

## All are Safely Gathered In, Let the Winter Storms Begin

Thanksgiving is all about sacrifice, and remembering the early settlers of this country—a religious community that barely survived. While these are very fine principles and worthy memories, they make forbidding topics for a movie. In fact, I don't think I've seen a movie about Pilgrims ever (elementary school film strips don't count), and I'll be you haven't either. So let's go ahead and celebrate Thanksgiving with a story that takes place a couple of centuries later.

*Friendly Persuasion* is also about sacrifice in a religious community, and set at time when the country's future was in peril; but in this case, the sacrifices are personal and ethical matters rather than distribution of tiny bits of grain, the religious community is composed of the moderate Quakers rather than firebrand Pilgrims, and the crisis is the inherently dramatic Civil War rather than phantasmal disease and starvation.

The movie takes a time establishing family and community relationships and poses various minor conflicts that foreshadow the big

one; but the major theme of the movie is the compromise. Every member of the Birdwell family is forced to give up some aspect of themselves that is key to their self-conception. For example, the patriarch makes a show of defying his wife, Eliza, and installing an organ in their house (she thinks it will threaten her standing as a Quaker minister), but joins her voluntary exile in the barn and agrees to her terms for keeping and playing it. Their daughter's vanity is injured when her would-be boyfriend overhears her rapturous description of him, but when she realizes he is returning to service with the Union Army she runs to him and cops to it all.

The most anguishing compromise is that of the eldest son, Joshua, who is disciplined enough to let bullies abuse him at a county fair, but cannot stand by while others fight and die in the service of principles he shares. The community pressure, both for and against his enlistment, is enormous. In one striking scene, an army recruitment officer enjoins the Quaker men to sign up with the local militia. He is rebuffed by Eliza and the elders in the congregation, but as her son watches him leave, he hears both her prayers for the continuance of pacifism and the tap of the officer's cane—evidently the result of battlefield injuries. The decision he has to make seems either to be between two equal goods—pacifism or the vigorous fight against slavery (the Birdwells employ an escaped slave, so the matter is close to home) and defense of their homes, or equal evils—shirking duty while profiting from the efforts of others and, well, killing people.

That conflict is handled with all the respect it deserves, even though there was a “now you've gone too far” Death Wish impulse of the part of a certain cast member that the author of the collection of stories upon which *Friendly Persuasion* was based had to veto. And if the above does not convince you that this is an ideal Thanksgiving's Day movie, perhaps the saturation of autumnal colors will sway you. Either way, rent this film. 🍁

