Prayer
Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-6
Hymn: 446 "My Jesus, as Thou Wilt"

Rhode Island was the home of the first Baptist Churches in America. Roger Williams is remembered as the founder of Rhode Island and the founder of its first Baptist Church. He remained in the Baptist Church for only a very short time and his Baptist Church died out, having no living descendants today. Nevertheless, Roger Williams, Rhode Island, and the Baptist Church are remembered as the first champions in America of the complete separation of Church and State. All America owes them a great debt for the principle of religious liberty and toleration for all the people. The Baptists were one of the groups most hated by both Puritans and Anglicans. Puritans and Anglicans tended to associate Baptists with the Anabaptists of Munster although there is no evidence that American Baptists were ever guilty of the hated extravagances of these Anabaptists. Any debt of American Baptists to Anabaptists would have been to the moderate Mennonites of Holland and England whose influence on the English Baptists is very difficult to measure.

THE ENGLISH BAPTISTS

The first English Baptist Church was the congregation of John Smyth in Amsterdam in Holland. John Smyth was an Anglican minister, trained at Cambridge University. He turned Separatist Puritan. Dutch Mennonites who had migrated to England may have had some influence on him and his Gainsborough congregation that fled to Amsterdam in 1608/9 because of persecution. There can be little doubt that Smyth and his associate, Thomas Helwys, were strongly influenced by the Mennonites in Amsterdam. Smyth and his congregation reached the conclusion that infant baptism was not Scriptural baptism. They dissolved their church. Smyth baptized himself and then baptized Helwys and the rest of the congregation by pouring, forming the first English Baptist Church on Dutch soil. After Smyth's death, Helwys and John Murton returned to England in 1611/12 to form the first permanent Baptist congregation on English soil. In addition to Mennonite influence they had been strongly influenced by the Dutch Arminians and had come to believe that Christ died for all men. These English Baptists were ardent champions of religious toleration and were known as "General Baptists." They spread rapidly in England. By 1644 they had at least forty-seven congregations and by 1660 their membership was about 20,000. Among the English who fled to America for religious liberty were a number of these Arminian Baptists.

The "Particular" or Calvinistic Baptists of England began as a separation from the non-Separatist Congregationalists of Henry Jacobs. John Robinson and William Brewster had led the
Separatist congregation of Scrooby first to Amsterdam and then to Leyden in 1609. Henry Jacob, William Ames, and William Bradshaw moved to an Independent Non-Separatist Congregational position. They worked to establish a nation-wide system of Congregational churches in England. In 1616 Jacob founded a Congregational Church in Southwark that is considered the first of these Congregational Churches. In the 1630's it became concerned over the scripturalness of infant baptism. On September 12, 1633, the minister of the Southwark church, John Spilsbury, and a part of the church renounced infant baptism and Spilsbury, repudiating apostolic succession and the idea that Baptizedness was essential to the administrator, administered adult baptism by pouring to himself and his followers. In March, 1641, Spilsbury's congregation split again. Richard Blunt and P. Barebone contended that baptism must be by dipping the whole body in water. The remainder of the congregation remained with its minister, H. Jessey. The split was amiable. Richard Blunt was sent to Holland to consult a group that was known to practise immersion. It is thought that the group was the Rhynburgers or Collegiants who were Socinian antipedobaptists who practised immersion. A teacher in this church, John Batte, gave Blunt a letter that baptism should be by dipping the body of the adult believer. On his return Blunt baptized Blacklock and Blacklock baptized Blunt by immersion (1641). Then they immersed the other members. One of the number was Mark Lukar who would later be a leading worker in John Clarke's Baptist Church in Newport, R.I..

William Kiffin became a leader among the immersionists in 1642 and in October engaged with Dr. Featley of Southward in a debate on baptism. Kiffin organized a new Baptist Church in 1644. By October, 1644, there were seven Particular Baptist Churches. Kiffin, Patience, Spilsbury and others of the Particular Baptists drew up a Calvinistic Confession of Faith. In 1645 Henry Jessey, the pastor of the Congregational Church was immersed by Hanserd Knollys. Members of his congregation followed his example. In 1646 a second edition of the confession was issued.

