

#Sermon Series: The New Normal
Failing Faithfully
Matthew 14:22-33

I saw on ESPN this week that Tim Tebow has been voted the most popular sports athlete in the country. If you do not know who he is you'll have a better understanding after you see this piece of video. Take a look.

There has been much debate about whether Tim Tebow is a legitimate pro-quarterback. He led his team to a string of wins, then lost 3 games in a row. Tebow has more than his share of critics. Last Saturday on the first play of an overtime period against the Pittsburg Steelers, he threw a touchdown pass that won the game. However last night his season game to an end against the Patriots. What is special about Tim Tebow is that he is a very devout Christian. He has already begun to use his wealth and fame as a football player to sponsor a children's hospital in the Philippines where his parents were missionaries. Throughout this year during the winning and loosing he has been consistent about voicing his trust and gratitude to Jesus Christ. **He is a good modern day example of someone who is able to fail faithfully.**

Our current sermon series is entitled, The New Normal. Last week we kicked off the series with a message about looking at Jesus as normal; instead of radical. We discussed how describing Jesus as radical might make it easier to give up trying to live like. Seeing Jesus as radical might make his teachings out of reach for us to attempt. Although in John 14:12, Jesus himself once said once to his disciples "greater works than mine shall you do..." than his miracles. One thing normal for Jesus was that he had his share of ministry efforts that didn't work out in a way we would call successful or effective.

Mark's gospel 6:1-6 describes a disappointing homecoming for

Jesus. He returned to his hometown and the people questioned the authority of his teachings. Verse 5-6 indicate he could do no deeds of great power because of their unbelief.

Matthew 9:18-26 Describes the time when Jesus went to heal a little girl who was sick. The people at the scene laughed at him when he claimed there was hope for a little girl, that she was not dead but sleeping.

How about ridicule from your own family. John 7:1-6 describes how even the earthly brothers of Jesus ridiculed him.

Jesus had relationships and circumstances that failed to work out even though he possessed the truth and power. We could say he failed faithfully for God. His faithfulness brought him through the failures of others so in a way the failure really wasn't a failure at all.

Failing faithfully is a principle to remember as you are starting out with a new year, decisions and resolutions.

Failing faithfully is a principles all of us in the church who lead whether were experienced, new in leadership or committee activities.

We see a good example of the Jesus teaching his disciples about what it means to fail faithfully in the story we are about to hear from the gospel of Matthew. Read text.

Failing Faithfully: “Lord if it is you, command me to come to you on the water...” v.28

The Bible tells us that Peter requested that Jesus invite him to walk on the water and do what Jesus was doing. That is a really important point in this story. Because **Failing faithfully is**

stepping out to do the things that Jesus did. By this time Peter had seen Jesus heal people (Matt.8), he had seen him feed the multitudes (Matt. 14). He had even seen Jesus calm a storm at sea (Matt 8), but he had not seen this guy who he was still trying figure out walk on water. Peter saw Jesus coming to him in a storm walking on the sea and wanted to do the same and experience God's power like Jesus.

Have you had a good failure lately in something you have tried to do for God? For some that question may not really register because you're not really seeking to take any steps to intentionally serve God or imitate Jesus or his disciples. But who we admire we imitate we emulate. This is a great story if you have attempted that challenge or role to do something that was for God's purposes and it just didn't work out. The failure comes with the territory.

Perhaps to some that sounds like an understatement. However, churches are filled with people who said, **"I tried to and it didn't work out and I'll never try again."** What we are missing out on is the truth that there is such a thing as failing faithfully.

Failing faithfully is the new normal for a follower of Jesus. The story of Jesus and Peter is a story about considering what it means to fail faithfully.

Freedom to Fail: He said, come and so Peter got out of the boat." v.29

The next thing that happens is Jesus gives Peter the green light to get out of the boat and walk to him on the water. Now we teach that God is **omniscient** meaning he is all knowing. Jesus is God so Jesus is also **omniscient**. So Jesus knows what is going to take place. He knows Peter will be braver than the other disciples and at least get out of the boat. He knows Peter will take a few steps. Jesus knows that Peter will notice the strong winds more than his presence and will become afraid. In spite of knowing all that was

about to go down, Jesus still gave Peter permission to get out of the boat.

