



April 22, 2007

Failure

Have you ever really wanted to do something or achieve something special? If so you probably prepared yourself to get it or attain it. As a teenager I really can't think of anything I wanted to do more than win a league section and state title in basketball. Much of that desire came out of my freshman year. I was a big tall awkward kid who barely made the team. I was picked on quite a bit and as a result there was a definite desire to personally get better and well, you know, show those guys. Then there was the precedence. Bishop High always won after all we were the mighty broncos. So when we finished in 3rd place suffering a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Tehachapi Warriors in our last game, a defeat that was even on our own home floor, a defeat complete with all the taunting, heckling and finger pointing. Well, I know that much of our team including myself said, "never again." In fact, to show that we were serious in our goal to hold every title we made it our goal to, by the next year, go undefeated in league, and you know what? This isn't the great American dream story, the next year we lost a game to the lowly Mohave Mustangs. In our senior year we lost in a game one short of our goal. A lot of people want to say, "Oh that's close." But I know how we looked at it; we called it "failure." What is interesting is that I notice something about my response to failure, those many years back as I prepared my sermon this past week. My response way back then even was biblical. "Biblical?" you might ask. Yeah, biblical, I went back to the beginning, after the failures I always ended up on the driveway with my basketball and the basketball hoop. It was familiar, it was home, it was sanctuary, and it was comfortable. Biblical? Yes.

Look at our gospel this morning. Where were the disciples? The Sea of Galilee, they are no longer in Jerusalem they've gone home they've gone back to the beginning probably feeling like

failures. In fact, Peter, the one who said in Matthew 26:33, “even if all fall away on account of you I never will.” When he said that Jesus told him, “Before the rooster crows you will deny me three times.” Peter’s response, “even if I have to die with you I will never disown you.” By the way, we often forget the second half of that verse where it says, “and all the disciples said the same.” It wasn’t just Peter who said he would never leave the Lord all of them said it. No wonder they had gone back home. You see, they felt like failures and so it is that Peter says in verse 3 of our gospel this morning, “I’m going out to fish”, and the rest of the disciples said, “We’ll go with you.” Basically they’re saying, “We failed as disciples lets go back to the beginning lets go back to what’s comfortable, lets go fishing.” Little did they realize Jesus was also saying, “Yes lets go back to the beginning.” The very beginning when Jesus first called, Peter, James and John. He met them after they had been fishing all night while they mended nets He preached. Then He told them to go out to the deep water and let down the nets. They doubted but they did it and they caught a boatload of fish. Remember the response? Peter said, “Go away from me Lord I am a sinful man.” Christ’s response, basically you ain’t seen nothing yet Peter, “I will make you fishers of men.”

And so we go back to our gospel we find Jesus walking along the beach. He sees the disciples out in a boat in the early morning hours, kind of like at the very beginning. They’ve caught nothing, kind of like the very beginning. Jesus calls out to them and says, “Friends haven’t you any fish?” Let me tell you that’s a really rough question for a fisherman, especially a good one. The standard response of a fisherman will come in one of two ways when faced with a question on a poor fishing outing. The first possible response, the one that is most highly employed, boldly lie, “Oh yeah I’ve been knocking them dead, only problem is they’ve been too big to fit in the frying pan! So I had to throw them all back, that’s why you don’t see any here.” The second, this is usually employed the fisherman who are a little older and wiser, “Not yet but I just started I’ll have plenty in just a bit, you’ll see.” By the disciples response we could see how dejected they truly feel. Their answer to the question, “no”. This is an amazing breach in fishing protocol but it is also total truth. They have no egos to protect or inflate they were failures as disciples now they’re failures as fishermen.

Jesus tells them, “throw your nets over the right side of the boat.” They do it, perhaps remembering the first event, perhaps they

were just willing to try anything but they catch a boatload again.” John says, “It’s the Lord! Peter puts on his clothes, dives in the water and swims to meet Jesus. Now you might ask a question, “Peter why did you put on your outer garment and everything and jump in and swim to Jesus, it would have been faster to just jump in and go.” You must be clothed to do a proper respectful religious greeting in Hebrew culture. Peter hears John say, “It’s the Lord!” He’s going to greet Him and he’s going to greet Him correctly with all his clothes on.

So Peter gets there and the others bring the boat in and they sit down to eat and Jesus then begins a dialogue with Peter. He asks Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?” Notice He does not call him Peter, which means the “rock”. Peter hadn’t been a rock, Jesus doesn’t berate him but He also doesn’t call him what he is not. We also notice He takes Peter back, back to Maundy Thursday when He said that he would love Jesus more than all of these. So Jesus asks him, “Son of John do you truly love me more than these?” Now again, we have to understand that question because it involves the word love. In English we have the word love, in Greek, a much more specific language, there are three words for love. There is Eros, which is physical love from which we get the word erotic, there’s Phileo which is brotherly love like the city of Philadelphia, back to my basketball team you know what I had phileo for the guys on my team, I really liked them they were nice guys, then there is Agape unconditional self sacrificing love.

Jesus asks Peter, “Do you truly agape love me more than these?” Peter’s response, “yes Lord you know that I phileo you.” I really like you. Christ’s response, “feed my lambs.” A little while later he asks him again, “Simon son of John do you truly agape me.” “Yes Lord you know that I phileo you.” “Take care of my sheep.” Third time, “Simon son of John do you agape love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him a third time. And about this time I think Peter gets it because he says, “Lord you know all things, you know that I agape love you.” Peter is back to the beginning back to loving Jesus with all his heart, soul and mind and Jesus says, “feed my sheep, I tell you the truth when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted but when you are old you will stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go. Follow me.”

Jesus restores Peter, he’s called to follow Jesus yet, Jesus is going to leave shortly so how can Peter follow him? Think pack to

Easter; think back to the command that we looked at last week. Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me so I am sending you." When Jesus says follow me he's saying follow in my footsteps I followed my Father's will I followed my Father's purpose, follow me by following God's plan for you Peter.

I think we are often like the disciples we come to church and we're in the presence of God and surrounded by other believers and we feel bold, I'm going to do it I'm going to live for Jesus. Then we get away from church and it's hard and we fail and well, we like, the disciples, go back to the comfortable place that lifestyle which we are used to. I bet we all can remember a time when we were young in faith we didn't have a doubt or a care in the world when it came to it. Jesus wants to meet you back there he wants to start all over with that child-like faith. He's saying, "Lets' do this again follow me give your life to me feed my sheep." The disciples did will you?

In our Savior's name, Amen.