

## St. Peters Palmerston North Sunday 2 July 2023

### What do we do with failure?

Most of us want to succeed in the things that are important to us – to succeed in life!

In this context therefore, how do we each feel about failure, and does failure in whatever form it happens, inhibit our ability to succeed?

I suspect that for many, the fear of failure, rather than failure itself, prevents us from doing our best and possibly prevents us from becoming the People that God wants us to be.

I sought some universal wisdom on failure and here are the quotes I came across that I liked the best:

“Success is stumbling from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm”.

“The greatest mistake you can make in life, is to be continuously fearing you will make one”.

From Henry Ford: “Failure is only the opportunity to begin again, more intelligently”.

And finally, from CS Lewis: “Failures, repeated failures, are finger posts on the road to achievement. One fails forward towards success”.

The great news, today and always for all of us, is that we can afford to fail, because God doesn't! (x2)

Isn't that a joyous thing to celebrate this morning!

And so, we come to Peter in today's readings...

Peter who would have to be one of the most prominent, and most colourful characters of the New Testament. Peter who more than most, proved that failure is not a barrier to success.

Peter was of course Simeon or Simon. From Jesus, he received the name Cephas (from Aramaic Kepa [“Rock”]; therefore Peter, from Petros, a Greek translation of Kepa).

From what we know, Peter was a man's man, a strong confident, enthusiastic individual, sometimes impetuous and occasionally offensive, but also thoughtful and sometimes insecure. This should encourage us – that God can use us, complete with all our insecurities, failings and idiosyncrasies.

Peter appears to have been an ordinary man. His family came from Bethsaida in Galilee but he lived in Capernaum at the northwest end of the Sea of Galilee, where he and his brother Andrew were in a fishing partnership with James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

Peter was a fisherman who became a friend and confidante of the Son of God.

That statement is an extraordinary summary of Peter's life!

Peter is often considered the first or principal disciple and Jesus' regular references to the least or the servant being the greatest would I am sure, have challenged Peter's sense of fairness and ambition.

Like some of us, Peter had the unfortunate propensity to go from Hero to Zero on a regular basis. And whilst that must have been disappointing and frustrating for those around him and particularly for Jesus, I guess that was the way in which Peter grew in his faith, his wisdom and his capability. All of which God was using to prepared him for his later role in the church and in the community.

I like the concept of Hero to Zero because it describes the way so many of us fall, particularly from a place of achievement, success and probably pride and satisfaction. However, the lesson we learn from Peter is that it's not just Hero to Zero but it can also be Zero to Hero.

We just have to use the experience we gain, to learn and to get better!

Some examples:

Hero: Had the faith and courage to get out of his boat and walk to Jesus on the water

Zero: Got scared on the way and started to sink

Hero: As we read in Matthew 16, Peter demonstrated that he understood the nature of Jesus

Zero: Seemed to grapple with the need for recognition and to compare himself with others

Hero: Examples of wisdom and commitment

Zero: As recorded in John's gospel, at the time of Jesus' arrest, Peter cut off the ear of Malchus the High Priest's servant

And of course:

Hero: Peter's commitment to Jesus in Matthew 26 that even if he had to die for his convictions, he would never disown Jesus

Zero: Peter denies Jesus

Hero: We again see Peter in Acts, living into the potential that Jesus had talked about and planned for ....

Peter having grown into a man of God, filled with the Holy Spirit, a man of wisdom, vision and able to heal and perform all sorts of miracles. We see these miracles recorded in the early chapters of Acts. He was so effective in his ministry that it earned the persecution of Herod.

Raises an interesting concept – if we are not being persecuted and challenged for our faith, are we visible or effective enough?

But that is a conversation for another day.

So, Peter is imprisoned by Herod, having just had one of his good friends executed. He was on Death Row!

He was heavily guarded, bound in chains, between two guards and with two further guards at the entrance.

How would you feel in these circumstances? Sounds like a pretty desperate situation to be in and yet we read that Peter was asleep whilst the church was praying for him. Maybe Peter had the sure knowledge that he was under God's protection and God had further plans for him.

So, a miracle happens! Peter is rescued by an Angel - his chains fall off, he gets dressed, and he walks free. God's reward for his faithfulness!

Take encouragement from this story. As we inevitably fail at some things in life, with God's help and encouragement, we can turn that to success.

This is also the experience of the Wellington City Mission. We often see broken lives restored with the right encouragement and support.

In the words of Father Greg Boyle; "Compassion is not a transaction between the Healer and the Wounded, it is a covenant between equals". We don't fix or heal people (God does that), we merely walk alongside and encourage them in the journey, help them envisage and plan for their future, and assist them to make good and positive choices.

There is delight in the City Mission, and I believe in heaven, when we see people move on from the things that afflict them and have another opportunity to live into fullness of life.

We are looking forward to seeing more of these transformations when we open a new facility called Te Pā Maru in a few months. As a residential alcohol harm-reduction service, it is a chance for us to serve those who have few options in life because of the burden of the addictions they carry. The opportunity to offer them dignity, respect and a lack of judgement creates the very best chance they have to be the very best version of themselves.

And this would be our hope for those in our community that are struggling.

Most of the Wellington community (and the rest of New Zealand) have felt the heaviness of the Loafers Lodge tragedy nearly 7 weeks ago. I do believe that this tragic event represents a collective failure of our community – of all of us.

Not that the fire was our fault, but the fact that our fellow citizens were living in these conditions is. We have a unique opportunity to commit to ensuring that we raise our expectations of how we need to house and care for all of us.

Is this possible? Yes of course!

In amongst the trauma, loss and sorrow of the recent weeks, there has been moments of joy as we see the compassion and generosity of our community come to the fore. This gives me the confidence that we do care for each other, and we can do better.

Through our faith in God, we can do anything. And as for Peter, our failures can be turned into joy.

As I said at the recent Loafers Lodge Service of Remembrance, and I am sure this also applies here in Palmerston North; we should be grateful for the community that we have, and hopeful that we can become the community we aspire to be.

To conclude this morning, I wanted to share with you my favourite quote from William Carey:

“I’m not afraid of failure, I’m afraid of succeeding at things that don’t matter!”

Let’s pray that the things we aspire to succeed at, really do matter.

Amen.