

AN INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP
“FOLLOW YOUR FAILURES”
John 21: 15-19

Dr. J. Howard Olds
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Some people say life is like an ice cream cone. The moment you think you have it licked, it drips on you! Regrets? I have had a few, how about you? Mistakes? I have made my share, how about you? When it comes to faults and failures, how can we find our way through? That is what I want us to think about today on our way to Holy Communion.

FAILURE IS CERTAIN

We catch up with Simon Peter today, back in Galilee. He is fishing and catching nothing. The same Peter who saw the empty tomb first-hand and encountered the risen Christ in person is now back where he started.

What is it about the human personality that drives us into isolation when we miss the mark of our high calling? When Adam ate the apple, he went into hiding. When God called Jonah, he runs right into the belly of a whale. The prodigal finds himself feeding pigs and no one gave him anything. Peter deals with his denial by going fishing.

For a long time, I thought that everybody who dropped out of church was mad at me or somebody like me. Occasionally, people do get their feelings hurt. I do blow it from time to time. A great reason for church drop-outs is that disciples blow it. Like Peter, they start their Christian walk with high hopes. However, their reach exceeds their grasp. Practice proves to be much harder than profession. God has a way of wanting to transform our whole lives. Sometimes it all gets to be too much. As a lady once told me, “I couldn’t keep listening to you preach on Sunday and still sleep with my boss on Thursday. So it just seemed easier to stop coming to church.”

If you are feeling all alone in your sinfulness today, hear this word from Romans 3:23, *“All sin and all fall short of the glory of God.”* *“There is none righteousness, no not one”* (Romans 3:10). *“We err and stray from God’s ways like lost sheep. We follow too much the devices and desires of our own hearts”* (Isaiah 53:6). People who pray like that are my kind of people.

Why do we fail? The reasons are as numerous as the sands of the seas. But a few seem all too common.

Power intoxicates us. Peter was a natural born leader. He thought he could walk on water and never hesitated when it came to jumping out of the boat. Here is the point. Our strengths can become our greatest weaknesses. If we think the devil only knows what we cannot do, we are badly mistaken. He wants our strengths for his evil glory.

Pride blinds us. The last time Jesus and Peter shared a meal together, it was in the upper room. Jesus was talking about self-denial, service, and sacrifice. Jesus wonders out loud if the disciples have what it takes to take it. Peter responds, *“even if all fall away, I will not!”* Oh, what false notions we come to hold about ourselves. Coasting down some highway, we believe ourselves to be powerful 8-cylinder disciples only to discover on the next hill, we are a pattering 4-cylinder at best.

Pressure tests us. The campfire by the sea had to remind Peter of another campfire in the courtyard. For there, warming himself by the fire, Peter denied his Lord. Some folks say there was a woman to blame, but Peter knew it was his own darn fault. Temptations are real. Temptations are strong. Temptations are bound to come along.

GRACE IS AVAILABLE

The Bible that calls us all sinners goes to great lengths to convince us that we are still savable. Is that not what the whole drama of salvation history means?

“God so loved the world that he gave his only son.” Why? Because you are worth it. *“Where sin abounds, grace super abounds.”* Why? Because you deserve to be set free. Max Lucado tells the story about his 4-year-old, Jenna. Jenna confessed that she wrote on the wall with a crayon. Trying to be a wise father, Max took Jenna up in his lap and asked, “Is that a good thing to do?” Through her tears, Jenna replied, “No.” “What does daddy do when you write on the wall?” Max inquired. “Spank me,” sobbed Jenna. “What do you think daddy should do this time?” “Love me.”

Is that not what happens here by the sea? Jesus loves Peter anyway. He could have said, “I told you so.” “Let this be a lesson to you.” “I don’t want this to ever happen again.” But instead, Jesus fixes breakfast and loves Peter with a love that will not end. That is what grace is about.

Grace does not cure all our cancers, correct all our faults, transform us into greater success, or even guarantee that we will get it right the next time around. Grace is the gracious hand of a loving God reaching out to his own saying, “Could we start again, please, could we start again?” Grace is God Almighty saying, “I love you anyway.” Grace fits faulty people.

RESTORATION IS POSSIBLE

I have a brother-in-law who dropped out of college after one year, and spent most of his life climbing poles and stringing cable for the telephone company. He made a decent living for his family, but his passion was never with the telephone company. He eventually had a heart attack which forced him into early retirement. In that vulnerable, weakened, threatened state of existence, Bob discovered his real joy. He started restoring things.

He took old furniture from our grandparents’ house, and restored it, turning it into a fine antique treasure. He found an old 1933 Auburn automobile in his father’s barn that had not been used in 40 years. With great patience, tender care and more persistence than a mouse after cheese, he took the car apart piece

by piece, then put the car back together again. Now he travels around the country to antique car shows, demonstrating his restoration.

If people can restore old cars and beat up furniture, making them look like new, can you even begin to imagine what God can do for you?

Restore - it is one of our finest words. It means to reconstruct, rejuvenate, repair, refresh, renew, revitalize, reinstall, reinstate. Remember how it is stated in the world's most favorite Psalm, "*He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.*" The church is not a museum for saints. It is a hospital for sinners. It is a place for people who have messed up, fallen short, done wrong, need help. It is a place for people like you and me!

On this day when we share the Lord's Supper, as we break the bread and receive the cup, let us take seriously these words, "In the name of Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven." Thanks be to God. Amen.