

“Everything Is Holy: Our Failures”  
Acts 27:13-44

Life rarely goes as planned! There are many detours, struggles, and failures that come our way. Today we will explore the example of the Apostle Paul who had more than his fair share of failure. We often admire Paul today and read his letters as scriptures, but this was not always the case. Paul's ministry was not always successful. He struggled over and over again. He always had to justify his ministry because he was not one of the original disciples. He faced many rejections after he preached and taught. His mission efforts were not always well received. He also faced the rejection which Jesus himself faced. By challenging the oppressive powers of his day and calling people to a way of love, nonviolence and liberation, Paul was seen as a threat to the peace and unity of the Roman Empire in the communities he visited. He was even opposed by some of the people within the Jesus community because he was reaching out to Gentiles before it was sanctioned by the church in Jerusalem.

According to the Book of Acts, Paul went on several missionary journeys. He was trying to spread the message of Christ and to continue his mission of the transformation of the world into the vision of God. And just like Jesus, his efforts landed him in trouble with the authorities. In our story for today, Paul was a prisoner being led to Rome to have an official hearing before the emperor. He advised his captors not to set sail to Rome as the season for sea travel was coming to an end. Yet, they decided not to take his advice and thus ended up encountering a life-threatening storm. Let's listen to a part of this story from Acts 27. It is a very dramatic story of adventure and misfortune:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CWtAGITXXCM>

This is an incredible story of faith and perseverance. Paul is faced with the ultimate failure of his mission. He had been maligned and captured. He had no reason for hope. And then he found himself close to death due to the imminent danger of the storm. Paul did a few things that could help us as we face the storms of life and of failure.

1. Dreams & Visions: Paul relied on his connection to the Spirit of God through prayer, dreams, and visions. Even though his original plans fell apart, he did not give up on the internal guidance that he had.
2. Focus: Paul stayed focused on God's mission. Even though he was not able to preach the good news of Jesus in the usual ways, he found new ways to fulfill God's mission. He focused on the opportunities that were right in front of him instead of lamenting the ones he was used to.
3. Ritual: As they were getting close to being shipwrecked, Paul invited his captors to a communal meal. The last thing they would have wanted to do was to eat. Yet, Paul invited them to a communion-type experience of

sharing bread, which strengthened their hearts and bodies. It prepared them for the shipwreck.

Paul offers us a great way to see the sacred in our failures. When our plans seem to fall apart, it is very human to want to salvage things and go back to our original plans. What we miss in the process are the opportunities that are right in front of us. Instead of fighting against the failure, the invitation is to focus on the sacred in the midst of it. Our lives take many detours but our deep calling to live as children of God by loving and serving is a constant that we can rely on. Our inner life becomes our inner compass in the ups and downs of life. We get lost when we believe that life is about success instead of soul.

Success has an amazing lure for us because it triggers our need for control, esteem and security. No one wants to be a part of a shipwreck. Yet, failure strips us of these illusions. That is why failure becomes a great time of learning about the true stuff of life. When the illusions of success, power, and control are no longer at the center of our being, something powerful can emerge. Instead of pushing our times of failure away as quickly as possible, it is good to reflect on those times and to see what God is helping us to see. I am reminded of the prayer of Thomas Merton:

My Lord God,  
I have no idea where I am going.  
I do not see the road ahead of me.  
I cannot know for certain where it will end.  
nor do I really know myself,  
and the fact that I think I am following your will  
does not mean that I am actually doing so.  
But I believe that the desire to please you  
does in fact please you.  
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.  
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.  
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,  
though I may know nothing about it.  
Therefore will I trust you always though  
I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.  
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,  
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone. Amen.