The Particular Baptists grew rapidly, spreading through England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland. They became an important part of Cromwell's army and furnished many officers. The Particular Baptists were credited with persuading Cromwell to refuse the prerogatives of royalty and strongly influencing him in the direction of religious toleration. His Board of Tryers to pass on the qualifications for the ministry included several Particular Baptists, including Jessey, Tombes, Dyke, and Myles. Particular Baptists were assigned to pastorates in state-endowed churches.

At the Restoration under Charles II Baptists suffered severe persecution and many joined in the migration to America. At the Act of Toleration under William and Mary the Particular Baptists numbered in the thousands. Over a hundred Particular Baptist congregations adopted a Baptist recension of the Westminster Confession.
ROGER WILLIAMS AND THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN AMERICA

Roger Williams is credited with being the first to introduce believer's baptism and to organize a church on Baptist principles in America. He and his wife embarked on the ship, Lyon, from the port of Bristol in December, 1630, and landed at Boston on February 5, 1631. He was about thirty years of age and was described as "a young minister, godly and zealous, having precious gifts."

Roger Williams had been reared in a family of respectable middle-class Anglicans. His proficiency at shorthand secured him a place in the Star Chamber Court under Sir Edward Coke, the eminent jurist. Coke secured for him a scholarship to the Charterhouse School in 1621 and then an appointment to Cambridge where he was graduated with distinction in 1627 from Pembroke College. He accepted holy orders in the Anglican Church and became a chaplain to Sir William Masham in Essex. He turned against the Anglicans and adopted the Separatist cause. He married Mary Barnard in December, 1629. They decided to migrate to America because of Bishop Laud. He later declared that leaving England was as bitter as death.

Upon arriving in Boston he was invited to become pastor of the Boston Church in the absence of the Pastor, John Wilson, who was returning to England. Williams refused the offer, declaring that he could not serve in a church that held fellowship with the Anglican church and that recognized the jurisdiction of magistrates in matters of conscience. He urged the Boston church to completely separate itself from the corruptions of the English Church that bore on its skirts the blood of saints and martyrs.

Williams received an invitation to become pastor of the church at Salem. He accepted the invitation on learning that the Salem church was more liberal and not so non-Separatist. But on the day he was to begin his ministry in Salem the Salem Church received from the General Court of Boston a strong letter of protest. When the Salem Church rejected him, Williams went to Plymouth. He served as an assistant to the minister, Ralph Smith, and found favor among the people for his teaching. He labored among the Narragansett Indians with some success and formed a warm friendship with them. He mastered their language. For two years he worked in Salem. Governor Bradford wrote, "... he was freely entertained, according to our poor ability, and exercised his gifts among us; and after some time was admitted a member of the church among us and his teaching well approved, for the benefit whereof I still bless God, and am thankful to him even for his sharpest admonitions and reproofs, so far as they agreed with truth."

Elder Brewster of the Plymouth Church declared that towards the end of his stay he began to vent his own opinions and to attempt to impose them on others. He denounced the right of the crown to grant charters to land that belonged to the Indians.
Influential people in Boston tried to turn Plymouth against him. Governor Bradford pronounced him "a man godly and zealous, having many precious parts, but very unsettled in judgmente." Friction between Williams and some of the congregation grew.

When Williams received an invitation to return to Salem in 1633, he accepted the invitation gladly and served as assistant to the Salem minister, Samuel Skelton. That same year, 1633, Williams in a treatise criticized patents by which King James conferred title to the lands of Massachusetts to the settlers, insisting that the lands belonged to the Indians. The Puritans appealed to the example of the Israelites taking the land of the Canaanites. The Indians were an ungodly people and the Puritans were God's Israelites. Williams contended that such an appeal to the example of Israel was equal to repudiating Christianity.

