

A script from



“Before We Get Off This Ship”

by
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- What** William Bradford, transported through time, explains the history and importance of the Mayflower Compact...and the importance of being united. This script is perfect for a Thanksgiving event or even a July 4th celebration at your church. **Themes:** Thanksgiving, America, Faith, Courage, Mayflower, History
- Who** William Bradford
- When** Present
- Wear (Props)** Period costume- late 1500's
- Why** Ecclesiastes 4:9-12
- How** This is a script for a more experienced actor. It is important that the actor be a good storyteller and immerse himself into the character. It is helpful to have a director or someone who is skilled to watch and give helpful feedback. Feel free to edit content for time.
- Time** Approximately 10-15 minutes

Dressed in period costume, William Bradford, addresses the audience in a very conversational manner.

Yes, well...here we all are. I, myself, in my usual attire. And all of you...well...I must say, I am not entirely familiar with the strange, but splendid manner in which **you** are attired. I have been...summoned here by *(pulls a scrap of paper from his pocket and reads the Pastor of the church's name on it, then looking towards the pastor)... (Pastor's name) is it? (Looking again at the paper. Then, to Pastor) My goodness. Such atrocious penmanship. (To Pastor) Yours, I take it. The good (Pastor's name) has summoned me here to tell you a bit of my story. I know not what strange...powers this good Pastor possesses to be able to summon me thus. (Addressing the Pastor) Good Sir, what day is today? (Waits for the answer) Tuesday. Ah. And the year? (Waits for the answer) Oh. My. Powers indeed. The time is out of joint, as Mr. Shakespeare has written, most surely out of joint. Almost four hundred years, by my quick reckoning. Well, I suppose before anything else happens, I should get on with my story (to Pastor) with your kind permission, of course, Sir. Yes, well...my story.*

Born in 1590 in Yorkshire to wealthy parents, who named me William, after my father. Orphaned at an early age. Raised by my two bachelor uncles. Sickly. I spent much of my time in bed, reading. The Bible, mostly. Thank God, for that.

Years passed and I found myself a young man throwing in my lot with a pack of so-called "religious renegades". We dared to question the authority of the King of England over our church. Which, of course, was like waving the red flag in front of the proverbial bull. We were hounded out of England, chased all the way to Holland.

We reasoned: "there is nothing to fear in Holland, except, perhaps, an overabundance of tulips". We were wrong. The hounding continued. Only the language changed. Dutch.

I had acquired a wife, a son and a trade in Holland. I was...settled. I simply wanted to live my life in peace. That is what all of us, in our church, wanted. But, in season, we realized, to our dismay, that there would be no peace unless we moved on. A "New World" is what we sought. "Pilgrims," is what we called ourselves. It seemed...appropriately Biblical.

Of course, simply calling oneself a "Pilgrim" does not exactly pay the bills. We had scarce money. But, we had an abundance of faith, and little fear of hard work. So, we attached ourselves to a group of businessmen, who were interested in investing in the world, across the ocean. They were to provide the capital. We were to provide the hard work. We would pay for our transport with several years of indentured labor in an

already established settlement in the Colony of Virginia. The businessmen would make a profit, and we would be free to worship God, as Pilgrims, in a New World. A splendid arrangement.

There were about forty of us Pilgrims, set for the journey. There were other travelers, not from our church. We chose to call them "Strangers". To be sure, these Strangers were probably interested as much in financial opportunity as in freedom to worship. But, they were, for the most part, good folk all. Merchants. Farmers. Carpenters. About sixty Strangers in all. And...there were about twenty others- sailors, soldiers, and the like- whose job was to get us across the rough Atlantic Ocean in two ships. It was... *(with a chuckle)* a fool-proof plan.

Our ships were called the May-Flower and the Speed-Well. Poorly named, the second boat, for it did not...speed well. It sprang a leak, and both ships were forced to return to England. We loaded, all of us, onto the one ship, the May-Flower. We had lost time, many days. And, because of the delay, we were now sailing an unwieldy ship into the teeth of the winter winds.

