

WHAT PLYMOUTH MEANS TO ME

*“My days are gliding swiftly by, and I, a pilgrim stranger,
would not detain them as they fly! Those hours of toil and danger
For oh! we stand on Jordan’s strand, our friends are passing over,
And just before, the shining shore we may almost discover.”*

—*The Shining Shore*, David Nelson

I believe that many of us, myself included, are pilgrims and travelers through life, so it is only fitting that I stumbled across Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims and have since become a member.

Growing up, I was exposed to the Christian faith by my parents through a combination of a year in a Lutheran pre-school, regular evangelical fellowship groups held within a small Chinese Christian community and occasional attendance to youth groups events held by larger evangelical churches within the Denver metro area. My parents were exposed to the Christian faith by distant Christian relatives, who supported them in the immigration process to the United States on student visas, and friendly Christian neighbors, who so readily helped them settle in Tuscan, Arizona their first home. To them, the Christian faith was rooted in kindness and generosity and a community of fellowship, trust and support. In turn, the Christianity I grew up with was a nurturing environment, but a narrow in perspective, passed down by these evangelists.

Since arriving in NYC fifteen years ago, I have accepted friends and classmates’ invitations to attend various churches from time to time, but boy is it easy to de-prioritize faith in the Big Apple when you are working hard and having fun. Despite drifting from church and faith, the deeper questions of life were never far from the heart and mind.

I find myself fortunate to have stumbled upon Plymouth Church as an adult, when my wife Amy and I were looking for a minister to help officiate our

wedding ceremony. What drew us back to Plymouth was the simplicity and relative familiarity of the worship service and structure, the unbelievably beautiful music service, the thought-provoking sermons and scripture teachings every Sunday, and a prayer-centered worship. Plymouth and its people, especially Rev. Brett Younger and Erica Cooper, helped re-ignite my faith for the first time since I began actively looking for it. My wife and I were both baptized in May 2018. We are glad to continue our journey learning as disciples in Christ here.

What's more, it is incredibly enriching to be a part of the Congregationalist movement and a church with such a storied legacy, dating back to America's first pilgrims, Henry Ward Beecher, and the abolitionist movement. I wonder what we can do today to be a positive force in addressing the big social justice issues of our time. It is comforting to have an inviting space and peaceful sanctuary to worship in and to celebrate the church's unique traditions (such as Tenebrae readings by candle-light on Good Friday, Christmas service, etc.). It is uplifting to be a part of the strong, visible, diverse, and accomplished congregation that we have and to witness and participate in the grounded and active role the church and its members play in the community and abroad. It is wonderful to share faith with the current community of family, friends, neighbors, pilgrims, and strangers – in an open and vulnerable, challenging yet supportive way.

As Congregationalists, we are reminded that the church is only as strong as its members, and we hold ourselves responsible to each other in our faith. It is not all that different from the basic premise of the small fellowships that I grew up in and have personally seen grow and yield fruit. What we have at Plymouth is so much more and what I see are endless possibilities and an abundance of opportunity, hope and life.

Spencer Liu