

The Five Kernels  
John 6:25-35  
Colebrook Congregational Church  
November 20, 2016 / Thanksgiving Sunday

Today, we celebrate Thanksgiving in warm homes, surrounded by lots of family, a lot of food, and a football game. It commemorates the thankfulness of the Pilgrims, our theological ancestors, at the good harvest that they had in Plymouth. But that good harvest was in their second year. Their first year was filled much more hardship.

The story of Thanksgiving and also of the five kernels starts in England in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Back in England at that time, you belonged to nearest Church of England. You did not have a choice, like us over here, with our many kinds of churches and the freedom to choose. There was much unrest and oppression over this, so groups fled. Our Pilgrim ancestors boarded the Mayflower and set sail for the Jamestown colony in Virginia.

However, their ship went off course on their way to Virginia and they were also running out of beer to drink, so they made landfall at the first land they could find, which was Cape Cod. And when they landed, they were met with a surreal scene. A fully constructed village, but it was deserted.

Back in the 1520s, a French-sponsored exploratory expedition found that the east coast was densely populated by native tribes, but by the time the Pilgrims arrived just less than a century later, the deadliest plague in human history, which was introduced by the Conquistadors, had wiped out well over 90% of the native population.

And when the Pilgrims made landfall, it was in November of 1620, so they could not plant a harvest for themselves. They just moved into the ghost village and did what they could.

The local great chief just happened to have among his tribe a man named Squanto, who was from that deserted town, who survived the plague because he was captured by a British sea captain, but had escaped. And because Squanto could speak English, the Sachem of the Wampanoag Tribe, Massasoit, sent Squanto to be his liaison with the settlers and to try to help

them survive. They did what they could for the Pilgrims, but half of them still died that first winter.

Back then, it was much colder than it is now. When they landed, it was just past the peak of what is called the Little Ice Age. The times of daylight were short, and they had to work through ice, snow, and winter storms, without electricity to aid them. This was going on right after two months of transatlantic travel, and straight into that hard New England winter. They did what they could for warmth and food, but people started to get sick and succumbed to illness or exposure. After they used up all the food that they had brought, the Wampanoags did what they could to help. In addition to the cold and lack of food, they also endured wolves, buildings damaged by fire, and mountain lions.

The story goes that it became so bad, that each person only had five kernels of corn to eat per day. Each of you have a packet with five kernels of corn. Can you imagine only having that much to eat for the entire day?

Now, as Spring arrived, Squanto was able to help the Pilgrims more. He helped them to cultivate the abandoned town's farmlands, and slowly, they were able to start growing their own food.

So, the Pilgrims finally being able to grow and the harvest the food that they needed to survive, led them to plan a three day Thanksgiving feast. They had all the harvested foods, corn, squashes, grains, potatoes, fruits, and they sent out hunters for all types of fowl, especially turkeys, and the Wampanoags contributed other game, like venison.

And the story goes that in addition to all the bountiful food, each person also received five uncooked kernels. This was a reminder of what they endured the previous winter, a tangible reminder to help them remember what they're thankful for.

It has become a tradition from then, handed down to us Congregationalists, that we place five kernels of corn next to our plates at Thanksgiving, to help us remember what we are thankful for. To remind us of leaner times, even as we partake in bounty, so that we give even greater thanks for what has been provided for us.

Gratitude is one of the most powerful forces, and one of the easiest applied. It brings hope & comfort through its contemplation. It makes the efforts of others seem worthwhile when given. And it brings happiness to those who receive it. For this, gratitude should always be on our lips.

I invite everyone to take their packet of five kernels with them, and put it next to your plate for the Thanksgiving meal; to remind you about being thankful for what you have; as well as to prompt you to think of five things that you are thankful for. For family. For friends. For loved ones. For those who helped in times of need. And for so much more.

It has been another long, yet fruitful year; and we have a lot to be thankful for here at this church. New faces at worship, and new members. More children in Sunday School, and many Baptisms. Greater attendance at Community Dinners. More Special Services. Our Food Pantry is meeting the needs of the community and has become one of our gems. Our Meetinghouse has continued to grow more active during the week; and we are even more active in the community; and we are working with more organizations.

All of us have worked hard this past year, so we should recognize that as well, by never forgetting to occasionally take a moment to say to each other: THANK YOU.

Please join me in the spirit of prayer:

O God our Creator, we thank You that once again You have blessed us with bountiful harvests, reaped from the earth, which provides for us. We thank You for all the fruits of the earth that You have given to our use. May we enjoy them and share them with family and neighbor alike. Teach us, we pray, that it is not by bread alone that we live; and grant us evermore to feed on the true bread from heaven, in Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

## INTERCESSORY PRAYER

[PAUSE]

O God, You invite us to hold the needs of our sisters and brothers as dear to us as our own needs. Loving our neighbors as ourselves, we offer our thanksgivings, our confessions, and our petitions on behalf of the church and all Creation.

We give You thanks for all the ways that you bless our lives. For abundance in harvest and a full table. For the opportunities to serve those in need. For our families and loved ones who will gather in thanks.

We ask for Your forgiveness. We recognize that we don't always embody Your love for others. May we have the courage to act, instead of taking the easy path of ignoring a neighbor in need.

We offer prayers for our neighbors, known and unknown, the world over. We pray for those who are unwell, that they be healed. We pray for reconciliation between all people; and for safety to all who live in fear for their own well-being. We pray for those in need, victims of violence, poverty, or destruction. We ask for peacefulness and an end to the conflicts and unrest in our own country and around the world.

We pray for Your guidance in all that we do, and for Your strength of spirit to do what is right, and to act generously towards all, full of Christ's Love. May we also remember to be tolerant of those whose opinions are different from our own, seeking harmony in all relationships. Make us instruments of Your Love in our community. We offer to You, the prayers of our hearts, both silent and spoken, confident that You will hear them and respond.

We especially pray for:

Loving God, open our ears to hear your word and draw us closer to You, that we all may be one with You, as You are one with us in Jesus Christ our Savior, Amen.

## Psalm 100

100:1 Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.

100:2 Worship the LORD with gladness; come into his presence with singing.

100:3 Know that the LORD is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

100:4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.

100:5 For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

## John 6:25-35

When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal." Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.