

John 15:1-16 (NIVBUK)

1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

5 I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

13 Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

14 You are my friends if you do what I command.

15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.

No Greater Love

January 17, 2010

Isaiah 52:1-6

John 15:1-17

SLIDE ONE: NO GREATER LOVE

One year ago yesterday, US Airways Flight 1549 took off from LaGuardia airport bound for Charlotte. While on its initial climb out, the Airbus A320 struck a flock of Canada Geese which resulted in an immediate loss of thrust from both engines. When the pilot, Captain Chesley A. (Sully) Sullenberger determined that the plane would be unable to safely reach any airfield from its location just northeast of the George Washington Bridge, he turned it southbound and ditched the airliner in the frigid waters on the Hudson river. All 155 passengers and crew were rescued by nearby watercraft. We all know by now that Captain Sullenberger not only landed (if

that's what you call a water ditching--a landing?)... his plane and kept it intact, but we know how he was the last person out of the plane, having walked through the cabin twice to see if there was anyone still there.

And what you may not know is that there was an American airlines first officer riding in first class, doing what pilots called a jump-seating.

#### SLIDE TWO: SUSAN O'DONNELL

Her name is Susan O'Donnell, and she was in uniform, commuting from New York to Charlotte to pick up her own flight. When the entire crew got rescued by a ferry and were taken to a dock in Manhattan, Captain Sullenberger asked her if she would like to go with the crew to a hotel, where she could get warm, get some clothes, and some food. She said she would like to be included with his crew, and would appreciate it. Then she told him that she was sorry, that she had no money to pay for the hotel or for food, for she had left her purse on the plane. Captain Sullenberger reached in his wallet, and whipped out a \$20 bill and gave it to her. "His concern for me when he had so much else to worry about was amazing".

#### SLIDE THREE: PILOTS AND CREW OF FLIGHT 1549

I am also thankful for the professionalism and capabilities of Captain Sullenberger (and the other members of the crew). They certainly did our profession proud, and they saved my life."

"Sixty Minutes" did a piece a few months back on Captain Sullenberger and the crew. They first arranged a meeting between many of the survivors and the crew in Charlotte, and then a piece on Captain Sullenberger and his family. Here is that report:

SIXTY MINUTE VIDEO –WHEN VIDEO ENDS PLEASE CLICK ON SLIDE FOUR...

#### SLIDE FOUR: CREW OF FLIGHT 1549

In a year of unremitting bad news, this is a story full of good news, of turning the worst into the best, of a group of people who were helpless, and were rescued by the heroism of their pilots, their flight crew, and those who steered their watercraft and pulled them out of the icy waters of the Hudson River.

#### SLIDE FIVE: NO GREATER LOVE

This story touches us as well because it is a gospel story. It reminds us of Jesus of Nazareth, who died on a cross and was raised by God on the third day. It reminds us that once upon a time he did for us something we could not do for ourselves. It reminds us of how much He loves each of us: "Greater love has no man than this, Jesus said, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

And then he incarnated those words by carrying his cross through the streets of Jerusalem to his place of execution just outside the city walls.

A friend of mine tells about his grandfather who had to go into a nursing home. "My

grandfather,” he said, “had a lot of respect for the chaplains and clergy who came to visit him as he sat in his nursing home bed, physically spiraling downhill. For he had come to see that there are some things that you can’t do for yourself, and that you need help from Beyond.”

Throughout the New Testament you see the disciples struggling to explain the meaning of the Cross. There is no consistent explanation, that is to say, no consensus about the meaning of the Cross. Paul admits in I Corinthians that the cross appears to be foolishness to the world. It is an absurdity. But to us who have been saved, Paul says, it is the power of God for our salvation.

Over the centuries the greatest theologians of the Christian church have had a go at it in explaining the meaning of the cross. They have posited all sorts of theories. There are at least five classic theories about the cross. They are called theories of atonement, atonement being one of those ten dollar theological words which means the effects of Jesus = death to redeem humankind.

All of these images of atonement are attempts to explain the inexplicable:

- whether it be that of a payment on our behalf of a debt which we could have never paid;
- or the bearing in our stead of a penalty that would have destroyed us;
- or the overcoming of demonic powers from whose thrall we could have never freed ourselves;

All these theories were trying to convey the bedrock truth at God in Jesus Christ did something to open for us a blessed future which had become otherwise impossible.

I once was in a class of young pastors and our task was to compose an Easter sermon to present to the class. All of us in the class tried to out-do one another in telling the story of the crucifixion and resurrection. I admit that I used some mighty highfalutin language in that sermon. Our teacher, a master preacher of the first-rate, said to all of us (but I thought particularly to me) “Boys!” (there were no women in the class) “Boys just tell the story. There is nothing you can say or do to improve it. Just tell the story.”

I think that what I was trying to do way- back- when is the challenge I find each Easter time when I am trying to write an Easter sermon. How can you find words big enough and profound enough to explain the most important truth in human history—that Jesus Christ is human face of God. That by his stripes we are healed. That in his death, we find our lives given back.

#### SLIDE 6: MOTHER TERESA

Every morning in her prayers Mother Teresa would take the fingers of one hand, and she would pray, “All this he did for me.” And in the evening, with the fingers of the other hand, she would ask herself, “What have I done for him today?”

#### SLIDE 7: SULLENBERGER & SKILES IN COCKPIT

On October 1<sup>st</sup> of last year Captain Sullenberger and First Officer Jeff Skiles were reunited. They climbed back into the into the cockpit of an A320 and with some passengers

aboard who were on that fateful January flight, took off for Charlotte. He never identified himself, nor did Skiles, but everybody aboard knew who their captain was.

Since I fly U.S. Airways on a regular basis, I was imagining the other day what it would be like for me to board a U.S. Airways flight, and we all get buckled in our seats and the flight attendant drones out her pre-flight ritual. Then, there is a pause, and there follows soft male voice, saying, "From the flight deck today, this is your Captain, Sully Sullenberger. Welcome aboard."

It would be electrifying for me for that to happen, to know that I was now in the safe hands on one who had already saved so many. And I know that during that flight I would recall the words of that 84 year old Holocaust survivor, whose daughter wrote Captain Sullenberger with the words: "To save a life is to save the world. You never know what the person you have saved or his or her prodigy will do to contribute to the peace and healing of the world."

I know that during that flight I would reflect on the most important truth I have ever received:

#### SLIDE 7: NO GREATER LOVE

On that good Friday long ago, my Lord reached out in love to save me, did something for me that I could never do for myself. That I am now and forever in his safe hands. But I am sure I would ask myself, "Given that, what am I doing for Him to contribute to the peace and healing of the world?"