Skelton died in August, 1634 and Salem invited Williams to be their pastor in the following month, September, 1634. The Massachusetts authorities strongly protested. A bitter conflict between Williams and the Massachusetts authorities followed with John Cotton becoming the chief opponent. The Massachusetts authorities were Non-Separatist. Williams insisted that the Church of England was utterly apostate and that it was a sin to have any sort of communion with it. Ministers returning to England should not attend any of the services of the Anglicans. Williams continued to insist that the land belonged to the Indians and that the colonies should return their charters to Charles I. Living under the charters was an enormous sin. Williams condemned the oaths taken to the crown. He condemned the practice of having wicked people take oaths. He urged complete separation of Church and State and declared that the civil magistrate's power extended only to the outward state of men.

To the Massachusetts authorities Williams had attacked the very foundation of their state. In December, 1634 he was summoned to appear before the court the following March to answer the charges that he had preached against the charter and had termed the Church of England antichristian. John Cotton persuaded the court to forbear civil prosecution until the ministers had tried to convince him of sin. He was brought before the court where the ministers believed they thoroughly confuted him, but they did not change him.

In May, 1635, the Salem church in defiance of the court and the ministers proceeded to make Williams their full pastor. He continued to denounce the charter and the oaths and to preach the complete separation of Church and State. In July, 1635 he was again summoned to court and charged with uttering opinions dangerous to the common welfare. He was also charged with teaching that one should not pray with the unregenerate and that thanks should not be given after the sacrament or after a meal.
The Massachusetts Bay Court sought to put pressure on Salem. Salem had petitioned the court to grant Salem a tract of land near Marblehead that Salem claimed. The Court made the grant of the land conditional on their rejecting Williams as minister. Williams and Salem considered the action of the court as an effort to bribe Salem. Williams and Salem strongly protested to the sister churches of Boston and called on them to demand the resignation of the members of the court. When the churches backed the court Williams scathingly denounced the churches and demanded that Salem disfellowship them. When the majority at Salem refused to do so, Williams refused to enter the church again and began holding services in his own house.

At the meeting of the court, October 19, 1635, Williams was sentenced to "depart out of our jurisdiction within six weeks." On account of Williams' poor health and early inclement winter weather the court agreed to postpone his banishment until spring, provided he would refrain from airing his opinions. When Williams continued to preach to his friends in his house the Court ordered officers to seize him and to put him on a ship about to sail to England where he would experience the tender mercies of Archbishop Laud. His property was to be seized to pay for his passage. A friend warned him and in the middle of January, 1636, Roger Williams fled from Salem and the Bay Colony into the frozen wilderness, leaving his wife and two children behind.

For fourteen weeks Williams wandered in the wilderness until he stumbled upon the camp of the friendly Narragansett Indians who cared for him throughout the remainder of the winter. In the spring Williams and four or five other exiles founded a settlement at Seekonk. When Governor Winslow warned them that they were trespassing on land that belonged to Plymouth they moved to the head of the Narragansett Bay. They again purchased land from the Indians and planted a settlement on the Great Salt or Mohassuck River.

Late in 1638 Williams and twelve "loving friends and neighbors" joined together in a social compact promising to submit themselves "in active or passive obedience, to all such orders or agreements as shall be made for the public good of the body, in an orderly way, by the major consent of the present inhabitants, masters of families, incorporated together into a township, and such others who they shall admit into the same." They named the place "Providence." Williams later wrote, "I desired it might be for a shelter for persons distressed for conscience." The settlement grew and in 1640 another agreement was signed by thirty-nine freemen. In the second edition to the promise to submit themselves they added "only in civil things." They further added, "We agree, as formerly hath been the liberties of this town, so still to hold forth liberty of conscience."

Williams was joined in Providence by his wife and children
who had been cared for by faithful friends. As soon as he was settled in Providence Williams began holding religious meetings in his home, preaching Separatism. From the first Williams made Providence a sanctuary of freedom for religious refugees. The men of the Holy Commonwealths regarded it a catch-basin for heretics. When the Indian Wars came they refused to admit Rhode Island to membership in the New England Confederation.

Baptist refugees arrived in Williams' colony and their teaching of adult conversion and believers' baptism seemed to Williams to agree with the New Testament. In March, 1639, Williams received baptism from Ezekiel Holliman and then proceeded to baptize Holliman and ten other persons. They then organized themselves into the first Baptist church in America. Whether Williams was baptized by immersion or by pouring is debated. Some contend that immersion was not introduced in Rhode Island until 1649.

