

## **The Difference Between Success And Failure**

**Luke 5:1-11**

**Preached by Rev Dr. Harry Cahill**

**Babcock Presbyterian Church**

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Life is a series of ups and downs. Sometimes you find yourself on the highest mountain, other times in the lowest valley. This is true of everybody.

No one escapes the roller coaster ride we call life.

Someone once said you're not a failure if you fail, but you're a failure if you quit. It's so easy to get overwhelmed when despite doing everything right, to the best of your abilities, it all comes crashing down, especially because of circumstances beyond your control, but let's be very honest, sometimes we fail because we cut corners or maybe our vision for success is outside God's will. Then we need to acknowledge and correct our error and discern how to get back on track. Otherwise we set ourselves up for more disappointment and frustration.

One lesson I hope we all take from today's sermon is this: failure is not necessarily something to be ashamed of. In fact failure can lead to not only a successful life, but more importantly a significant life.

Listen to some of the great men who themselves experienced the pain of failure.

Ralph Waldo Emerson: "It is defeat which educates us."

Herman Melville: "He who has never failed cannot be great. Failure is the true test of greatness."

A Japanese proverb: Failure is not the worst thing in the world, the worst is not to try.

And finally, Oswald Chambers: "Jesus Christ's life was an absolute failure from every standpoint but God's.

Here's a question to ponder:

What would happen if everyone who ever failed quit before they even got started?

When Pavarotti, the great tenor, took his first voice lesson, his instructor told him he was hopeless.

Walt Disney was fired from his first job as a newspaper cartoonist because his boss told him he had no imagination.

Woody Allen flunked his first motion picture course at New York University.

We tend to forget Babe Ruth struck out more times than he hit the ball, let alone hit home runs and Thomas Edison once revealed that 80% of his experiments ended in failure.

Which leads to my point. Your life and my life contains a secession of both successes and failures. Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose, sometimes you get rained out, but you never quit.

Winston Churchill, when he was sixty five years old, was labeled a has-been. He had many successes in life, but he also masterminded several colossal failures. Some of his friends didn't want to be seen in public with him. And then in 1940 he was selected to be England's Prime Minister after Hitler conquered most of Europe. Five years later he led England to victory, only to be defeated several weeks later in the general election in 1945. Soon after his electoral defeat, Churchill was asked to give a speech at Harrow, the school he attended when he was a boy. He was introduced by the school's headmaster, who reminded the boys how Mr. Churchill had a long and exciting life of both ups and downs, successes and failures. Then Churchill got up to speak. He said, "**Boys, always remember this; Never, never, never, never, never, never, never quit.**" Then he sat down.

Churchill's point: when you believe in your heart of hearts your cause is good and sacred, don't ever be discouraged. You are sure to experience failure, but in the end you will meet success and you will feel reaffirmed as a child of God.

But sometimes it's wise to quit if what you are doing is not what God wants you to do. Someone once said the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and getting the same negative results. That's when you need to ask God what he wants you to do, instead of what you want to do, because, you see, what God wants and what you want are not always the same thing.

I once met a man in his early 70's who was an Episcopalian priest. John was past retirement age, but his ministry was just beginning. You see, John went to seminary when he was in his early 60's when most people are looking forward to retirement. He told me his story. When he was a young man he sensed the call to go into the ministry. He had the nagging urge to go to seminary and answer God's call to be a priest. The people around him, his family, his friends, his pastor all recognized his calling. But John didn't want to be a priest. He didn't want to work in a church. He didn't want the lifestyle, so like Jonah, John tried to run away from God. He became a business man, and he was very "**successful.**" He made lots of money, married a wonderful woman and had a nice family. Everyone who knew John thought he had it made. But deep down John was miserable. He drank too much, hoping to deaden his inner pain. He never enjoyed his work, he couldn't enjoy his life. He saw himself as a failure.

Then one day, when he didn't think he could take it anymore he began to pray. For years, he didn't pray very much because he was afraid to pray. Maybe if he didn't talk to God, God wouldn't remind him that God wanted him to be a priest. But on this bleak day of despair and frustration John broke down. "**Help me Lord, show me the way.**"

That was John's new beginning. He left his successful but sad life behind and with his wife's blessing and support he went to seminary, got ordained at an age when most people retire and began his new career as a priest with the Episcopal Church. By the time I met John he was one of the most happy, fulfilled and loving person I ever had the pleasure of meeting. He was a pastor's pastor, a great human being and disciple of Jesus Christ.

In both Bible passages today, we hear two stories of two men who were called into God's service. Both Isaiah and Peter responded immediately with a strong "yes" after working through their failures as human beings. That is, both admitted they were sinners. The word sin comes from the phrase "**missing the mark.**" All of us, without God's help and grace, fail to live up to God's standards. But even when we fail, God promises that with his help and by his grace we will succeed.

Let's look at Peter's life as an example for all of us. After reading Luke's story, I wondered how successful was Peter as a fisherman? According to the gospels, he lived with his mother-in-law. Maybe he couldn't make it on his own. And then, we see Peter blustery and defensive in the morning after a failed attempt to bring in at least a respectable catch of fish. Jesus came to Peter when he was in a terrible slump. Nevertheless, Jesus wanted Peter to be one of his inner circle. "**Follow me and I will make you fishers of men and women.**"

During his three years with Jesus, Peter had his successes, but also some colossal failures. Sometimes he pleased Jesus, other times he irked Jesus. But his biggest failure came on the day Jesus was crucified, a failure he would never forget. Soon after bragging to Jesus he would always bravely stand with him, Peter, filled with fear, denied Jesus three times and then ran for his life leaving Jesus to die alone. Peter wept bitterly, but unlike Judas, at least he didn't quit. God still loved Peter, and had a plan for his life. Soon after Easter morning Jesus forgave Peter. Fifty days later on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit empowered Peter to take Jesus' place as the leader of the new church. You see, God especially loves failures because God can see deep within our hearts and see our fullest potential.

There have been days, and there will still be days when you and I, and some people around us will see us as terrible failures. The temptation will come to hate yourself, call yourself a loser and beat yourself up for a long time. When that times comes, and it will come again sooner than you think, remember what Mother Teresa of Calcutta said, "**God has not called me to be successful, he has called me to be faithful.**"

Very few of us achieve the professional success of a Pavarotti, a Walt Disney or a Winston Churchill, but all of us can be faithful, like my friend John, the Episcopal priest, who after almost a lifetime of running away from God, finally, in desperation cried out, "**Help me Lord, show me the way.**" When you invite Jesus into your life to help you and show you the way, when you do, not what you want, but what God wants, you will be successful, maybe not by the world's standards, but certainly in Jesus' eyes, you will become the man or the woman God wants you to be.

So, admit your failure, call on God for forgiveness, trust that he loves you and that with his help and by his grace your life will be filled with purpose, joy, love and success, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let us pray!