

Jesus, Rejection and Ministry
By Rev. Sharon Lee MacArthur
For Berkeley Chinese Community Church
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Mark 6:1-13

¹ He left that place and came to his home town, and his disciples followed him. ²On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, 'Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! ³Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary' and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?' And they took offence' at him. ⁴Then Jesus said to them, 'Prophets are not without honour, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.'
⁵And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. ⁷He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰He said to them, 'Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.'
¹²So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

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I recently ran across an interesting story...



In 1961, the Swedish warship Vasa was pulled out of the water after 333 years at the bottom of the sea. Divers had discovered the ancient wooden vessel just a few years before. When it was built in 1628, the Vasa was a marvel of the latest technology. It was the atomic bomb of its day...it was the biggest and mightiest of warships with two decks and 64 massive cannons. The Swedish king was in a desperate struggle with Poland and was eager to have unleash the new weapon to win the war.

On Sunday, August 10, 1628, the beaches around Stockholm were filled with spectators and foreign diplomats eager to watch the maiden voyage of the mightiest ship ever built. The voyage was to be an act of propaganda for the ambitious Swedish king. The Vasa set her sails, fired a salute and started moving.



But after only a few minutes of sailing the ship began to heel over. She righted herself slightly, and then heeled over again. Then to everyone's horror, the glorious and mighty warship

suddenly sank...killing about fifty of the 150 people aboard. Many people wondered why the Vasa sank. Deep down in the Vasa several tons of stone were stored to give the ship stability, but it wasn't enough to counterweight the guns, the upper hull, masts and sails of the ship.

You see, the plans used for building the Vasa were intended for small ships with only one gun deck. But because the Vasa had **two** gun decks with heavy artillery higher on the ship than ever before, the standard calculations didn't work.

When the ship began to tilt, water poured through the open lower gun ports and quickly sank the ship.



The raised Vasa was made into a museum. Nowadays anyone can visit this ancient vessel that was supposed to be the most glorious warship of its day, but instead became the biggest failure of the day. Imagine - museum to failure! How embarrassing it must have been for everyone involved? It was a horrendous public failure. But then, many of us can understand because we have known failures that were almost as public as this one.

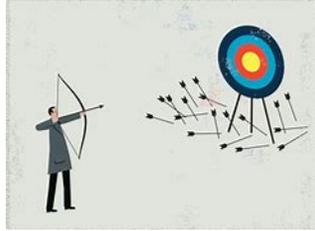
Failure is a word that strikes fear in the heart of everybody. Our society has become so success-oriented that we have very little tolerance for failure.



We glamorize all the successes - the Steph Curry's



and the LeBron James' of the world. We make them heroes and call them role models to emulate.



But you know what? Sooner or later, we will run up against failure...failure and rejection. People fail every day. We suffer from failed relationships, failed marriages, failure at work and failure in health. Most of us can identify with failure, and we know from experience that failure and rejection is hard to cope with -especially in a world where success is glorified. When we fail at something or feel rejected most of think of it as the ultimate and irreversible tragedy of all time.



It is interesting that in our passage for today Jesus experiences failure himself and expects his disciples to fail as well. In some Bibles, this passage is titled, "The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth." That's the first story – the rejection of Jesus by his homies. In the second part of this passage, Jesus gives his disciples instructions about what to do when they are rejected.



Jesus has been moving from one success to another in his ministry. In the last few weeks, we have followed Jesus through Mark's narrative – we've witnessed some of Jesus' most amazing miracles – the calming of the storm, the healing of the demon-possessed man, the healing of the hemorrhaging woman, and the raising of Jairus' little daughter back to life. And now Jesus goes home to Nazareth in search of some rest.



At his home synagogue, Jesus begins to teach. But the response there was different. The people at home are astonished at his teaching all right, but this time they are astonished because they are appalled at his message and manner.

They were muttering among themselves:
"How dare this local boy, Jesus, assume such authority?"

'Wait a minute - Isn't this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judah, and Simon?'

"Aren't his sisters here with us?"

They didn't mince words – and they were offended.

This is actually the third time that Jesus had tasted a glimpse of failure in his ministry. Remember? A few chapters ago, his own family called him crazy and tried to restrain him. And then his mother and brothers and sisters try again to remove him from his teaching ministry. Here in his home town, he meets with out and out rejection, prompting him to utter his famous line - ***"A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and among his own relatives, and in his own house."***



And now for the second part of today's passage – almost as a response to the rejection. Jesus turns to commission his disciples for the beginning of their missionary work. He tells the disciples that it is time for them to begin their ministry, going two by two into the countryside preaching and casting out unclean spirits. He advises them to travel lightly taking nothing but a staff. "Don't carry bread, or bag, or money in your belts. Just wear sandals and don't even take an extra tunic."