Williams remained in the Baptist fellowship for only a few months. He withdrew to become a "Seeker". He was the first pastor of his Baptist Church but he became disturbed over his right to administer the ordinances of the church, holding that a true ministry must derive its authority from apostolic succession and that therefore he could not assume the office of pastor. He had come to the conclusion that the church was so corrupt that there could be no recovery out of apostasy until Christ shall send forth new apostles to plant churches anew. Richard Scott, who left the Baptists to join the Quakers, wrote to George Fox describing Williams' spiritual pilgrimage:

I walked with him (Williams) in the Baptists' way about three or four months, in which time he brake from the society, and declared at large the ground and reasons of it; that their baptism could not be right because it was not administered by an apostle. After that he set upon a way of seeking (with two or three of them that had disagreed with him) by way of preaching and praying; and there he continued a year or two, till two of the three left him."

Williams continued friendly toward the Baptists. He confessed that he regarded the Baptists as more in harmony with early Christianity than any other church, but after the desolation by Rome the only hope was that God would reestablish the true church by divine action. Williams gave up the ministry and denied the legitimacy of instituted churches altogether. He continued to consider the Bible the authority and interpreted it typologically. Israel of the Old Testament was a type of spiritual worship under Christ. Old Israel was not a model for church and state but only for the church. There must be complete separation of church and state and complete toleration and religious freedom.
OTHER COLONIES OF EXILES IN RHODE ISLAND

Williams' colony at Providence drew dissenters of varied types to the Rhode Island area. Portsmouth was founded in 1638 by Anne Hutchinson and her associates. She had arrived in Boston in 1634. She and her husband became parishioners of John Cotton. Winthrop later described her as "a woman of ready wit and a bold spirit" who "brought over with her two dangerous errors." Anne Hutchinson began holding religious meetings in her house where the sermons preached the previous Sunday were discussed and the ministers criticized. Mrs. Hutchinson contended that the covenant of grace had made obsolete the covenant of works. One was a Christian not by works but by virtue of the divine spirit dwelling within him and illuminating his soul, kindling an awareness of personal salvation and union with God. She charged that most of the ministers were unconverted and all except her own minister, John Cotton, and her brother-in-law, John Wheelwright, minister of the church at Wollaston, were under the covenant of works and preached the covenant of works. The covenant of works meant conformity to a prescribed order as laid down by the minister. Every man under the covenant of grace had direct communication between himself and his maker. The Holy Spirit personally dwells in a justified soul. She claimed a direct divine inspiration. The clergy and most of the members of the General Court were outraged but they had to move slowly because she was supported by a number of important officials, including three members of the General Court, Captain Underhill, the military leader, John Cotton, her minister, and Sir Harry Vane, the governor.

When her brother-in-law, John Wheelwright, preached a sermon in his church in Wollaston defending her views and criticizing conditions in Massachusetts Bay he was arrested on the charge of sedition. In 1637 a church synod was called at Newton to give an ecclesiastical judgment on Mrs. Hutchinson and Wheelwright. When they were examined they were found guilty of heresy. The General Court met in May, 1637 and elected John Winthrop, who had sided with the clergy in the dispute, as governor, replacing Bane. Sixty citizens signed a "Remonstrance" asking the Court to refrain from punishing Mrs. Hutchinson. When the Court called on the signers most of them agreed to remove their names. Even John Cotton backed down and sought to be restored to good standing with his fellow ministers. At the November session of the General Court Mrs. Hutchinson and Wheelwright were banished from the colony. The Reverend John Wilson pronounced the excommunication:

Forasmuch as you, Mrs. Hutchinson, have highly transgressed and offended and forasmuch as you have so many ways troubled the church with your errors and have drawn away many a poor soul, and have upheld your revelations; and forasmuch as you have made a lie, etc. Therefore in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the name of the Church I do not only pronounce you worthy to be cast out, but I do cast you out and in the name of Christ I do
deliver you up to Satan, that you may learn no more to blaspheme, to seduce and to lie, and I do account you from this time forth to be a Heathen and a Publican and so to be held of all the brethren and sisters of this congregation and of all others; therefore I command you in the name of Christ Jesus and of his Church as a Leper to withdraw yourself out of the Congregation; that as formerly you have despised and contemned the Holy Ordinances of God, and turned back on them, so may you now have no part in them nor benefit from them.

