

Navigating the Pandemic from a Pilgrim Perspective **Dr. Paul Jehle - September 2, 2020**

The year 2020 has been nothing like any of us planned. Many had planned events to honor the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the Pilgrims for two or more decades. This year has had its share of fear, disappointment, discouragement, delay and financial loss. Since all of these emotions were faced by the Pilgrims, we can honor their memory at a deep level by seeing how they responded to these challenges.

Fear of Death

Fear has gripped many across our communities. Business owners, teachers, public officials, homeowners, parents or children have all faced the fear of an invisible, deadly virus. This has been especially true for health care workers. But the Pilgrims experienced a fear of death as well.

Some of the Pilgrim's friends faced "*bloody death and cruel torments; other whiles imprisonments, banishments.*" Being killed for your faith is not new to history, but it challenges how strong your convictions might be. Bradford writes "*many became enlightened by the Word of God and had their ignorance and sins discovered unto them, and began by His grace to reform their lives.*" But "*the work of God was no sooner manifest in them but presently they were both scoffed and scorned by the profane multitude; and the ministers urged with the yoke of subscription.*" The government at the time respected no freedom of religion. When they ratified their church covenant, Bradford concludes it with these words "*whatsoever it should cost them, the Lord assisting them.*"

The Pilgrims faced this challenge with faith and courage; "*...all great and honorable actions are accompanied with great difficulties and must be both enterprised and overcome with answerable courages. It was granted the dangers were great, but not desperate. The difficulties were many, but not invincible.... It might be sundry of the things feared might never befall; others by provident care and the use of good means might in a great measure be prevented, and all of them, through the help of God, by fortitude and patience, might either be borne or overcome.*"

Disappointment and Discouragement

Disappointment and discouragement have covered the plans for 2020 since just about everything was either canceled or postponed. Businesses wonder if they can survive, public officials have tried to balance freedom and safety, and those planning events wonder if any plans will succeed.

Think of it. When the Pilgrims determined they could no longer remain in England because they were "*hunted and persecuted on every side*" they were deeply disappointed. After all, this meant selling their homes, fleeing the country of their birth, and learning new trades and a new language. Some thought their plan was "*an adventure almost desperate; a case intolerable and a misery worse than death.*"

How did they deal with such disappointment? They did so through their faith and work ethic. "*These things did not dismay them, though they did sometimes trouble them... they rested on His providence, and knew Whom they had believed.*" When emigrating to Leyden, they promised the authorities never to be a burden on the Dutch, and "*though many of them were poor, yet there was none so poor but if they were known to be of that congregation the Dutch (either bakers or others) would trust them... because they had found by experience how careful they were to keep their word... Yea, they would strive to get their custom to employ them above others in their work, for their honesty and diligence.*"

Endless Delays

One of the biggest challenges we have all faced has been the postponement of events. The challenge in re-scheduling is that only 50% of the numbers we anticipated might be realized. But the Pilgrims faced delays as well. When attempting to leave England in 1607, they were betrayed, their leaders put in jail, and were mocked by on-lookers. They had to return to neighborhoods where they had sold their homes and lands and find places to stay as they waited a full year to try to escape again! The delay was painful.

In 1608 they attempted to escape again, and this time most of the men were on the ship, but most of the women were stuck at low tide. *"... the poor men which were got aboard were in great distress for their wives and children... pitiful it was to see the heavy case of these poor women in this distress; what weeping and crying on every side; some for their husbands that were carried away in the ship... others not knowing what should become of them and their little ones; others again melted in tears, seeing their poor little ones hanging about them, crying for fear and quaking with cold."*

With what perspective did the Pilgrims see these delays? *"Yet I may not omit the fruit that came hereby, for by these so public troubles in so many eminent places their cause became famous and occasioned many to look into the same, and their godly carriage and Christian behavior was such as left a deep impression in the minds of many."* Maybe Plymouth and her Pilgrim heritage will gain much more attention as a result of this pandemic and in God's providence work out for the best!

Financial Loss

The loss of 2020 events have been a great financial loss to Plymouth. The Pilgrims faced the same. They agreed to a financial contract with their Investors, purchased the *Speedwell*, and accumulated supplies. They were to depart in mid-July so they could arrive in early September to have houses built before winter. But the *Speedwell* sprung leaks and had to be sold for a loss. Their financial contract, without their consent, was changed, eliminating precious time to work for themselves and pay off their Investors. They had to sell supplies with twenty people returning. The loss of time meant more dangerous winds to cross the Atlantic, and now they would arrive at winter with many supplies gone.

So how did the Pilgrims respond to all of this? Let us remember that these Pilgrims were never numerous or wealthy. But they had come for the purpose of *"propagating and advancing the gospel of the kingdom of Christ into those remote parts of the world; yea, though they should be but even as stepping-stones unto others for the performing of so great a work"* and their focus was future generations. So they *"knew they were pilgrims, and looked not much on those things, but lift up their eyes to the heavens, their dearest country, and quieted their spirits."*

Upon their arrival, Bradford wrote *"what could now sustain them but the Spirit of God and His grace? May not and ought not the children of these fathers rightly say; 'Our fathers were Englishmen which came over this great ocean, and were ready to perish in this wilderness; but they cried unto the Lord, and He heard their voice and looked on their adversity.'"*

May the result of all of this year's "troubles" be a greater appreciation and thanksgiving for the character, integrity, self-government, innovation, faith and perseverance the Pilgrims demonstrated and encourage us to be grateful for those emulating the same today. Then we might together echo Samuel Eliot Morison's sentiment; *"The Pilgrims: a simple people, inspired by an ardent faith in God, a dauntless courage in danger, a boundless resourcefulness in the face of difficulties, an impregnable fortitude in adversity: thus they have in some measure become the spiritual ancestors of all Americans."*