And then he says, "Whoever will not receive you nor hear you, as you depart from there, shake off the dust that is under your feet for a testimony against them."

Isn't that preparation for rejection? For failure? Jesus makes it clear that they will not be insulated from failure just because they are going in his name. In fact, Jesus knows that failure will be a real possibility, so he provides his disciples with a sacrament of failure – a ritual to follow with failure, with rejection – what's the ritual? Shaking the dust off their feet.



In other words, carry on in the face of failure. Shake off the dust and continue on.

Did you know that John Narrone wrote a whole book on this subject? It was entitled *A Theology of Failure*. He writes "A theology which takes failure seriously does not encourage fatalism, passivity, indifference to the world; rather it affirms that the man who cannot freely lay down his life is one whose ideals and values are already compromised."



Everyone knows Hershey and his chocolate now, but when Milton Hershey first started his candy production career, he was a nobody. After being fired from an apprenticeship with a printer, Milton started three separate candy-related ventures, and watched all of them fail.

In one last attempt, Hershey founded the Lancaster Caramel Company, and started seeing good results. Believing in his vision for milk chocolate for the masses, he eventually founded the Hershey Company and became one of the most well-known names in the industry.

He must have heard what Jesus told his disciples - that they should not fear failure. He did just what Jesus told his disciples – he shook off the dust and went on.

So – failure can lead to better things...

Have you noticed that sometimes our highest hopes are destroyed so that we can be prepared for better things? The passing of the caterpillar is the birth of the butterfly. The failure of the bud is the blooming of the rose. The death of the seed is the prelude to its resurrection as wheat. Someone said that plants grow best in the darkness of night just before dawn. Maybe, our failures, too, can be the dark doorway to a new success.

You know John James Audubon, right? He is forever associated with the magnificent paintings he made of the birds of North America. No one else has so accurately painted the birds and the natural environment in which they were found. But consider this – he might not have become such a famous painter if he not gone bankrupt in business!



In 1808, he opened a store in Louisville, Kentucky. It was after he went bankrupt in 1819 that he began traveling and painting birds. We are all richer because of his business failure. Shake off the dust and go on.

AND, failure can be the catalyst to creativity....

Sometimes we get stuck in a rut and it takes failure to blast us out of a routine so that we can be creative. A great failure can enable us to risk and change.



Take George Frideric Handel – yes the Handel who is known for his “Messiah”! Did you know that “Messiah” was written after Handel had suffered a stroke? He wrote it while he lived in poverty. Apparently, he had suffered through a particularly bad night of gloom and despair over his failure as a musician, and the next morning his creative genius was unleashed in a musical score that continues to inspire us generations later. Shake off the dust and go on.

AND, failure can be “one” for Christ...

Sometimes failure comes our way when we are doing everything in our power to serve Christ. Some modern theologies promise health, wealth and success if we will only follow Christ. But don't forget that he warned that his disciples would experience the same kind of rejection that he experienced. In fact we have to remember that almost every one of the first twelve suffered martyrdom for Christ. Failure is success when the failure is for Christ's sake. Shake off the dust and continue on.



I'd like to end with another story about shaking off failure and continuing on. It's a parable about An Old Mule in the well.



Once upon a time – a farmer had an old mule that fell into an old well. The farmer heard the mule 'braying' – or whatever mules do when they fall into wells. After carefully studying the situation, the farmer sympathized with the mule, but decided that neither the mule nor the well was worth the trouble of saving. Instead, he called his neighbors together and told them what had happened and asked them to help haul dirt to bury the old mule in the well and put him out of his misery.

At first, the old mule was hysterical! But as the farmer and his neighbors continued shoveling dirt onto his back ... a thought struck the mule – it's a parable, folks and yes, mules can think in parables! It suddenly dawned on him that every time a shovel load of dirt landed on his back, he should shake it off and step up! So this is what he did, shovel after shovel. "Shake it off and

step up...shake it off and step up!" He repeated this aloud to encourage himself. No matter how painful the blows, or how distressing the situation seemed the old mule fought "panic" and just kept right on shaking it off and stepping up!



It wasn't long before the old mule, battered and exhausted, stepped triumphantly over the wall of that old well! What everyone thought would bury him, actually blessed him...all because of how he handled his rejection and adversity.

Maybe we can learn from this mule and from Jesus and his disciples --- we can face our failures...we can face our rejections and respond to them positively. We can shake the dust off and refuse to give in to panic or bitterness, or self-pity when adversities or rejection come along to bury us. And we can carry on because these rejections and failures usually have within them the potential to benefit and bless us as we carry on!



Let us pray - O God bless us this week and every week as we "shake off the dust and dirt of perceived rejection and failure and continue on to step up out of the wells" in which we find ourselves! Amazing God, thanks for reminding us that we can do all things through You! Amen.