

Rev. Beth Anderson

Bermuda Hundred UMC

Love Does Sermon Series

Psalm 46

John 21:15-19

“Free to Fail”

Children’s moment—light bulb

### **Thomas Edison**

Thomas Edison was both hearing impaired and fidgety. He only lasted three months in school where his teachers said he was "too stupid to learn anything." He eventually was home schooled by his mom. In talking about his invention of the light bulb, he said:

*“I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that do not work.” - Thomas Edison*

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Today in our Gospel lesson we hear Jesus ask Peter- Do You love me?

Then Feed by sheep.

Jesus even repeats it several times....

Jesus then makes Peter the foundation – the rock upon which he will build His church.

Why Peter?

Because Peter knows what it means to fail.

He’s messed up over and over again.

And that... makes Peter – perfect for the job of being the Rock upon which Jesus will build His church.

That sounds kind of backwards doesn't it?

Wouldn't you want to hire someone who has shown success?

In most job interviews they usually ask what are your strengths and then they'll ask what are your weaknesses?

When working with our Annual Conference on interviewing potential church planters—we asked – “Tell me about a time when something didn't work out the way you hoped.”

You learn a great deal about someone by the way they handle failure.

If our worth is based in the love of Jesus Christ—we aren't measured by whether we succeed or fail.

But the world tells us our worth is measured by how many rungs on the ladder we've climbed, how much money we've accumulated, how many likes our status receives on Facebook...

//The church is not successful= by the world's measure.

The goal of grace is to love those who don't deserve it—that doesn't meet the world's standard of earning success.

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Jesus asks Peter- do you love me?

Do you love me more than ---- fill in the blanks.....

Do you love me more than what other people think?

Do you love me more than fear of messing up?

Do you love me more?

Peter has struggled to put his whole trust in Jesus-

Matthew 14- Jesus walks on water and calls Peter to him- "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

And Peter walks out to him. And he walks on water with Jesus.

We often take note that Peter took his eyes off Jesus and that's when he began to sink. Scripture says, "Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord save me!'"

Peter may have still been looking at Jesus- but he also saw the wind billowing.

The wind would mean failure.

Would the wind knock him down? Could he drown?

*----What is the worst that could happen?*

He would sink...

But the moment he began to sink—he called to Jesus and was saved.

Can we see the wind coming and see Jesus at the same time?

In Matthew 16 – Peter proudly confesses who Jesus is- he is the Christ- the Son of the living God – but when Jesus tells Peter what it means that he must suffer and die—Peter says—"Never Lord- This shall never happen to you." Jesus had just told Peter that he would give him the keys of the kingdom of heaven and now Jesus says, "Get behind me Satan. You are a stumbling block to me, you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Peter struggles –suffering, dying, sacrifice—this is all not the path of success

Take over, ruling, over throwing—wouldn't that be the way to win?

Jesus has a different way.

In John's Gospel chapter 18 Peter is really a mess—when Jesus is arrested. He pulls out a sword and cuts off the right ear of the high priests servant, Malchus.

What was Peter even doing bring a sword?

Peter denies knowing Jesus three times. Even denying him in front of a relative of the man whose ear he had cut.

Peter fails.

Over and over again.

Not only Peter- but the bible is filled with stories of people who failed.

But here's the thing we forget—it wasn't the end of the world.

Failure never means losing--- at least not in the sense we're used to believing.

The only thing we need to lose is our self.

Our ego, our plans, and most of all our fear of failing.

Peter was so afraid of losing Jesus- that he failed at serving Jesus faithfully.

Church- Do you love Jesus?

What does it mean to love Jesus?

It means to feed His sheep.

Will we mess up? Yes.

Yes- we will fail –sheep will wander-

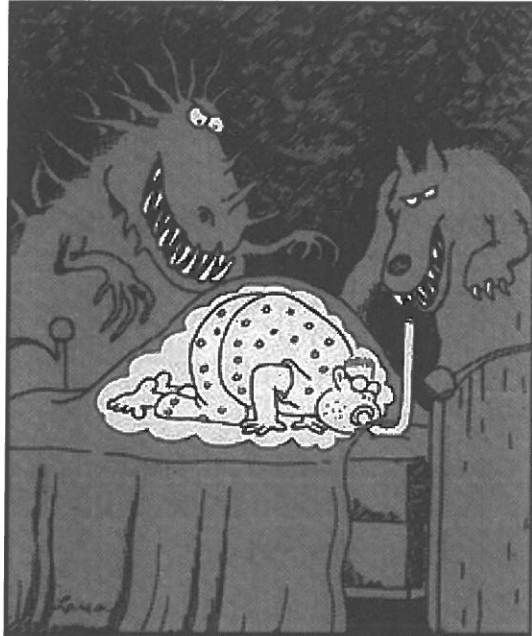
But then we go looking and searching.

We feed all the sheep- the 99 and the one who goes missing.

We can't let fear paralyze us.

That's when we get stuck—that's when we start to sink.

Take a look here at this Far Side cartoon—It's the monster snorkel—it allows you to stay comfortably hidden under the covers without any of your vulnerable parts risking attack.



The monster snorkel: Allows your child to breathe comfortably without exposing vulnerable parts to an attack.

Would we rather stay comfortable and hide where it's safe- with a dream of what we think is perfect-- but we're too afraid to risk losing perfection?

Are we too afraid of failing?

If we are vulnerable enough to admit that we know we'll mess up—but we're willing to try- that is courage...

And faith is knowing that *when we do fail* down we'll have God with us.

Too often we don't even bother to try—b/c we are afraid of failing... We come up with logistical reasons why something can't happen or won't work—rather than just step up in faith.

Things that go wrong can shape us or scar us.

If we are vulnerable enough to admit that we know we'll mess up—but we're willing to try- that is courage... and faith is knowing that when we do fall down we'll have God with us.

Failure is just part of the process, and it not just okay- its better than okay—God doesn't want failure to shut us down.

That's why Peter was the right choice for being the rock upon which Jesus built his church.

Peter's not afraid to fail. He has failed..... and he knows he will likely fail again.

And.... **That won't stop him.**

The church was just starting out—and it would have set backs and difficulties – if Peter chose to let challenges as failures that define who he was... the church would never have gotten started.

Are we so afraid of failing at things that matter that we're merely succeeding at the things that don't?

What have been some of your failures?

What have you learned?

We aren't defined by our failures- we are defined by Christ.

Do you love Jesus?

Feed His Sheep.

Do you love Jesus?

Walk on Water.

Take courage- he is with you.

The wind isn't to fear.

Jesus is with you.

Do you love Jesus Church?

Let's leave fear and go feed sheep.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.