

*“Let’s Talk About…” is a column in our monthly newsletter where we will learn one thing at a time about how we can love others the way they want to be loved. We will learn something each month that helps us understand and respect people who are different from us a little more deeply.*

## Let’s Talk About History

This November, let’s talk about history. Wouldn’t it be great if we could just leave the past in the past? Although there’s something powerful to be said about not letting the past determine the future, we cannot ignore how the past has created our present circumstances. This time of year, the prime example is our American Thanksgiving Day.

Although plenty of other countries celebrate a Thanksgiving Day at some point during the year, the history of our particular holiday is unique in some unflattering ways. The federal holiday began during the Civil War, in the hopes of boosting public opinion of the administration a year after our government intentionally went a long way towards wiping out the Dakota people. The lore of Thanksgiving is based on something that happened between the colonists of Plymouth and the Wampanoag people, which occurred less than 20 years before the English began massacring the very tribe who first shared this thanksgiving feast with them.

As citizens of the nation that occupied this land and genocided its original inhabitants, we have a responsibility to be honest about our history. First graders in many American schools today already understand that the story of pilgrims befriending Native Americans is a mythologized tale that masks the dreadful truth of interactions between European colonists and indigenous peoples.

But we don’t have to be miserable and guilt-ridden to be responsible for our history. We cannot deny what has happened to create this holiday and its story, and at the same time, we have an opportunity to live into something more authentic and beautiful than the myth so many of us learned as children. The indigenous peoples of the area we now call New England celebrated autumn feasts of thanksgiving long before Europeans found their way here. Gratitude to the Creator for the fruits of the earth has deeper roots than propaganda or shallow promises between peoples.

So on Thanksgiving Day, if you have the opportunity to gather with family or friends and share food, do it wholeheartedly. Let it be a day of embracing neighbors with free grace and hospitality, with awareness of how much unearned grace and hospitality has already been offered to us and our ancestors. Let it be a day of deep gratitude for all that God has created, and for all the peoples across the globe who have known for millennia how to thank the Divine for the gifts of the land.

*Our “Let’s Talk About…” column is one place where we can help one another learn how to be better allies for all our neighbors. If you have a question you’d like answered, or if there are things you wish others in our congregation better understood about your own marginalized identities or those for whom you are already a strong ally, please submit suggestions to <https://forms.gle/E9eRqZJGLgVagbDZ9> or email me directly at [virginiag@smokyhillumc.org](mailto:virginiag@smokyhillumc.org).*