With the help of Williams, Mrs. Hutchinson and her friends purchased from the Indians the island of Aquidneck in Narragansett Bay. On the north end of the island they established a settlement called Portsmouth.

Nineteen people joined in a covenant on March 7, 1638:

We whose names are underwritten do here solemnly, in the presence of Jehovah, incorporate ourselves into a body politic, and as he shall help, will submit our persons, lives and estates, unto our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of lords, and to all those perfect and most absolute laws of his, given us in his holy work of truth to be guided and judged thereby.

They elected William Coddington as judge and Dr. John Clarke as physician and preacher.

Dr. John Clarke had arrived in Boston in November, 1637. He had been born in England (October 8, 1609) and was highly educated in arts and medicine. He had become a Separatist. He was a strong advocate of liberty of conscience. He could not accept the intolerance of Massachusetts Bay and cast his lot with Mrs. Hutchinson.

The peace of the Portsmouth was disturbed by the coming of Samuel Gorton who was more radical than Mrs. Hutchinson. Gorton had come to Massachusetts to enjoy "liberty of conscience." By 1637 he had worn out his welcome and in 1638 he was accused of "all manner of blasphemies" because he claimed an inner illumination of the Spirit and condemned the union of church and state. He taught that the ministry and sacraments had no place among true Christian disciples. After leaving Boston he stayed for a time in Plymouth, then Aquidneck, in Providence, and Pawtuxet, causing trouble where ever he went. In Portsmouth he led a revolt that put Coddington out of the judgeship and elected William Hutchinson (Anne's husband) in his place. Coddington and John Clarke and their supporters withdrew to the south end of the island, where they established Newport on May 1, 1639. Coddington became governor of the new settlement and Clarke the pastor. Coddington negotiated with sympathizers in Portsmouth to form a union of the two towns. They were united under a common government in March, 1640. Coddington sought to secure a patent for Aquidneck that would give him proprietary control over the island. Roger Williams blocked
him by drawing the whole Narragansett area into a federation for mutual cooperation and support.

Gorton, in 1642, founded a settlement at Shawomet which he renamed Warwick that became a mecca for free-thinkers and radicals.

PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS

In 1643 Roger Williams, knowing the hatred of the Holy Commonwealths for the settlements in Rhode Island, decided to go to England to seek a patent that would give the settlements a stronger claim to their lands than the deeds from the Indians. In England in 1644 he published his defense of religious freedom against the Massachusetts Bay authorities in his great classic, _The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution for the Cause of Conscience Discussed_. With the help of Sir Harry Vane he obtained from Parliament a patent authorizing the union of the four Rhode Island settlements under the name of "Providence Plantations." The patent empowered the inhabitants "to govern and rule themselves and such others as shall hereafter inhabit within any part of the said tract of land, by such a form of civil government as by voluntary consent of all or the greatest part of them, shall be found most serviceable in their estates and condition."

The citizens of the four towns met at Portsmouth in 1647 to form a federal commonwealth. In the preamble to their government they stated "the form of government established in Providence Plantations is Democratical, that is to say, a government held by the free and voluntary consent of all, or the greater part of the free inhabitants. They further declared:

These are the laws that concern all men, and these are the penalties for the transgressions thereof, which, by common consent, are ratified and established throughout the whole Colony. And otherwise than thus, what is herein forbidden, all men may walk as their consciences persuade them, every one in the name of his God. And let the saints of the Most High walk in this Colony without molestation, in the name of Jehovah their God, for ever and ever.

In 1650 they established a legislative assembly with strictly delimited powers. Religious liberty and separation of church and state were carefully guarded.