- Some might say, shouldn't have Jesus been thinking that the other 11 disciples in the boat that would see Peter fail and it might discourage them?
- The failure might cause the other disciples to say, "When we get back to shore I quit before someone drowns."
- It may have them thinking thoughts like "Well Jesus should of known what was going to happen and it wouldn't work. Anybody who has been around Peter for 5 minutes knows he talks first and thinks later."

But Jesus gave Peter permission to fail, to sink, to be embarrassed or any other angle you want to describe.

But Peter and those disciples were also within the presence of God. So often we are like the disciple Peter in that we notice the storms that work against us more than we pay attention to the presence of God amongst and in us. After all if being in the presence of God is the safest, most rewarding, most inspirational place to be, than what does anything else really matter including failure? If God is there to teach us and grow us from the failure we experience when we are seeking to live for him, then failure will not have the final word. This story indicates to me Jesus gave his disciples freedom to fail.

Now keep in mind I am not talking about attempting just any old idea that hasn't been give thought and prayer. Remember, Peter and the other disciples had been with Jesus a while so they had some investment and preparation behind them.

But freedom to fail faithfully goes with the life of living for Jesus.

Because it was Jesus who put them in a boat.

He sent them on ahead.

He waited a while before he came to them in the storm.
It was Jesus who gave Peter permission to get out of the boat.

We have several people this year that are chairing or co-chairing a ministry in this church for the first time. I have tried to make it a point to say especially to them, feel free to fail as you try and serve. It's based on stories like this because Jesus calls those who want to do what he does permission to try and fail.

What God want us to know and do about failure: vs.30-31

The story ends with some teaching for us about what God wants us to know and do about our failure as we live for him.

Perhaps in verse 30 we find a reminder to not handle our failures alone. When Peter is sinking he cries out. I have some study in the field of mental health . One of the common findings among many who suffer from issues with depression, anxiety, addictions and so forth, is that they suffer because they have coped with their struggle too much on their own.

I once came across an article on the issue of emotional burnout. People who are burned out from their jobs, their relationships and yes in the church often wind up that way because they carry responsibility alone.

Peter cried out and he cried out to the one who could help. Plenty of stories in the Bible exist where the men and women God used, turned to God and others for help. Failing faithfully means don't go it alone.

Peter also failed faithfully because he accepted the help that Jesus offered. The scripture tells us "Jesus reached out a hand..." v.31. What if Peter would not have trusted Jesus. What if he had an attitude that Jesus was the one that got him into this mess in the first place; and refused to accept his help. But Peter

accepted the hand of Jesus. Jesus spoke and Peter responded to the word of Jesus.

We can trust that God's presence is going to reach out to us with truth and encouragement because all of this will grow us more into his likeness, not necessarily the success we want. After all the real success in that situation was for Peter to experience how God's powerful love would continue to reach out to him even when he did fail.

Failing faithfully requires we own the failure. Jesus questioned Peter and he said to him, **“You of little faith, why did you doubt.”** v.31 Those words from Jesus defined Peter. Jesus made sure Peter understood God, didn't fail him, and Jesus didn't abandon him and the storm wasn't too much for God to handle. There is something deeper in that description about Peter having little faith. There is something deeper in the question from Jesus about why there was doubt. Questions open us up and expand how God is at work.

This story reminds us we take ownership of our failure when we spend some time reflecting why we fail. Someone once said, **“Why do you hasten to remove something from your eye, while if something effects your soul, you postpone until next year.”** Horace This story teaches that God doesn't want failure to leave us bitter and misguided.

Jesus questioned Peter. I don't think he questioned him in a condemning way like some preachers and Sunday school teachers will use this story. I think the questioning was so Peter would understand God had not failed him.

Failing faithfully is about using that crisis, disappointment, or setback to let God question us so we can go forward trusting God.

Failing faithfully is risking to do the things Jesus loved to do, turning to God when failure comes and owing any part where we did not exercise faith.

Conclusion

Great story isn't it?

Uncomfortable story because it should cause us to look closely at our setbacks and disappointments.

A very hopeful story because Jesus rescued Peter and brought him back into the boat to moved on in ministry with Jesus, and he will do the same for us when we fail faithfully if we let him.