

Happy Saturday, New South Family. Welcome to the 69th edition of the Weekly Word – this for the week ending November 21, 2020.

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Announcements

1) FMC Retiree Assistance The FMCusa maintains a Retiree Assistance Program for qualifying retired FM pastors / spouses / widow(er)s who have a minimum of 10 years of full time active ministry in the Free Methodist Church and who earn less (annually) than \$11,100 (singles) or \$14,400 (couples.) The years of active service determines the percentage eligibility. Twenty-five years of service grants 100% participation in the program.

If you or someone you know might be eligible for this program, [please contact me.](#)

2) FM History and Polity The conference is planning to offer FM H & P in Wilmore or via Zoom this spring in a Friday evening / Saturday format for two weekends. If you are interested, [please email me for more information.](#)

3) MEG Interviews The MEG Board will be conducting Zoom interviews in early December. If you need or want an appointment with the MEG, [please email me.](#)

4) Difficult Days These are difficult days for any leader, so I hope you pray for your governor, your mayor, your school superintendent or principal and certainly your pastor. These days require hard decisions, and people are quite divided in their opinions about almost everything it seems.

I'm not sure of the situation where you are, but here in Kentucky the COVID case rates are increasing rapidly. The number I keep a close eye on is the hospital headroom percentage – how much room hospitals have for COVID patients; to me, that tells the story better than mere case numbers. Where I am, that percentage is decreasing, which means hospitals / ICUs are filling up, and that will likely get worse after the thanksgiving gatherings ahead.

In your church, please do all you can to balance the biblical instruction in Romans 13 to honor our civil authorities, the encouragement of Hebrews 10 to not neglect gathering for worship, and the biblical mandate to love others – which includes giving up our rights and privileges at times for the sake of, in this case, those who are especially vulnerable to COVID and all those who care for them. It is never preferable, certainly, but it is fine and sensible at times to worship in different ways than that which we're used to...in smaller groups or even online for a season. We don't offend the Lord when we act with pure motives of love and concern toward others.

To that end, beginning this Monday, we at Wilmore are essentially closing our church facilities for three weeks – moving corporate worship back on-line and suspending all activities, in hopes of keeping transmission rates low. The goal is to keep hospitalizations manageable, but the other goal is to send a signal of teamwork and unity to our community – to let those around us who are not in Christ, but who watch what the church does, know that we care.

Personally, I am not afraid in the least of this virus, but that's because I'm not afraid to die; I am spiritually ready to die whenever my time comes. Yet all around me there are people who are not spiritually ready to die, and whether or not they fear this virus, they should certainly fear death apart from Jesus. Motivated by truth and love, the church should always act in those persons' interests. Isn't that really what Jesus did?

Thanks for representing Him and His love for the lost in all you do.

Church of the Week: Let's keep the Wilmore church in our prayers in these days, with Pastors Daryl, Dwight, Andrea, Craig and Brian.

This Week's Passage, Quote and Joke

Passage: This week I conclude a series on the benefits of giving thanks with Paul's words to the Colossian church, chapter 3, verses 1-17, speaking on how God can use the thanksgiving of His people to bring healing to the world.

Quote: "God's hidden work today is often tomorrow's revealed wonder." ~ Tom Batura

Joke: **A Fitting Wreath for 2020:**



Blessings on your worship this weekend!

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The Mayflower Mystique: Remembering the Pilgrims

November 9, 2020 Gary Scott Smith

Few can name which groups the Godspeed and the Arabella brought to America. They were the Jamestown colonists in 1607 and the Puritans to Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630, respectively. But the Mayflower, which brought the Pilgrims to Plymouth in 1620, has sailed into history and ranks with the Titanic, the Lusitania, the Bismarck, and the Queen Mary as the world's most famous ships. What accounts for the Mayflower's mystique?

As many promote a cancel culture, with numerous monuments honoring prominent leaders and historical events being torn down, and a ferocious debate raging over slavery, racism, and American exceptionalism, discussing the 400th anniversary of the initial landing of the Mayflower is a daunting task.