*If possible, at this point, the **actor** walks into the audience, as if walking into the ship he describes. He walks the approximate dimensions of the below-deck area of the ship as he describes this next section.*

See it here: the May-Flower. Below the deck. One hundred passengers, all crowded into a small area, twenty by fifty feet. The roof so low that a man over five feet tall was always bent. The coming winter weather so rough that many days we could not even raise our heads above deck to breathe fresh air. Drinking water contaminated. Provisions dwindling. Little light. No privacy. Sleeping, sitting, eating, huddled, side by side, tensions rising, with no escape and no exit. And all the while, the winds buffeting. A journey, that in fair weather, might take three weeks, stretched out to over two months.

*The **actor** stands on a chair, now on the stage, as if on the prow of the ship, looking out to sea, seeing the end of the journey.*

But, always before us a dream, the end of the journey, beckoning. People, a settlement, waiting for us, in Virginia. Warmth, and light, and simple civilization. All we had to do was get there.

*The **actor** gets down from the chair, in "quasi defeat".*

But, we did **not** get there. The winter winds had blown us far north of our destination. The Captain, the sailors were barely able to steer the ship into a natural harbor, with no hope of going further. There the ship uneasily anchored, stuck in Cape Cod. And, in the good Cape Cod, there

was...**nothing**. No settlement. No shelter. No civilization. No people. No welcome. **Nothing**. Just bleak woods, freezing rain, and uncertainty.

After two months on the rough seas, in stifling quarters, we longed for release from the ship. But we dared not depart. The shelter of the ship was minimal, but at least it **was** shelter. And, we knew not if there were enemies, unseen, waiting to attack us in the woods. Fear, and the threat of disunity began to spread rampantly among us. All of us Pilgrims, and some of the Strangers felt that, although we had not arrived at our expected destination, it was the Providence of God that had brought us to this place and that we should make the best of it. Others of the Strangers, and some of the sailors, had no such faith. Their desire was to leave the ship, no matter what, and to live under the banner of "Every Man for Himself." The leaders among us knew that we were, all of us, Pilgrims and Strangers alike, in a fight for our very existence, our lives. We knew that unless we held each other accountable, unless a basic agreement of living and governance was made between us all, we would not survive.

And so, before we could even get off the ship, we were forced to sit and discuss our options for survival. This was no theoretical or idle discussion. It was heated and intense. And, thank God, rational. And, thank God, we came to an agreement. A Compact. It became known as the May-Flower Compact.

That first winter, off the ship building primitive huts, scrounging for food...it was hard. Half of us died, my wife among them. But, the rest of us lived. We survived. And eventually, over the coming years, our enterprise thrived because we all stayed together. We had agreed, in a Compact, that this was the wisest and the best thing to do. We trusted in the goodness and Providence of God.

The actor now crosses into the audience once again, this time to make his final speech. He acknowledges the Pastor again.

And now I find myself summoned here- I know not how- by the good Pastor. *(Pulls the Pastor's note out of his pocket and looks at it for a moment)* He tells me, in his barely legible scribble, that the winds of this present culture are blowing against you. And, he asks me, in this note, to encourage all of you to work, and to dream, in compact together.

Well...I am **no** speech-maker. I made no speech on the ship before we signed our Compact. But, it seems that your good Pastor wants a speech. So, if I **did** make a speech to you, it would be, in essence, the same as the speech I would have made to my friends on the ship. I would say simply this:

*During this last speech, the **actor** directly addresses the audience, as if he were speaking to both early settlers on the Mayflower **and** present day church. He moves freely in the audience between them all. All the previous monologue has been more "conversational". But, this final speech will take on a more "stirring" feel.*

We have, all of us, come from different places, with different challenges and dreams. We have arrived here, in this place, not necessarily of our original expectation. But it can be, this place, if we deem it so, a place of hope...a place of expectation.

Nothing of our journey has been easy. But, **all** great and honorable actions are accompanied with difficulties, and both must be enterprised and overcome with answerable courage. There is change afoot. We are washed up on this Western Shore. But, let us not fear. Let us have courage and hope. We have found common ground. And, if we will but agree together to work side by side, we **will** grow, each in our own unique and curious ways. We will be planted, and we **will** grow.

And, years from now, looking back, may we realize that all of us, people of good will, have created a legacy. We will be remembered because we have agreed that we are better together than separately.

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