Sometime before 1648 a Baptist Church was formed in Newport with John Clarke as pastor. As early as 1640-41 there was great religious dissension in Newport. Coddington and Coggeshall held antinomian views. Clarke, Lenthal and Harding opposed them and may have adopted antipedobaptist views. Under Clarke's leadership they seem to have begun holding separate meetings in 1641. Later it was claimed that they organized a Baptist church in
1644. Samuel Hubbard, a well educated and spiritual man in Connecticut, embraced Baptist views and moved to Newport. He and his wife were received by baptism into the Newport church in November 1648. Two of Clarke's brothers, Thomas and Joseph, were among the early members of this church. William Weeden was the first deacon and Mark Lukar, a Baptist from England, was the first "ruling elder."

Clarke and some of his followers, on hearing of a Baptist meeting at Seekonk, Massachusetts, led by Obadian Holmens, visited Seekonk for preaching and to administer baptism. The meeting was broken up by the authorities and most of the members moved to Newport.

In the summer of 1651 Clarke, Obadian Holmes from Seekonk, and John Crandall, a deputy from Newport in the Rhode Island General Court, journeyed to the home of an aged Baptist in Swamspcott, Massachusetts. While conducting worship they were arrested by the constables and forced to attend the services of the Puritan church. They refused to participate in the services and Clarke gave a defense of his Baptist principles. They were imprisoned, tried in the court, and sentenced to heavy fines or severe flogging. Anonymous friends paid the fines of Clarke and Crandall. Holmes refused any help and received thirty strokes of the lash.

In 1651 Roger Williams and John Clarke were sent to England to secure a charter for the colony, whose peace was disturbed by Coddington and which was still threatened by the Holy Commonwealths. While in England Williams published his reply to Cotton in The Blody Tenent Yet More Bloudy. Cotton had defended himself and Massachusetts against Williams' first attack in 1647 in a work entitled The Blody Tenent Washed and Made White in the Bloud of the Lambe. Clarke published his Till Newes from New England in which he described the persecution they had endured in Massachusetts.

Williams returned to Rhode Island in 1654 to find the colony greatly troubled internally and externally. He accepted the presidency of the colony although he was tired and in poor health. In 1655 he received a letter from Oliver Cromwell urging him to take whatever measures were necessary to insure peace and safety in the plantation. Coddington submitted to the authority of the colony. Williams retired from the presidency in 1657. Clarke had continued in England working to secure the charter.

In 1659 John Winthrop, Jr., and men from Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island formed a land company and purchased land in northern Narragansett threatening the Plymouth Plantation. When Charles II came to the throne Clarke worked to secure a royal patent. Winthrop and the Holy Commonwealths sought to block the royal recognition. In spite of their efforts on July 8, 1663, Clarke gained a royal charter that included guarantees of freedom of conscience:
No person within the said Colony, at any time hereafter, shall be in any wise molested, punished, disquieted or called in question, for any differences in opinions in matters of religion, for do not actually disturb the civil peace of our said Colony; but that all may from time to time, and at all times hereafter, freely and fully have and enjoy his and their own judgments and consciences, in matters of religious concerns. . .not using this liberty to licentiousness and profaneness, nor to the civil injury or outward disturbance of others.

Dr. Clarke returned to Newport where he continued to serve as pastor of the Baptist Church until his death in 1676.

THE BAPTISTS IN PROVIDENCE

Thomas Olney became the leader of the Baptists in Providence after the withdrawal of Williams from the church. He was a Calvinist. His leading laymen were Arminian General Baptists, who believed that the laying on of hands was an apostolic practice requisite to the reception of the Holy Spirit and necessary for church fellowship. Controversy broke in Providence in 1652 over the differences between Olney and his "five principle" Calvinistic Baptists and the Arminian "Six Principle Baptists." They drew their six principles from Hebrews 6:1-2: repentance, faith, baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment." Williams sided with the Arminians. Olney ministered to his group which was the minority until his death in 1682. Their number dwindled and they ceased to exist about 1720.

The Six Principle Arminian Baptists continued as the original church. In 1700 they built a meeting house. When Rhode Island College, which was founded in 1764 in Warren, was moved to Providence, in 1770, President James Manning became pastor of the church and brought it back to Calvinistic principles. He led the church into the Warren Association which he had helped form in 1767—an association of Calvinistic Baptists. Baptist Churches had been springing up throughout the colonies, championing the separation of Church and State and religious tolerance.