**Sermon. Sunday 3rd April 2022**

When coming to this particular passage, about Peter denying Jesus, I thought of different ways to approach it… but after some time and feeling like I’d gone down some dead ends, I think the Lord was saying, this time take the direct route … talk about the obvious. Failure.

My initial reaction to failure, depending on the circumstances is generally to think to myself, ‘get over it, move on, don’t dwell’ or maybe, “try harder and do better next time”.

Everything we do is supposed to work out isn’t it? If we make a mistake someone is quick to point it out. Often, we are own worst critics.

From when we are young, we are taught not to fail. There’s a subtle message that if we do there’s something wrong with us. We’re not good enough. We don’t meet expectations; we’re not hitting the KPIs of life (key performance indicators). Failing a test at school, letting that goal get through into the net, finally making a choice as to what tertiary study to do only to find it’s not right for you. These can all be hurdles, aspects of our lives that we or other people regard as failure.

And then there is not just the slipping up and ‘making a mistake’, a sort of ‘living typo’ but when we really fail, when the book we are writing (our book, our life) has taken a major turn for the worse. When a decision means we are no longer on the track we had dreamed about.

We find ourselves struggling to pick up the pieces of a career or a business. We might be hoping to mend a friendship that we know is rocky because we’ve dropped the ball, been insensitive, or unkind. Perhaps because we’ve messed up, we are desperate to restore a relationship with our husband or wife or children. There might have been a moment we know it went wrong, we made that choice, we failed. Or, it might be a slow leak, we have failed to give what is needed, to be attentive, to listen, to be available and loving.

I think this week we all saw a clear example of a very high-profile failure (and I’m not referring to the failure of a certain football team Friday night, no) a personal failure of self-control when Will Smith let his feelings be known at the Oscars. Of course, it was followed by all the judgements, rationalisations, condemnations and generalisations. One commentator wrote, “at the pinnacle of his career, Smith has trashed his own reputation”.

Whatever we think, he failed to be the person he would like to be.

Not only do we disappoint and fail ourselves and others but we know deep down we have, as the Bible tells us fallen short of God’s standard. We fail to be the people God created us to be and if we have already given our life to him and desire to follow him, those failures can cut deeper and be felt even more intensely.

We all fail, it is inevitable, it is human…the ‘human condition’, our ‘tragic flaw’.

And that is not an excuse, it is reality.

And it’s why we have this book, God’s Word, and it’s why Jesus came.

Over the past 5 weeks we’ve been with Jesus and his disciples through the sharing of the Passover meal, how Jesus tried to prepare the disciples for what was coming, Jesus praying in Gethsemane, Judas betraying him and his arrest.

Now, let’s look at an incident in the apostle Peter’s life that could have been such a crushing failure that we never heard of him again.

Luke 22:54-65 (I’ll be reading in the New Living Translation)

*So, they arrested him (Jesus) and led him to the high priest’s home. And Peter followed at a distance.*

Comments about the setting…

House, gated estate, a complex, courtyard, passageway, gate.

Temple police, Roman soldiers, politics. Caiaphas apparently had a ’good working relationship’ with the Roman authorities. Vested interests.

Peter really loves Jesus. Yes, he follows at a distance, but at least he follows. Apparently, John also followed at a distance, because we read in John’s account that he was acquainted with the high priest so the girl at the gate let him in and John asked her to let Peter in too.

*55 The guards lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat around it, and Peter joined them there.*

Can we imagine what might have been going through Peter and John’s minds?

Their teacher, their friend, their Lord, had been arrested.

All that they had imagined in terms of the salvation of their people was coming apart. Jesus had warned them that His way was not the world’s way. Even so, Peter would have been desperate to prove himself but so fearful of what that might lead to. He had already tried to defend Jesus. He was the one that had used his sword in the garden and cut off someone’s ear. But Jesus had rebuked him and told him he was out of line. What was he to do?

*56, 57 A servant girl noticed him in the firelight and began staring at him. Finally she said, “This man was one of Jesus’ followers!” But Peter denied it. “Woman,” he said, “I don’t even know him!”*

Oops, did that just pop out? Did I really say that? We can all relate to that. We all do and say those things that will bring distance between us and other people and distance between us and Jesus, the one we profess to follow.

What will happen if I own my beliefs? If I stand with Jesus?

Millions of Christians have had to face this question. (2 Tim. 1:7)

*58 After a while someone else looked at him and said, “You must be one of them!” “No, man, I’m not!” Peter retorted.*

Imagine the pressure, this is awful. This wasn’t just some off the cuff remark. This was getting in deep. The fear must have been overwhelming. So, perhaps the rationalisations started to creep in. Why would Peter risk judgement by those around or perhaps his life for being a friend of Jesus now? I mean Jesus hasn’t even resisted.

