

**“A Full Table”**  
November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2021  
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I remember the first time I saw Plymouth Rock - that iconic point of meeting, when the pilgrims landed in what would become the Massachusetts bay colony. I was in elementary school and visiting Plymouth Rock was on our school trip circuit - there were the Newport mansions, historic cemeteries, Plymouth plantation - all the places a bus ride away from southern Rhode Island.

I remember our teachers priming us for our trip to Plymouth Rock - they kept telling us that it was smaller than we were expecting, not to get our hopes up that it would be impressive, that it mattered for the history, not its size.

I, being the A+ Hermione child that I was, listened closely and took their words to heart: Plymouth Rock is small and unimpressive. And I was deeply disappointed. I was expecting comedic tiny-ness after all the priming - I wanted stepping stone, basketball sized, maybe I could lift it myself small - but in truth, Plymouth Rock was about the size of a bathtub. I was not impressed, so disappointed that it's really all I remember.

What we're expecting makes a difference.

I think that's part of what makes Thanksgiving hard with the shift towards telling a more honest history - it's the dissonance between genocide and smiling paper turkeys in pilgrim hats. We were expecting to feel good and, in truth, it's complicated.

In addition to the horror of American history and all the ways that indigenous people are still persecuted, there's all the complexity of talking politics with extended family, or the complexity of family politics - old hurts and new alliances. There's still the ambiguity about gathering - how and with whom and are-they-all-vaccinated? There's the struggle of navigating food - everything from all the collective allergies to our relationships with food and our bodies, to the age-old challenge of cooking a turkey that isn't dry.

Thanksgiving is complicated.

*And* many people love thanksgiving. And why not? Harvest festivals exist across cultures - a time to celebrate a season of honest work, the abundance of being able to feed the community through the cold of winter, the gratitude for sustenance and all

those who labored over the crops. Collective gratitude and shared abundance are good and worthwhile things. Things that we probably need to do more as a society. In a world of consumerism and individualism, pausing to make a shared feast is good medicine.

Mix it all together, add in some decorative pumpkins, and that is one full table.

Thanksgiving is complicated.

So what story do we tell? What expectations do we foster?

I generally find that humility and honesty make for a good pair, especially when facing complexity.

What if, instead of expecting some ultra-woke anti-Thanksgiving or cinnamon scented social media perfection, what if instead we let it be complicated? What if we looked for ways to be grateful while also letting it all be human and messy and a little burnt? What if we made space for grace amidst all that complexity? What if we just let the table be full?

I wonder how my child self would've felt if I hadn't been expecting that comedically tiny Plymouth Rock. What else might I have noticed, or even questioned? In retrospect, I wonder what story we were told about what it meant for white Europeans to settle amongst the native people of this land. I don't really remember, to be honest, so it certainly wasn't a sobering picture, which makes me think much of the truth was glossed over or re-written.

I remember being told, I think by my dad, that the first Thanksgiving would've featured a lot of lobster, which may or may not be historically accurate or significant. And I remember doing all manner of Thanksgiving crafts at school. They ranged from the innocuous paper turkey hand to the horrors of making paper headdresses as if that was somehow okay.

Thanksgiving is complicated.

The stories that have long been held up as truth are laden with white supremacy and empire. Rarely are Thanksgiving stories told from the perspective of native people, rarely do they acknowledge any kind of diversity in what is now the United States.

*And* moral purity doesn't exist - life is far too messy and interconnected for that. So maybe, instead of any kind of perfection, this week can be about holding all the

complexity, letting it be as it is. Because there is reason to celebrate, there is reason to mourn, there is reason to be grateful, and there is reason to wish that our world is kinder and more just.

There is room at our table for all this complexity. Room for the fullness of feeling, room for the fullness of history, room for the fullness of family. May we welcome it in with grace. There is space here.

Amen and blessed be.

***A Thanksgiving Blessing:***

In the name of all that is complicated,  
may we enter this week gently.

May we welcome all the guests that come to our table:

The ambiguity of why-bother-this-year

The joy of celebration and fresh baked pie

The grief of the empty seat that can never be filled

The warmth of candles lit in the dark

The malaise of all that you've been told about how to feed your body

The hope of reconnection, of feeling filled for the first time in a long time

The fear of is-this-safe-enough

The loving bustle of ancestry and recipe and tradition

The horror of history and all the ways it lives on

May we welcome all these guests at our table,  
and all others who come needing a place to call home.

There is good news.

There is space here,

plenty of grace to share,

in the name of all that is complicated.

Amen