

Ann Bonner-Stewart

Saint Mary's Episcopal Church, Newton, MA

Advent 4C; Primary Text: Luke 1:39-45

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On January 9, 2009, US Airways flight 1549 hit a flock of geese just after departing La Guardia. The engine failed. As the plane began to descend, Captain Sully asked his copilot for the QR, the Quick Reference guide. When pilots get into trouble, they are supposed to use the QR. For engine failures, the QR recommends to attempt to restart the engine. And yet apparently in 80% of cases of engine failure, the pilot did not attempt to restart the engine. In other words, 80% of pilots experiencing engine failure did not consult the QR.

They were probably freaking out in the midst of a crisis, which is both very understandable and also not helpful. The captain trusted the wisdom of others in crisis.

The Christmas story is a story about trust in a time of crisis. As we hear every year during this time of year, and as we heard last week in Spanish, Mary seems to have been just minding her own business when the angel Gabriel shows up to tell her she is going to become pregnant with the son of God. Mary being pregnant when she isn't married is a HUGE deal, a genuine crisis, the personal equivalent of running into a flock of geese in that day and age. Joseph, her fiance, had the legal—and biblical—right to have Mary killed—not something that's very Christmas cheery, but it's hard to understand this story without knowing that unsavory piece of the puzzle.

Though we have often been encouraged to think of our patron saint as being meek and mild, obedient and accepting, the adjective that would come to mind first, if all were right with the world, would be **brave**. She's brave in her ability to trust. She has the hutzpah to trust. And, Mary was really young—about middle school student's age. How did she do it? How was she able to tap into that courage to trust in such a stressful situation?

We pick up in Luke today right after Mary's found out that she's going to be the mother of God. And what does Mary do? She doesn't try to carry this weight alone; She also does not depend only on people who are at the same stage of life to help her carry it; She doesn't hide in fear and shame, afraid to tell anyone about this unbelievable thing that is happening to her. Mary doesn't go and see any of her friends, which is who I would have thought she would have gone to see. Mary doesn't go and stay with Joseph. Mary doesn't go talk to her mom or her dad. Mary goes and sees another adult in her life, an adult with whom she already has a relationship.

When young Mary has been thrown the ultimate curveball, she makes the decision to trust someone else, someone who could shun her, someone who could belittle her, someone who could shame her. Nonetheless Mary trusts. Maybe it's not quite as logic defying as Mary, but we tend to get sent down some twisty, kinda weird paths sometimes. Sometimes we choose them, intentionally or unintentionally. Sometimes we don't. Sometimes these detours are delightful, sometimes not so much. Maybe we are not aging the way we would have hoped. Maybe we enjoy most of what we are doing but when we add it all up together it becomes too much and thus less enjoyable in the aggregate. Maybe we are middle aged and wondering how halfway has already gotten here and if we should have more figured out by now.

I don't know what plans Mary had for her life, if any, but I am confident that the way her life ended up unfolding was absolutely not one of them. She's given every reason to say why me? And yet instead somehow she seems to continue to trust. Make no mistake— going to see Elizabeth is a leap of faith. We know from the text Mary knows that her aunt Elizabeth is pregnant. We don't know if Elizabeth already knows her young niece Mary is pregnant. And yet the graciousness and trust with which Elizabeth receives her niece is not too be discounted. Elizabeth extends Mary the benefit of the doubt. Elizabeth is also not mad at Mary for stealing her thunder. This vignette of a young niece going to see her elderly aunt and being received so compassionately is almost as incredible as the virgin birth.

Honestly, the trust just oozes throughout this entire chapter in a lovely way. I wonder if Mary is able to trust God because it seems like God trusts Mary first. God trusts a human to help bring God into the world. It seems like an enormously risky thing to do— the human track record is not pretty.

And yet.

God trusts Mary. It's sometimes said the true miracle in this story is not really the virgin birth. It's that Mary says yes. There's something to that. It's also that God trusts Mary even though humans have done God dirty plenty of times.

We have evolved to see the danger, the things that could get us. And that is great. It's a fantastic survival technique in some contexts. But we forget to see the things going right, the people we can trust, the people shining light. The inclination is to not trust, to not want to trust beyond ourselves. Because our trust has been violated so many times in so many ways. Our inclination is to not look at the manual, and no one hates referring to the Bible as a manual more than I do, believe me but I do believe there is great value in approaching the Bible as stories from our family tree, so the Bible as stories about our ancestors, our generations of faithful people responded and looked to in times of need.

God trusts you. Not that we're going to get it right all the time, because we're not. You won't. I don't. No one does. In fact, sometimes we get it horribly, terribly wrong. And yet God loves us so much that we still have the ability to make choices. And God delights in us when we are somehow able to respond in trust— by trusting enough like Mary to reaching out when we are scared and need someone to talk to. By trusting enough like Elizabeth did by giving someone the benefit of the doubt.

What might it be like to trust just a little bit more? Sometimes we have to be like Mary and go out and seek that help or companionship, not waiting for it just to appear to us. What if, like Mary, we do reach out to one person, someone you already know but may not be particularly close to? What would it feel like to talk about what's really on your heart and mind right now or in a time of confusion? Elizabeth didn't make the problem go away, did she? She supported Mary through it.

What would it feel like to be known, to be seen, to be heard, and still be loved? And if telling a person sounds like something you're not ready for yet, write a letter longhand on paper, pour your heart out, then burn it as an offering (safely in a fireplace). How does it change our perspectives to think that God trusts us some instead of being a Kris Kringle, watching to catch us doing something wrong? Or the Elf on the Shelf don't get me started on that. We like to talk about God loving us all the time. I don't have anyone in my life who loves me who doesn't trust me at least a little bit. Love requires a degree of trust.

Restarting the engine didn't work for Captain Sully. AND the attempts at to restart combined with fact that the plane wasn't has full of fuel has it could be used meant more buoyant so that when they emergency landed in the Hudson RiverHe trusted something beyond himself, everyone survived, with only 5 people injured, less than 3%.

God trusts us. What would it be like to trust just a little bit more?

Amen.