Nevertheless, this event deserves to be carefully examined. The Pilgrims are best known for their zeal to worship God as their consciences directed, for the celebration they shared with the Wampanoag in 1621 to thank God for their successful harvest, and for the underwhelming rock in Plymouth, Massachusetts, commemorating their arrival. More recently, the Pilgrims have been lambasted for their religious intolerance and for stealing Native American lands and killing or enslaving Indians who resisted.

As is often the case, the history of the Pilgrims is more complicated than such assessments suggest, and reality must be separated from myths. As John Turner argues in "They Knew They Were Pilgrims: Plymouth Colony and the Contest for American Liberty" (2020), the history of Plymouth is far from simple.

The Puritans arose in the 1570s in England. These Reformed (Calvinist) Protestants wanted to purify the Church of England, which, they contended, was still too Catholic in its theology, worship, and polity. They sought to reform the Anglican Church from within rather than create another denomination. In 1606, however, a group of Puritans in Nottinghamshire, England, did found a church that was separate from the state-sanctioned Church of England. Persecution in England prompted these dissidents to move to the more religiously tolerant Netherlands where they struggled for 12 years to earn a living in Leiden. Seeking other alternatives, these Puritans secured the financial support of London merchants to establish a colony in the New World.

On September 6, 1620, 102 of them sailed for America. Based on Hebrews 11:13, William Bradford, their second governor, dubbed them Pilgrims; the 1587 Geneva Bible referred to Old Testament believers who lived by their faith in God's promises as pilgrims and strangers. Their 66-day voyage across the Atlantic was arduous; one passenger died, and one baby was born.

The Pilgrims had intended to establish a settlement near the Hudson River in present-day New York, but treacherous shoals and weak winds forced the Mayflower to anchor instead at what became Provincetown Harbor at the tip of Cape Cod. Before disembarking, 41 male passengers signed the Mayflower Compact, declaring that they had migrated to the New World to promote "the Glory of God" and advance "the Christian Faith." They covenanted to create "a Civil Body Politic" to help accomplish these goals and to frame "just and equal Laws."

Describing the Pilgrims' arrival, Bradford wrote in his History of Plymouth Plantation: "Being thus arrived in a good harbor and brought safe to land, they fell upon their knees & blessed ye God of heaven, who had brought them over ye vast & furious ocean, and delivered them from all ye perils & miseries thereof."

When Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth merged in 1691 to become Massachusetts colony, Plymouth had only 7,500 residents and had not sent a single person to college. Established 10 years later, Massachusetts Bay Colony, by contrast, had founded Harvard College in 1636, had developed an impressive system of primary education, and had almost 50,000 residents. Plymouth has been called "the smallest, weakest, and least important of the English colonies."

So why are the Pilgrims and Plymouth important? Turner stresses that the Pilgrims are significant because they created a church that permitted laypeople to elect their own officers and exercise discipline over one another and devised a political framework with a substantial amount of (albeit male only) participation.

The Pilgrims are known, however, primarily for the large role they have played in subsequent American history; they have been frequently used to reimagine and reinvent the nation's history. During the early national and antebellum eras, ministers, scholars, and politicians often extolled the Pilgrims. Yale president Timothy Dwight, historian George Bancroft, and President John Quincy Adams, for example, saw direct connections between the Mayflower Compact and the Declaration of Independence and portrayed the Pilgrims as progenitors of democracy.

This portrait of the Pilgrims as the forerunners of republicanism reached a peak in the sermons and orations celebrating the 200th anniversary of the Mayflower's voyage in 1820. Former congressman and future senator Daniel Webster helped propel the Pilgrims from regional to national repute in one of his speeches. Webster, as Cory Higdon explains, insisted that the Pilgrims possessed the qualities and characteristics the American experiment required to succeed and he employed their history to thwart efforts to spread slavery. Plymouth rested on a moral framework, Webster asserted, which, in turn, was based on residents' religious piety and devotion to God.

As Americans celebrated the 300th anniversary of the Mayflower's arrival, many Americans used the Pilgrims' story to assist in their struggle against Bolshevism. Senator Bert Fernald of Maine, for example, claimed that "the raging storm of Bolshevism" currently sweeping the world could not uproot "the foundation of the American Republic as laid in the firm cement" of the Mayflower Compact.

