5 Kernels of Corn

- 388 years ago, a ship named The Mayflower arrived at Plymouth after 66 days at sea.
- 102 people set foot on land on after a month of scouting the land for the most ideal location for a settlement.
- Over the winter, 46 died from sickness, starvation, and exposure to bitter elements.
- However, in March of 1621, they met Squanto, a Native American who taught the colonists how to plant, fish, hunt and trade with the Wampnoag tribe who were led by Chief Massasoit.
- The summer provided a bountiful harvest. Governor William Bradford declared a celebration in October and invited Massasoit. Massasoit showed up with 5 dressed deer, more than a dozen wild turkeys, and 90 hungry natives.
- The feast was extremely successful but much to the surprise of the pilgrims, Massasoit and his friends stayed and the party lasted for 3 days, greatly reducing the supplies the settlers had hoped would enable them to avoid another hard winter.
- Because of this, food rations in Plymouth were reduced in order to ensure everyone in the settlement would have enough to eat to make it through the winter. Though tight, the settlers were hopeful of making it through the winter.
- However, one month after the feast, another ship from home arrived with 35 more people and no food supplies.
- Once again, food rations had to be cutback. This time, Bradford and his crew determined that the entire settlement would need to go on half-rations in order to have a chance of surviving the winter.
- Despite the drastic measure, half rations proved to be too much, and food supplies quickly dwindled to next to nothing.
- Again and again, Bradford was forced to scale back the rations until, ultimately, each settler was reduced to surviving on just 5 kernels of corn per day.
- As the Plymouth settlers well knew, similar circumstances had led to 46 people dying the previous year and 8 out of 10 dying in the Jamestown settlement.
- However in what could only be described as miraculous, not a single settler died in Plymouth that winter.
• When spring arrived, they planted double the crops, however a drought came and the crops withered in the field.
• Bradford called for a time of fasting and prayer. The next morning, it began to rain.
• In the words of Edward Winslow: "These and the like considerations moved not only every goodman privately to enter into examination with his own estate between God and his conscience, and so to humiliation before Him, but also to humble ourselves together before the Lord by fasting and prayer. To that end, a day was appointed by public authority, and set apart from all other employments. But, O the mercy of our God, who was as ready to hear, as we were to ask! For though in the morning, when we assembled together, the heavens were as clear and the drought as like to continue as it ever was, yet (our exercise continuing some eight or nine hours) before our departure, the weather was overcast, the clouds gathered on all sides. On the next morning distilled such soft, sweet, and moderate showers of rain, continuing some fourteen days [!] and mixed with such seasonable weather, as it was hard to say whether our withered corn or drooping affections were most quickened or revived, such was the bounty and goodness of our God!"
• Fittingly, Bradford called for another celebration of Thanksgiving.
• The first course served at this celebration was an empty plate with 5 kernels of corn. The settlers ate the corn before anything else, in order to give everyone an appreciation of just how much God had blessed them and to remind them of how He had brought them through the terrible winter.