

A Sermon for Easter 6, Year B
May 13, 2007 ~ The 10:15 AM service
Fr. Jim Cook

The Rev. Robert Hunt.

On December 19, 1606 three ships set sail from England: *Godspeed*, *Susan Constant*, and *Discovery*. The ships were owned by the Virginia Company, formed by charter of King James I of England. The purpose of their voyage was two-fold: to establish a colony in the New World, and find a trade route to Asia.

Because their departure was in December, harsh weather and contrary seas hindered their progress. In fact, they spent somewhere between five and six weeks simply trying to get free of the English Channel. In early February their luck changed and they were able to make for the open ocean. And 144 days after setting sail, land was spotted.

There were 105 colonists on the three ships, and one of them was the Rev. Robert Hunt. A priest in the Church of England, Hunt was a standout on the voyage and in the colony that would be established. But his past was anything but sterling.

Hunt was Vicar for the Parish of Reculver, in Kent, from 1592 to 1604, but was forced to abandon his parish, wife, and children, in disgrace, because his wife was (and I quote)

seeing too much of one John Taylor.

Hunt's next post was Vicar of All Saints' Church at Old Heathfield, in East Sussex. It was a post he would hold until 1606, when he was forced to leave when he was accused of having an adulterous affair with his servant, Thomasina Plumber, as well as (and I quote once more)

absenteeism, and neglecting of his congregation.

Thus, when the opportunity arose for Hunt to turn over a new leaf and travel to the New World, he accepted the invitation. And traveling aboard the *Susan Constant*, Hunt earned the respect and admiration of all the colonists.

For example, during those six weeks when the three ships were simply waiting for the favorable winds and seas that would enable them to escape the English Channel, it was Hunt who encouraged the colonists, who were more than willing to abandon their efforts, to stay the course.

And, when land was finally spotted, and the three ships made anchor just inside the Chesapeake Bay, Hunt required every colonist to remain onboard, and spend three days in personal examination and repentance, for all the difficulty and in-fighting they had engaged in.

When they finally came ashore, Hunt led the colonists in erecting a seven-foot oak cross, which they brought from England, for the purpose of giving glory to God in their endeavor. Leading them in prayers, Hunt declared that

from these very shores the Gospel shall go forth not only to this New World, but the entire world.

The colonists immediately undertook the building of a community, which they named **Jamestowne** for their king. And during his short time with them, Hunt served as a peacemaker, often bringing harmony to the quarreling colonists.

The chronicler of the colony wrote, of Hunt:

Many were the mischiefs that daily sprung from their ignorant spirits; but the good doctrines and exhortations of our Preacher Minister Hunt reconciled them. It is impossible to rate too highly the character and work of the aforesaid Robert Hunt, Chaplain of the Colony.

Despite the incredibly onerous circumstances of the new colony's beginnings, Hunt seemed to rise to the occasion, often mediating disputes between the camps various factions. The governor of the new colony wrote this of Hunt, in his journal: Hunt was

a man not in any way to be touched with the rebellious humors of a popish spirit, nor blemished with the least suspicion of a factious schismatic, whereof I had a special care.

This is high praise, apparently.

On or near May 13, 1606, and shortly after arriving in the New World, Hunt led the colonists in the first Anglican service of Morning Prayer. And, several weeks later, on or near June 24, Hunt led the colonists in the first Anglican service of Holy Communion. And the prayer book Hunt used at both services was the 1604 edition of the *Book of Common Prayer*. The prayers that Hunt employed are the very prayers we use this morning, and will for Holy Communion use on June 24.

In January of 1608, a fire spread through the fort the colonists had built at Jamestown, destroying much, and injuring many including Hunt, who died shortly thereafter.

It's impossible to know how things might have been different had Hunt not gone to the New World. But he did go, and one man, with a less-than-sterling past, helped to plant the seeds of Christianity and Anglicanism in the New World. And, 400 years later, we're still here. And so, today, we remember those colonists, and their pastor, the Rev. Robert Hunt.