

Lessons in Thankfulness From the First Thanksgiving

As we celebrate Thanksgiving, we should examine what lessons can be learned from the first Thanksgiving celebration. One little-known fact is when the Pilgrims landed they established a short-lived form of agricultural communism.

The land was owned in common; everyone worked for each other and each received an equal allotment of food no matter how hard they worked. The men planted for everyone and the women prepared food and washed clothes for everyone.

This system quickly failed. The women described the communal chores as a form of slavery, men rapidly lost motivation and the able-bodied feigned illness to avoid work.

As Gov. William Bradford described in *Of Plymouth Plantation*, “[The] taking away of property, and bringing in community into a common wealth ...was found to breed much confusion & discontent, and retard much employment. ...”

The crops dwindled to only providing several kernels of corn per meal. It was so bleak that some Pilgrims sold themselves as workers to the Indians for a few cups of food. Others tried to forage for food, but many died of starvation.

After much debate and prayer, Bradford established a free market system by assigning each family a portion of land and giving them rights to what it produced. He was amazed at the results and wrote, “[I]t made all hands very industrious, so as much more corn was planted than otherwise would have been by any means ... and gave far better content. The women now went willingly into the field, and took their little ones with them to set corn; which before would allege weakness and inability.”

This new respect for the fruit of each person's labor was what Bradford credited with creating the bountiful harvest and the reason the Pilgrims were able to celebrate what we think of as the "First Thanksgiving."

Think of how happy the Pilgrims were to know that they would not face starvation that winter. This is a poignant lesson as some Americans again look at rewarding laziness with welfare and taking from those who work hard and providing it to those who have worked less, or not at all.

"We have so much to be thankful for in America," said Mat Staver, founder and chairman of Liberty Counsel. "The Pilgrims learned a brutal lesson regarding communal living. In America, equal opportunity has always been a foundational value.

"Attempting to create equal outcomes for everyone will create disincentives and make society poor. Let's be grateful and learn from the Pilgrims. Let's not repeat their mistake."