

“Two Ways to Fail”

Matthew 26:69-27:10

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • November 2, 2014

On April 11, 1970, the third manned trip to the moon launched from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. Two days into the trip, however, disaster struck Apollo 13 when an oxygen tank exploded, damaging the spacecraft and endangering the three astronauts. Back at NASA, engineers went to work trying to find a solution to the problem. In the movie *Apollo 13*, there's a scene where Gene Kranz, the flight director at Mission Control tells the engineers, "Failure is not an option." Thankfully, through sheer determination and ingenuity, they succeeded in bringing back the astronauts safely.

But we know that in life failure is not only an option it's an ever-present reality. Is there anyone here who has never experienced failure? We all have. Sometimes our failures are big and make news. Like the sinking of the unsinkable Titanic. But other times they are just regular, average failures. Here are some examples of others who have experienced some kind of failure. Last year in Beaver Creek, Ohio, a man walked into a bank intending to rob it. But he must have been nervous because he passed out. The teller called 911 for an ambulance but while waiting for the paramedics to arrive the man revived and handed the teller a note demanding money.

Here's another one. Craig Aylesworth got into an argument with a neighbor in his trailer park in Florida. He decided to throw a Molotov cocktail at his neighbor's trailer. But when he threw it the winds shifted he ended up burning down his own trailer, too. And here's my favorite. Mitchell Deslatte walked into a hotel in Baton Rouge and asked the clerk for a room. The problem was that it wasn't a hotel. It was the State Police headquarters. They did provide him a room, though. He was arrested for drunk driving.

Failure is not the issue, it's the way we respond to our failures. Some very successful

people have failed. Henry Ford had two failed automobile companies before he became successful with Ford Motor Company. Michael Jordan, perhaps the greatest basketball player of all time, was cut from his high school basketball team. He later said, "I have missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I have lost almost 300 games. On 26 occasions I have been entrusted to take the game winning shot, and I missed. I have failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."

In today's Scripture passage, Matthew shows us two ways to fail. He intends for us to read the stories of Jesus, Peter, and Judas and see the contrasts. As we heard last week, when Jesus was arrested Peter followed at a distance to the courtyard of the High Priest so he could see how things would end. While there a servant girl comes and says, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." Peter immediately lies and says, "I don't know what you're talking about." Just hours before he was adamant that he was willing to die with Jesus, that he would never deny him. Now he denies that he knows Jesus. Jesus is being questioned by powerful men and only tells the truth; Peter is questioned by a slave girl and lies.

Another servant girl saw Peter and said to the people standing there, "This an was with Jesus of Nazareth." This time Peter swears with an oath that he doesn't know Jesus. He's basically saying, "God is my witness that I don't know the man." Lies have a way of growing like that. We start with one small lie to protect ourselves. But then we must lie more and more to keep the truth from coming out. Most likely these servants were not trying to accuse Peter of anything. It seems to me that they were probably trying to find out what was going on and they figured Peter could tell them. And he could have. He missed an opportunity to tell them who Jesus really is.

When the third person asks Peter about

Jesus he begins to curse and swear, “I do not know the man.” The curse was him telling them where to go. Immediately the rooster crowed. Luke’s version of this story tells us that Jesus looked out at Peter at that moment. He had heard what Peter had said and now Peter knew it. And he remembered how Jesus had predicted “Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” Peter went out and cried uncontrollably. Peter failed because he wasn’t prepared to face temptation. He didn’t take advantage of the means of grace – Scripture, prayer, the Holy Spirit, and close friends. Instead, he trusted his own strength. He didn’t watch and pray. But he repented and went on to serve God in mighty ways.

Then Matthew tells us what happened to Judas. When he saw that Jesus was condemned to death he changed his mind and tried giving the money back to the chief priests. He was trying to buy back his conscience. He was apparently sorry for betraying Jesus. But he didn’t repent. He tried to handle the situation on his own instead of going to the Lord for forgiveness. But there was no way Judas could deal with his guilt on his own. There’s no way for you to deal with your guilt on your own. Many people today suffer terribly because they don’t take their guilt, their burdens to Christ. We live in a “self-help” society. We think the solutions to our problems can be found with Google or in books.

The only solution to the problem of our sin is Jesus. Trusting in Christ as your Lord and Savior is your only true source of hope. Judas ended up taking his own life out of despair. He could see no way out of his guilt yet he didn’t think he needed the Savior. But if he had sought forgiveness from Jesus he would have discovered the hope that comes with new life.

Like Peter and Judas, all of us will fail. You and I are prone to deny our Lord. Our society is becoming more and more hostile to the Christian faith. Do you let people know you’re a Christian or do you keep it a secret? We will all fail in our walk with Jesus. What matters most

is how you respond to that failure. When the failure comes and you realize what you’ve done, will you run *from* Christ, like Judas? Or will you run *to* Jesus, like Peter?

Finally, we need to learn from Peter’s mistake. Peter wasn’t prepared to handle the temptation to sin. So how do we prepare ourselves to resist temptation? There are four things we can do that will help. First, worshiping every week keeps us focused on Christ and not on ourselves. We are transformed by hearing the Word of God, by prayer, and by being together. The practice of giving of our time and money in worship teaches us to trust in God in all things. Second, reading and studying our Bibles prepares us for the challenges we will face. We face them knowing God’s will in each situation. Third, connecting with other Christians can help us resist the temptation to sin. If some of the other disciples would have been with Peter in the courtyard he would have been less likely to deny that he knew Jesus. In the same way, spending time with other believers can help strengthen our faith and resolve. And fourth, we grow in our faith by serving others. When we are focused on someone else’s needs we are less likely to think about our own desires. That’s why mission trips are so life-changing for the people who go. In serving others who can do nothing for you in return, you encounter the Lord Jesus who said, “I came to serve, not to be served.”

We learn from the Bible that Jesus restored Peter. His failure was not the end of his usefulness to God. In many ways it was the beginning of his real usefulness. He goes on to be a leader in the early church and an author of Scripture. It’s God’s nature to restore. He can restore you. He can forgive your sins. He can transform your life. He can break addictions and heal relationships. Like Peter, once we realize that we are broken we then become useful to God. For the believer, failure is never the final word.

Amen.