The Pilgrims were not the forefathers of abolitionism; they enslaved Native Americans.

Nor were they thoroughgoing proponents of liberty; religious dissenters were second-class citizens in Plymouth.

Nevertheless, their "complicated legacy of human bondage and unresolved debates about liberty," as Turner puts it, as well as their quest to obtain religious freedom, need to be remembered as we celebrate the 400th anniversary of their arrival.

Dr. Gary Scott Smith is a Professor of History Emeritus at Grove City College.

God and Our Election: What Role Did He Play?

Paul J. Batura

We all want to win and succeed. But in reality, we all lose and fail at times. This is true in every area of human endeavor, and it's particularly painful when our failure is viewed by others.

The athlete whose team loses a big game, the CEO fired when his company's earnings drop, or the politician who loses an election often feels humiliated and dejected, particularly as the media spread news of the loss.

At the same time, it's disappointing to us when our favorite football, basketball or baseball team loses, or when a political candidate we favor comes up short.

Right now, that very frustration is leaving many of the nearly 73 million Americans who voted to reelect President Trump down in the dumps, along with the president himself, who refuses to concede defeat to President-elect Joe Biden until, Trump says, he is assured every legal vote has been counted and every illegal ballot discarded.

When these types of things occur, especially when we've been praying for the opposite result, many of us turn our eyes heavenward and ask: "Lord, how could you allow this to happen?"

If God is in ultimate control of our lives, as I believe He is, should we fret or lose sleep over who is in the White House or worry about which political party controls the Senate or House of Representatives?

That's a particularly relevant question now, in the wake of the current circumstance that President Trump and many of his supporters are grappling with.

Millions of us became obsessed with politics this year during an election campaign like no other, dominated by the coronavirus pandemic. But while I'm among those who love politics, sometimes I wonder if I love it too much.

I've been checking my news apps and social media feeds very frequently since Nov. 3 — eager for updates. I'm sure many of you have been doing the same.

Since grade school, I've seen the presidential race as the equivalent of the Super Bowl or the seventh game of the World Series — an exciting, high-stakes reveal that unfolds as an action-packed mix of mystery, drama and adventure.

This month's election — given its multiple days of ballot counting, delayed announcements and lawsuits filed by the Trump team — reminds me of a final World Series game that goes into extra innings and is filled with complaints about calls made by the umpire.

But back to the big picture: Ever since Election Day, I've been wrestling with the spiritual question concerning the outcome. What role has the Almighty played in this year's contentious election?

I firmly believe that regardless of political outcomes, God has a plan for your life and for mine. He is always working — we just can't always see what He's doing.

I simultaneously believe strongly in both the free will of people and in God's ultimate sovereignty. In other words, my choices matter and so do yours — but His will and ways will never be thwarted.

God isn't a member of any political party — I believe He transcends political parties. But I know that every political outcome that disappoints some brings joy to others. And an outcome that disappoints supporters of one party in one election cycle can lead to elation for the same folks in the next.

Consider these examples:

If Democrat James Buchanan hadn't won the presidency in 1856, defeating Republican nominee John C. Fremont and Know Nothing Party (officially the American Party) nominee and former President Millard Fillmore in a three-way race, it's unlikely Abraham Lincoln would have run and been elected president in 1860. Without the great Lincoln, when would the slaves have been emancipated? Would the United States have remained one nation?

More recently, if Democrat Jimmy Carter had not defeated Republican President Gerald Ford in 1976, most historians agree there would have been no Ronald Reagan presidency four years later. As such, there would have been no "Reagan Revolution" that restored America's optimism, rebuilt our military and defenses, and ultimately helped usher in the end of the Cold War.

God's hidden work today is often tomorrow's revealed wonder.

If I'm honest with myself, I've learned more in disappointment and defeat than in any success and victory. And I've found that even the pain of the most terrible losses, such as the death of a loved one, eases with time and acceptance of what I am powerless to change. I think that's true for just about all of us.

I haven't always been able to figure out what God is up to in the middle of every tough time or every election. But I know that He will help get me, losing candidates and their supporters, and our nation through it — making us tougher and more resilient in the end.