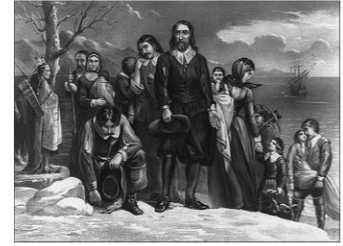


Martin's Message

Dear Friends



I had the opportunity recently to watch a programme about the epic journey of the first pilgrim fathers who sailed from England to discover the New World. It centred around puritan separatists who, due to persecution under King James, sought to break away from the established Church of England and establish a new society along the lines of their religious ideals. They boarded the ship called the Mayflower, but their journey was anything but plain sailing. The voyage was hampered by poor weather and cramped conditions, where death and survival were a harsh reality. In overcoming these challenges, it was pleasing to note how Christians and non-Christians alike came together and established a document called the Mayflower Compact. Its purpose was to form a rudimentary democracy, where everyone agreed to contribute to the welfare of the community.

Here were a people who were prepared to put their trust in God and to follow his call by stepping out in faith into the unknown; prepared for whatever challenges that may be set before them. Out of the 102 pilgrims, 45 perished within the first winter of the established colony. Pilgrimage was essentially part of their life and as Christians they sought to see life as a journey.

Pilgrimage is an essential part of life. Christians see life itself in terms of a journey, coming from God and returning to God. William Bradford who was Plymouth Colony governor for 30 years before his death in May 1657 wrote; *"Nevertheless, to keep a good conscience, and walk in such a way as God has prescribed in his word, is a thing which I must prefer before you all, and above life itself"*.

This journey reminded me of the many missionary journeys of the apostle Paul. A man who was greatly feared by the Christian community, prior to his conversion, when confronted by Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul grew to be a formidable advocate and follower of Jesus Christ. Due to the ongoing persecution that was growing in Jerusalem, believers fled across the Middle East, but continued to proclaim the gospel message and the church was growing rapidly. Paul orchestrated three pioneering missionary journeys in his time and influenced many who he encountered, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; *"They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God..." Acts 14:21-23.*

We are very much starting out on a new pilgrimage as the South and East Leicestershire Area begins to emerge into a 'new normal'. As with Paul and the early pilgrim fathers, it is a time for the Churches to step out in faith and discover new opportunities to engage with our communities both physically and virtually. In his book 'Crazy Christians' A radical way of life; Bishop Michael Curry makes the following point: *'Being a Christian is not essentially about joining a church or being a nice person, but following in the footsteps of Jesus, taking his teachings seriously, letting his Spirit take the lead in our lives, and in so doing helping to change the world...'*

To paraphrase Richard Holloway a former Bishop of Edinburgh during this post resurrection period, that Jesus continues to break out of the tombs to which we consign him. The question is, are we prepared to break out and follow where he leads, or remain where we are, consigned behind walls?

Shalom

Martin