What purpose would it serve by owning up to being his friend?

We all do that too, don’t we?

What difference does it make if little old me makes a stand that says ‘I’m a Christian’? It maybe in what we say, how we serve, our attitudes to others, where we go, whatever it is, as Christians we are expected to be different.

The very same Peter wrote in his letter some years later:

*“Now, who will want to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don’t worry or be afraid of their threats. Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it.”* *1 Peter 3:13 - 15*

Same person…. What had happened?

*59 About an hour later someone else insisted, “This must be one of them, because he is a Galilean, too.” 60 But Peter said, “Man, I don’t know what you are talking about.”*

*And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed.*

*61 At that moment the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Suddenly, the Lord’s words flashed through Peter’s mind: “Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny three times that you even know me.”*

*62 And Peter left the courtyard, weeping bitterly.*

What went through Peter’s mind in that moment when he locked eyes with Jesus?

Guilt and shame? I’m sure. But do you think he saw judgement and condemnation? No.

Let’s look back at that exchange Jesus and Peter had as they sat around the Passover meal, in the same chapter, verses 31-34

*““Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift each of you like wheat. But I have pleaded in prayer for you, Simon, that your faith should not fail. So, when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen your brothers.” Peter said, “Lord, I am ready to go to prison with you, and even to die with you.” But Jesus said, “Peter, let me tell you something. Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny three times that you even know me.””*

What Peter would have seen was love and grace. Jesus knew him so well. He knew what challenges he would face. He knew how it would be too much to bear in his own strength. He knew how Peter would fail. Not just here, but many times in the future.

We can’t do it on our own. We don’t have to do it on our own.

We can’t earn our salvation and hope we’ve done enough to get to Heaven.

And we can’t please Him as His followers, as his children, by our own efforts either.

Peter really loved Jesus. There is no doubt. But he was learning that his own strength was not enough.

It’s the same for us; no matter how hard we try. And we can try pretty hard.

We have to receive God’s grace. Totally undeserved favour of God. In grace God forgives and makes us right with Him. He saves us by His grace.

Then through His grace we receive what we need to face our trials and grow to serve Him.

In that look there was hope, and he remembered Jesus words.

Jesus had prayed for him. (How cool is that?)

Your faith won’t fail. When you’ve repented and turned to me again, go on to help others. Use what you have learned and the relationship we have Peter, to help others, to bring them strength and hope, to share the grace you have received and help them become recipients of my grace too.

God uses failure to grow us. It certainly teaches us humility and helps us be more empathetic and compassionate. But if we let God work in us through his grace, he grows our faith too.

Jesus was not surprised when Peter disowned him. Jesus is not surprised when we fail. He does not condemn us or stop loving us, but wants us to lean on him. He wants us to grow through his grace, not in our own strength.

There is only one failure to fear ... In Hebrews 12:15 we read “Be careful that no one fails to receive the grace of God.”

Don’t reject his grace. Don’t think you can live your best life without him. Don’t refuse His forgiveness and restoration. Don’t ignore the abundant life he offers.

When you fail, look to Jesus and draw on his grace. We can repent and confess our sin and our failure ... then receive the amazing grace of God and be restored ... then go and let God’s grace flow through us to others.

Peter found grace. And he didn’t keep it to himself. Read the last chapter of John’s gospel to see how Peter is restored and given a job to do. He was empowered by the Holy Spirit and given a love for people he had never experienced before.

Many have found that same grace in the midst of failure, freely given by a loving God.

In the words of John Newton, who wrote the hymn, Amazing Grace,

‘I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Saviour.’

John Newton, as many of you know was a slave trader. You could say that much of his life was a complete moral failure. But when he met Jesus, he repented and received the grace God offered. It changed his life from the inside out.

Another of his quotes is, “We serve a gracious Master who knows how to overrule even our mistakes to His glory and our own advantage”.

God’s grace moved him to action. He became a friend and confidante of William Wilberforce a politician, also a Christian, who fought for the abolition of the African slave trade in England in the late 1700s into the 1800s.

This is a short clip from the movie ‘Amazing Grace’ - Video clip

Prayer

We praise and thank you Lord for your amazing grace. We know that you know us completely, everything about us; our motivations, our thoughts, our words and actions. We thank you too that you know about our failures and pray that as we allow your Spirit to work, you can turn our failures into places in our lives where we grow in our faith and relationship with you.

But we thank you that you didn’t come into the world to condemn us but to save us and to keep giving us your grace to live our lives to the full; lives that reflect your love to others, that bring hope in a world that often seems hopeless. Help us to stand with you, to be prepared to let your Spirit work in us and through us, to love others enough to share your grace. In Jesus precious Name we pray, Amen.