset entered the Plymouth Village. Samoset was from the Abnaki Tribe. Samoset had learned English from the fishermen that would fish the New England waters.

After a day with the Pilgrims, Samoset left the village. Several days later Samoset returned with another brave. Squanto was from the Pawtuxet Tribe. Squanto had been taken to Spain and then to England to be a slave. It was in England he learned English. John Slaney of the Newfoundland Company employed Squanto. Squanto accompanied John Slaney to the Newfoundland Colony to act as an interpreter. Eventually Squanto was hired to work for Thomas Dermer of the New England Company. It was through his relationship with Mr. Dermer that Squanto made his way back to his homeland.

Tragically for Squanto, when he returned no one was left in his tribe. A disease had wiped out his whole village. Without a tribe, Squanto decides to connect with the Nauset Tribe and their chief, Massasoit.

It was because of Squanto that the Pilgrims were able to survive. He showed them what plants were poisonous and which plants could be used for medicine. Squanto showed the pilgrims how to grow corn and other vegetables.

As kids we learn the Pilgrims wanted to thank the Native people for all their help. The celebration that took place in November 1621 was the first Thanksgiving. Last week Corinne Dowell described how her preschool class made Indian outfits of decorated paper bag vests and featherhead bands. Do you remember making those?

I always thought it was odd that just as kids we're learning how the Natives were heroes in the Thanksgiving story, they also became the villains in the game of Cowboys and Indians.

Personally, I have always had an appreciation for the Native American. As I teenager and young adult I spent time studying Native Americans. My interest became so great I eventually made a dance outfit and would go to various pow wows in the mid-west.

As part of Show and Tell, I want to show you a bustle I would wear when I would dance (bring out bustle). Here, is a drawing of me in my full outfit. After the service I will put my full dance outfit on.

How did I learn how to make my dance clothes, how did I learn how to dance? I was taught! Someone took the time to show me how things were done. For a white boy from Detroit, this Native American culture was a whole different world.

The Pilgrims were in a whole different land. Squanto and the other Natives had the knowledge of how to live off the land. Lucky for the Pilgrims, they shared the knowledge with them.

That is the lesson we take from the Native American. When we attain knowledge and wisdom, we should share it with those that are lacking. The saying goes "Knowledge is Power". I believe that is right. Some people choose to use that power to elevate themselves and keep others down. Though the culture may approve of this line of thinking, it goes against what our faith teaches us.

Speaking of our faith, the knowledge we are to share involves more than our intellect. As Christians, our commission is to share what we know about Jesus Christ with others. Several weeks ago we sang the hymn “Pass It On”. That is the point of being a Christian. Being so thankful for what God has done for us, we want to pass on our faith to others.

This brings me to our Scripture Reading. I admit it might seem to be disconnected with what I have been talking about. How does Philip’s conversation with an Ethiopian Eunuch relate to Native Americans?

The obvious connection would be in dress and skin color. Just as there was a big difference in how the Native Americans looked compared with the Pilgrims, so too was there a difference in the outward appearance of Philip and the Ethiopian.

The reason I choose this passage however was the exchange of information. The Ethiopian didn’t know scripture. Philip was lead by the Holy Spirit to share what he knew so that this person could hear and believe.

Who knows where opportunity will be. It could be at home with a family member, it could be at the hairdressers, or it could be out in nature. A person might be curious about God or the mysteries of the world. At that point we can share what we know and believe.

We can tell our friend, co-worker or family member about the love of God. We can share our faith in a God who is the Creator. We can talk about the relationship God desires with everyone of us. We can talk about the salvation Jesus provides for us. We can explain the goal we have to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul, and mind and strength and our neighbor as our self.

Hopefully after our sharing, that person will want to explore further the possibility of his or her own salvation.

As we will hear next week, the Pilgrims were a people of faith. Though not religious, you can’t say the Natives were not spiritual. In the Native belief there was a concept of a higher being. As part of their life journey, the Native people were taught to thank the Creator when they were blessed. Thus the Natives would have understood the Thanksgiving celebration the Pilgrims hosted.

As you prepare for our own Thanksgiving, think about someone you know that could benefit from your knowledge about God. Try to find a way to share that information. If in this coming year someone comes to Christ because of you, how much more thankful will you be on Thanksgiving 2010.