

“If you’re not failing, you’re not growing” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
July 16, 2017 Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Prayer: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

Have you heard the expression ‘if you’re not failing, you’re not succeeding’? This is the mantra of today’s innovative businesses – businesses that are successful in recreating themselves as the world around them changes. ‘If you’re not failing, you’re not succeeding.’ I believe this statement sheds light on today’s scripture. We could say it another way, ‘if you’re not failing in your walk with Christ, then you’re not succeeding.’

Failure? How can I say that I want you to fail? Our whole society is based on success. We admire people who are successful. We don’t admire people who fail. But just consider this: how many times did those successful people fail before they became successful?

Let’s look at the meaning of the phrase ‘if you’re not failing, you’re not succeeding.’ You may have noticed that I said that this phrase belongs to innovative companies. The world is changing so fast that the idea of traditional, long-range planning is almost out-of-date. Companies today encourage workers to take risks, to try new things. Some companies give employees money and time to work on some ideas the employees want to pursue. In the process of trying and failing, new ideas and new directions are born. The best of these innovative ideas or directions are then captured by the company and turned into successful, profitable products. Success! But success only because of the failures.

You’re probably thinking, “I understand how this idea of failure applies to business, but how does this idea relate to today’s scripture?”

The sower sowed seeds on all types of soil: good and bad. Many people hearing Jesus that day probably thought he was crazy. Why would a person sow seeds on ‘bad’ soil? That would result in a failure. Any sower worth his wage would not do that!

What did Jesus say about the sower? Does Jesus say that the sower tried to sow on good soil only? Does Jesus say the sower was upset that he had wasted good seed on bad soil? The scripture simply describes what the sower did. There is no judgement of what happened to the seed, just description – seeds sprouted and withered, seeds choked by the weeds, seeds that produce a great crop.

I like to think that the sower is God spreading God’s love to all. God is indiscriminately spreading God’s love to all kinds of people as Jesus explains in the second section of the scripture I read where Jesus describes what happens to the sown seed. Again, is

there any judgment in Jesus' words? No, Jesus doesn't call the sower a failure. Jesus simply describes what happens.

I believe that Jesus is simply describing what we need to be doing: spreading God's love to all. We need to be out there casting God's love all about with wild abandon! Will our sowing produce success? I believe that's up to God to judge, not us.

There's a verse from Isaiah that says just that. God says in Isaiah 55:11 – **It is the same with my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it.** It's our job to sow the seeds and let God accomplish what God wants to accomplish with the seeds we've sown.

Now, I can just imagine some of you thinking about the church budget and wasting money on projects that may fail. I'm not saying we can be as indiscriminate as the sower with SOME of our resources, but there are non-financial ways to spread God's love – ways that don't cost money. Tell someone what Jesus means to you. Smile at that person you just met. Strike up a conversation with the person behind you in the grocery line. Treat them kindly as a fellow human being. Yes, you can easily spread God's love to all in very simple ways. We're not talking about an organized church initiative.

Did those innovative companies change their culture over night? It took time to change employee culture from fearing failure to embracing it. Likewise, it will take time for each of us to move from being comfortable to taking risks to share God's love. Here's an example of a father who helped his children embrace failure.

Billionaire Sara Blakely, the inventor of Spanx, credits some of her success to one simple question she asks herself every night: What did I fail at today? Some parents are content asking their children, "Did you have a good day?" or "What did you learn at school?" Not at the Blakely household. The question Sara and her brother had to answer night after night was this: "What did you fail at today?" When there was no failure to report, Blakely's father would express disappointment.

"What he did was redefine failure for my brother and me," Blakely said. "And instead of failure being the outcome, failure became not trying. And it forced me at a young age to want to push myself so much further out of my comfort zone."

Blakely was taught to interpret failure not as a sign of personal weakness but as an integral part of the learning process. It's this mind-set that prepared her to endure the risk involved in starting her own business. When coming up short is viewed as the path to learning, when we accept that failure is simply feedback on what we need to work on next, risk-taking becomes a lot easier.

Her father's question taught Blakely an important lesson: If you're not failing, you're not growing. (99u.com)

Let's take the word success out of our mantra, 'if you're not failing, your not succeeding' and use Sara Blakely's phrase. 'If you're not failing, you're not growing.' Perhaps that's what we want to do as Christ-followers – to be growing in our walk with Jesus. And that takes trying new things which we might fail at.

I like Blakely's comment about how her father's question pushed her out of her comfort zone. I hope that you're also able to see this idea that it takes trying, failing and trying again to grow in your Christian faith and push yourself out of your comfort zone.

You may remember Albert Einstein's definition of insanity. Insanity consists of doing the same thing over and over and hoping for different results. Sometimes Christians are accused of insanity. Is it because we fear failure that we keep trying the same thing over and over?

I especially like the parable of the sower because we see that God puts no limits on spreading God's love. The seeds are scattered everywhere, resulting in failure as well as success. Is that what you are doing in your personal life? I hope so!

Drew Houston, the founder and CEO of Dropbox, an online file sharing service, said this: "There are 30,000 days in your life. When I was 24, I realized I'm almost 9,000 days down. There are no warm-ups, no practice rounds, no reset buttons. Your biggest risk isn't failing, it's getting too comfortable. Every day, we're writing a few more words of a story. I wanted my story to be an adventure and that's made all the difference." https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/d/drewhousto659310.html?src=t_failing

Are you too comfortable? Are you taking risks outside your comfort zone? Is your faith journey an adventure story? If you're not failing, you're not growing in your faith.

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