**19th October 2023**

# Together

**"Therefore, although we are of different individualities … let us strive like flowers of the same divine garden to live together in harmony."**

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The promulgation of Universal Peace*

In 1621, Robert Cushman, one of the "Pilgrim Fathers", preached a sermon at Plymouth, New England, to the first colonists. His text was 1 Corinthians 10:24 (with my apologies for the gender-based language of the day):

*Let no man seek his own: but every man another's wealth.*

The sermon runs to just under a thousand words. My own sermons these days (roughly 15 minutes) are around 2,500 words. So Cushman's sermon was a fair chunk of preaching to sustain – for preacher *and* congregation.

During my recent holiday in the USA, my wife and I spent some days in Plymouth, the base for the Pilgrims' original settlement. I'll share some insights from this again, I'm sure, but for now, a word about Cushman's sermon. His focus is on togetherness. He begins by telling his congregation that the text he's chosen is St Paul's critique of the Church.

*The abuses which were in the Church of Corinth … arose chiefly through swelling pride, self-love and conceitedness. The sower of tares was not wanting to stir up evil workers and fleshly minded hypocrites, under a shew of godliness.*

And there's another hour of admonition where *that* came from! The sermon, littered with biblical references, is directed at individuals. But in truth, it is more of a challenge to this fledgling Church to have togetherness as their core purpose, just as Paul was directing the new Church in Corinth. Individual faith is important. But *individuality* which takes precedence over all else is dangerous. Cushman suggests:

*I pray you, remember yourselves, and know, that you are not in a retired monastical course, but have given your names and promises to one another and covenanted here to cleave together in the service of God, and the King. What then must you do? May you live as retired hermits and look after nobody? Nay, you must seek still the wealth of one another."*

"Cleave together in the service of God." From an hour's worth of fiery preaching in 1621, that would be enough for me in 2023.

**A prayer for today**

*Lord, you've placed us in communities.*
*May the togetherness of those communities honour you. Amen*

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