

### **“Thanksgiving Stew”**

The first recorded service of Thanksgiving in the New World was conducted on December 4, 1619 at what would become Berkeley Plantation. The account goes that the Good Ship Margaret sailed up the James River to the designated landing spot and dropped anchor. The men rowed ashore. They looked in awe at the dense forest surrounding them. They were relieved that they had made it safely to land. Then, as commanded by the charter of the company, they knelt in prayer of thanksgiving to Almighty God.

It was more than a year later that the people of the Massachusetts Bay Colony held what is erroneously called the first Thanksgiving. Their Thanksgiving certainly involved worship, but it was notable for the feasting that occurred.

Thanksgiving celebrations go back before recorded time. The model for our modern Thanksgivings might be the celebration that Judaism calls the Festival of Booths, Festival of Tabernacles or Sukkoth. It is one of the three most important festivals in Judaism.<sup>1</sup>

But what do we have to be thankful for these days? It seems that nothing is good enough to give thanks for. We fear our neighbor. We fear the immigrant. We fear being in public places, even church. Some think the solution is to pack a weapon wherever we go, because everyone is suspect. Bumper stickers, tweets, and Face book posts add to the fear. Radio and TV talk show hosts ramp up the fear because it increases their ratings.

We isolate ourselves. We congregate only with those of like mind and like station in society. We buy more stuff thinking it will quell our anxiety. Society seems to have lost its center--the place that holds us together as a people.

Many of us grew up thinking that America was the great melting pot, where everyone assimilates over time. But the melting pot concept is no longer relevant. While it was a comfortable notion for many no longer seems relevant. For some that loss adds to the fear.

I believe there is hope because I think rather than being a melting pot we are a stew, and I like stews. They have many flavors and they maintain the character of the individual ingredients while making something greater. A melting pot requires that I lose my identity in order to be part of it. I must completely blend in and conform. The melting pot is like baby food with little to recommend it but its ease of swallowing. Stews have textures, flavors, spices, and herbs that make for something more interesting.

As you prepare for Thanksgiving with family or friends or strangers or alone, remember that it is God who created each of us and we each contain the breath of God. When you give thanks tomorrow, I hope you will thank God for the stew that is humanity. It is a stew of God's making and it is something to be thankful for tomorrow and every day.

---

<sup>1</sup> Pesach (*Passover*), Shavuot (*Weeks or Pentecost*), and Sukkot (*Tabernacles, Tents or Booths*)