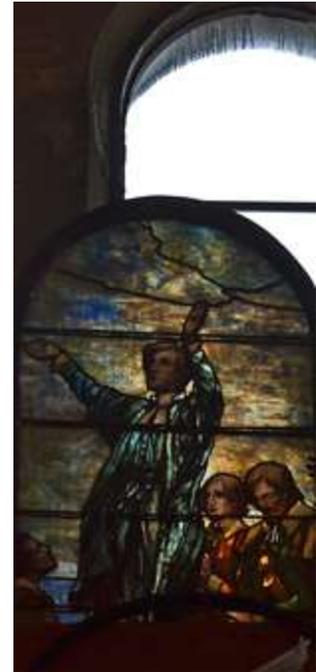


The Robinson Window – A Sermon

*Rev. Ed Hardy, Minister, First Parish Plymouth
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The John Robinson window slid gracefully to the floor revealing an infinite cloud grey sky. Robbed of backlight, Robinson appeared murky lying against the wall. I looked out the window where Robinson had stood for these last one hundred and eighteen years dressed in his blue silk suit with his arms up, his cape stirring in the sea breeze welcoming us to leave or arrive. It was grey and windy. I could imagine the Mayflower stealing away on return voyage to England and Saints and Strangers standing by the sea or on the very hill, waiting for Mayflower to cross below the horizon and then waited some more—stood there in their loneliness held only by their hope, God, and the sandy shore of the new world.



What did those Saints and Strangers imagine as they stood alone after that wicked winter when almost half perished. We can hardly place ourselves in their space and time; hardly imagine life without cars, electricity, running water and indoor bathrooms. I can hardly remember anymore getting up to adjust the volume on the TV.

Would they find what they sought? Would they find a sustainable way of life free from the crown of England? Would they survive? I admit I don't understand, nor feel their religious fervor, but I have an inkling of the desire for freedom, from the system of monarchy, from oppressive governments, and the economics of the caste system. The Saints and Strangers were among the first immigrants and with the grace of God they would survive and have many children and many generations to come would survive. But were they saints?

Were they persons of exceptional holiness of life, recognized by a Christian church and canonized? Sainthood? Not. Canonized? Not. Just read Bradford's diaries and plainly see—they were human and tied to causes and conditions of their day, which we barely comprehend today.

A Saint could be a founder, sponsor or patron of a movement—that would include all the original passengers of the Mayflower. But where would that leave the estimated 30 million descendants alive today? Lots of people who come here and take the tour say, "Oh, yes, I'm a descendant". I think, "yes, you're special, just like the other 30 million." When I was a child, I would say, "You know the Andrea Doria sank on my birthday." As if no other person had that distinction and as if that gave me place, title and importance. Or, I have in my living room an 1823 watercolor painting from the Waterman side of the family, of the Brig Herald sailing out of Duxbury. If I had had a son I was going to name my son after the Captain — Eli Martin Waterman. I love that painting. It gave me place, title, and importance which had a lot more heft and panache than saying, "my father, the short order cook and alcoholic." Yet I

finally grew up and I still have the painting. Maybe now I have it for the right reason—at least for me the right reason. It is a piece of history, but it doesn't make me special or a Saint.

As I enjoyed the joy of the members of the Restoration Committee, I wondered what was their right reason. What was the reason that allowed them to toil for years against steep odds? You'll have to ask them—what keeps them going? I wondered what would keep me going? What would make me want to preserve this building for future generations? The other night, Monday, at the Interfaith Thanksgiving Service, there were descendants of the pilgrims, Native Americans, African Americans, Jewish descendants, and even a few Buddhists—descendants of every color and many cultures—all 99.9% the same and all from somewhere else.

Theory has it that all Homo sapiens are descended from the same genetic material from a part of Africa along the equator about 200,000 years ago. We are all descended from black parents. So we are all immigrants too. Native Americans were the first to land here—probably coming across the Bering Strait—15,000 years ago. Where's their national monument? Where's their day of National recognition?

We have been coming here for a long time; from many different directions. Still we keep coming, day by day. Every day more legal and illegal immigrants come: by swimming a river, through tunnels, hidden in trucks, dressed in disguise, by boat, by inflated tire tubes from Cuba; by plane through America's greatest airports.

And still they come every day and for the same reasons as the Separatists and the Strangers and Saints, for political and religious freedom and an economic future. They come for the promise they bear in their heart. They come for the need they have in their belly.

They come for the hope they have in every cranny of their brain. And now we turn them back, send them home or arrest them. Today the Plymouth County Jail swells with some 300 undocumented immigrants. Would we send them back to wherever they came from? Back to oppressive governments? Back to religious persecution? Back to starvation in a dry, arid land? Now that we have our share of America, we shut the doors, we lock the gates, and turn our backs. We've got ours. Are we that hard-hearted? Every summer and every Thanksgiving tourists, immigrants, new citizens, and those wishing to affirm their heritage come here to see the spot, to see the symbols of the beginning of this country—to look at the Rock, to stand on Cole's Hill, to read the stones on Burial Hill and to come into this very sanctuary. For those very souls who dared—sat here, walked here, planted here, worshipped here, lived and died here.

Now, in this day, we are the holders of the National Memorial Pilgrim Church. We are its stewards.

We are not saints, or strangers—we are holders of a trust. We are a small band of holders, but that does not release us to do nothing. We have a duty to do what we can while the church is our property. If we cannot or choose not to maintain this memorial, we should turn it over to some public trust.

This monument should stand not for perfection, not for a particular religion, or particular politic, but for human hope, for the desire to live a fuller life of freedom—economic freedom, political freedom, and religious freedom. This is holy ground—the holy ground of hope. The holy ground of human capacity.

This is the sacred earth of the Wampanoags, sacred ground of the Saints and Strangers, sacred ground—for they sang and danced, and lived and died here, and so it is sacred ground today, and in our trust—sacred, for we live, laugh, and love here; we sing and dance here—here on our sacred ground.

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