

## **400 YEARS OF THE MAYFLOWER AT PLYMOUTH ROCK: WHAT CONGREGATIONALISM MEANS TO ME**

I won't lie. I wish we were celebrating the 400th anniversary of the 1620 landing of the Mayflower at Plymouth Rock dancing and feasting. We could invite the Packer Jazz Band like that one year at the Yankee Gala. Maybe Sally Larson could roast us a duck and we could graze on corn pudding and some kind of boozy cake we'd falsely attribute to Mrs. Beecher. At this point, I'd allow the History Ministry to recite the deed to the Lost Acre if we could eat a meal together. "We Gather Together" seems a long way from "The Shining Shore." Come to think of it, I'd settle just for singing.

Our Mayflower remembrance was cancelled, of course, in 2020's viral stormy seas.

But our Congregationalism was not.

I leave it to the experts to tell you what that means as doctrine or liturgy. No doubt it's something about Martin Luther and that pesky church door, the Salem Covenant, and the Kansas City Statement of Faith, seasoned with a dash of the Pilgrims and sprinkled with our shard of Plymouth Rock. The Rolling Stones may have also been involved. Or did I get that wrong?

Anyway, I don't have the "-ism" part down too well. But I understand the "congregate" part just fine.

At Plymouth, we know how to gather. Around our feasts and playgrounds, in our grand meetings and small groups. On our history tours, picnics and galas. In our raised voices, communal prayers and whispered fears. In our Sunday school rooms and greenings. Around each other as we suffer and mourn. Over pageants and pancakes. With our neighbors and needy strangers as we reach out with God's promise, once learned together, hard not to share.

It's not always easy, this congregating. Our 1620 traditions mean we argue like pent up Puritans over budgets and slights. But these same traditions bond and covenant us, one with another, and with God, honed by common promise of faithfulness, strong enough to leave a sliver where the spirit can come in.

2020's separateness has tested our bonds, our gathering traditions, our shared journey. Dispersed, we rely on the faith of 400 years of our Pilgrim ancestors, who stepped onto the doorstep at Plymouth Rock, carrying a faith for the ages, to keep us whole. The knowledge that it will do so is what Congregationalism means to me.

This year, like all others, no matter where we came from, who our parents were or how we got here, the blessing of Congregationalism and our faith is that we are all Mayflower people.

~ Caroline Koster