***Epiphany 4***

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Some of you might have seen the movie titled, *Sully: Miracle on the Hudson*. Produced in 2016, it was directed by Clint Eastwood and starred, Tom Hanks. The movie detailed the before and after events of the 2009, historic landing of US Airways Flight 1549, by Captain Chesley, “Sully” Sullenberger and First Officer Jeff Skiles.

Just three minutes into the flight from LaGuardia Airport to Charlotte Douglas International Airport, at an altitude of 2,800 ft. the Airplus A320 struck a flock of birds, damaging both engines. Without much time to think, Sullenberger and Skiles judged themselves unable to reach nearby airports and Sully ditched the aircraft on the Hudson River. After months and months of investigation, it was determined by the Federal Aviation Administration that Sullenberger had indeed, made the right decision. It was a decision that effectively resulted in no loss of life.

Sullenberger said of that day,” the moments before the ditching were "the worst sickening, pit-of-your-stomach, falling-through-the-floor feeling" that he had ever experienced. He also said: "One way of looking at this might be that for 42 years, I've been making small, regular deposits in this bank of experience, education and training. And on January 15, the balance was sufficient so that I could make a very large withdrawal.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

While Sully is hailed as a hero, make no mistake. The work that happened that day to save the lives of all the people on the plane, was the work of many people, the captain and crew, the ferry boat captains and first responders brought their very best, so formed in their understanding of their purpose and call, there was no flailing about or reservation. They lived into their full humanity and gave their best in a situation of extraordinary danger, fear and heightened anxiety. They did not retreat but moved into the situation with clarity, determination and perseverance.

I use this story today as we begin to think about our individual lives in faith. I can’t help but think that this is precisely what life in the Spirit looks like. It’s a life that is guided by years of formation and dedication as followers of Jesus, of discernment and disciplined faith practices of worship, prayer, community, spiritual practices that root us so decisively in Christ, that we are able to stay the course throughout any situation that presents itself. Jesus himself, gives us an example of what this looks like, as he faces a mob that is gathered in today’s Gospel lesson.

Jesus has just returned to his hometown. The people are gathered and he is teaching with great clarity and purpose. At one point he is hailed and celebrated, as the question is raised, “Is this not Jesus the son of Joseph?” They are astounded by his teachings and by all indications the people know him.

It is at that point the lesson takes a very pronounced shift. While they know him, Jesus did not come for a pleasant visit to be hailed as the hometown boy, rather, Jesus seeks to help them come to a new understanding of God and God’s inclusiveness of all people.

By recalling the God of the Hebrew Scriptures who sends his prophets to save the gentiles as well as the Jews, he confronts them with a God that there Jewish practices deny. Jesus tells them that Elijah was sent to the widow, Zarephath in Sidon, and Elisha was sent to Naaman the Syrian leper, both Gentiles. Those present, the Scribes, Pharisees and Jewish community, cannot escape these truths, but stating them, Jesus angers the crowd. Jesus’ decision to call up these words from the prophets was not a mistake. He knew what he was doing, not as Jesus the son of Joseph, but as Jesus the Son of God, and with that came much responsibility in proclaiming the Good News of God’s love, to all people.

Even in the face of the anxiety of the people, Jesus holds fast to his guiding principles. So formed in his identity as the Son of God, in his faith and love for God, he will not be swayed or moved to retreat. The gospel lesson tells us that the people got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. 30But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.Jesus “passed through the midst of them and went on his way.”

Both Jesus and Sully were faced with life-or-death situations, but both continued to stay the course. So formed and dedicated to their purposes and calls, they knew the way forward, regardless of the risks, and continued on their journey. If either of the events had ended differently, Jesus being thrown off the cliff, or the plane crashing and leaving no survivors, both had given their best from a place of authenticity and dedication, living into who they understood themselves to be, prepared for their life’s work. With clarity and determination, both of them faced the reality of their situations and moved forward, not only for themselves but for the world they were called to serve.

Sometimes when we are in the midst of our own anxiety or the anxiety of others, we might find ourselves wanting to retreat or even stuck not knowing what to do. But let’s think for a moment about the resources we have to be our best selves in the midst of all the anxiety that surrounds us these days. How might faith inform us?

Through our worship, prayer, spiritual practices and disciplines that keep us grounded in who we are and in whose we are, and through our gathered community of faith that supports us, we can draw strength and courage in whatever we face and rest in the assurance of God’s abiding presence and grace, even when we don’t get things right. God doesn’t call us to be perfect. God calls us to be faithful and when we give our best, our time, our talents, our treasures, and our very best authentic selves, God blesses us and uses us to bless the lives of others. We may not know exactly how things are going to turn out when we start down the road of uncertainty before us, but rooted in faith, we can rest in the assurance that we are never alone, and the path forward in faith, leads us back to where we began, with a God who blesses both in our physical life on earth and in the promises of life eternal.

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sully\_Sullenberger [↑](#footnote-ref-1)