

Fil-Am Community Church

Pastor Rolly Estabillo

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Key Verse: John 21:1-18

“EXTRAORDINARY POWER TO RESTORE OUR JOY”

Who has been watching the Olympics? The Olympics has hugged the headlines and been shown in prime time TV for over a week now. It is so exciting to watch the events especially swimming and gymnastics. Who wouldn't feel the feeling of exuberance and joy when Michael Phelps won his 22nd medal and 18th gold last night to become the greatest Olympian of all time? Or the thrill of victory when the relatively unknown 16-year-old Gabby Douglas won the gold medal in the all-around gymnastics competition? But in the midst of these successes, there are also failures. Like Jordyn Wieber, another teen-age American, who was actually the favorite to win the all-around competition being the reigning world champion but failed to qualify for the event. Of course, she suffered great disappointment and even cried. Phelps himself failed to win a medal in the first swimming event he competed in last week.

Now, we may not be Olympians but all of us would like to win. We all like to succeed. Is there anyone here in this room who wants to fail? But failure is part of life. It has happened to me, and perhaps, it has happened to you as well. One thing is sure: We all have failures in our life. And the reason why we all have failures is because none of us is perfect. We all make mistakes in our life and that causes us to have regrets.

I remember the story of four clergymen from the same town who got together for coffee one morning and they were sharing with each other their personal failures. The first one said, "I hit the bottle every once in a while, even though I tell my people not to." The second one said, "Gambling is my snag. I preach against it but when I go out of town, I can't resist it. "

The third said, "Drinking and gambling don't cause me problems, but I do cheat just a little bit on my income taxes. I know it's wrong but I just can't resist." The fourth clergyman was silent up to this point then the others asked him what his greatest struggle was. He said, "I appreciate you fellows being so honest so I guess I will be too. Drinking and gambling have never appealed to me and I don't cheat on my taxes. I do have one serious vice, though ... I just love to gossip and I can hardly wait to leave here."

Nobody's perfect! We all make mistakes, make bad choices and decisions, say foolish things. We hurt ourselves and others. You know, when you hit your thumb with a hammer, you're going to feel pain. And when you violate your conscience, you are going to have regrets. BUT God never meant for you to live that way. He never meant for you to live on an eternal guilt trip in your life. People are continually punishing themselves for their past.

You may have lost ground because of a failure. You may feel like it's so hard to make a recovery after that failure. And because of that you lost your enthusiasm in life. You lost your joy. You feel depressed.

This morning, let me show you how God's extraordinary power can help you regain lost ground. How his extraordinary power can restore the joy that you once had and throw away those regrets and continue to move on with life.

Our passage this morning is from John 21:1-18. For the sake of time I won't read the whole thing but let me summarize the first fourteen verses. These verses tell us about the events that occurred after the death and resurrection of Jesus. This was the time when the disciples, led by Peter, went fishing and didn't catch anything. But Jesus appeared, and they didn't recognize him at first and told them to cast their net on the other side of the boat. They caught 153 fish. They realized it was Jesus who talked to them and they rushed to him, again led by Peter.

Now, let me pick up from verse 15...

Before this time, Jesus had already shown himself twice to his disciples. And according to the previous chapter, in John 20:20, "*The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.*"

The question is, do you think Peter experienced the same joy that the other disciples had? I'm sure he did. But maybe it was fleeting. Because when he was alone, what do you think was he thinking or feeling?

Pretty much I think his mind was rather occupied with what he had done on the night Jesus was arrested. He denied Jesus three times. He wept bitterly because of it. He agonized over it. He must be thinking, "I betrayed my Lord. Can he forgive me? Am I still fit to serve him? Do I still belong to his kingdom?"

When we make a mistake, those same words may enter our minds. In fact, when we make a mistake, when we fail, when we commit a sin, we can beat ourselves about it over and over again. But there are three things we need to understand about failure. First,

1. Failure is Not Final.

If failure was final none of us would make it. None of the people of the Bible would make it. In fact, the Bible is one story after another of people who messed up repeatedly, and how they were coached along by God until they got it right. Names like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jonah, David, Paul and Peter come to mind — along with many others. But the Bible also shows us that failure is not final. King David is one of the best examples of someone who failed God and yet continued to be used by God. He committed adultery and murder. Despite this, God forgave him and blessed his kingdom.

The second thing we need to understand about failure is that

2. Bad Results Can Be Redeemed.

Bad choices lead to bad consequences. Many of us are living with the results of a wrong decision. It is true that God forgives our past sins, and that he heals the wounds with which sin has injured us. However, there are scars that remain even from a healed wound. But even scars can serve a purpose. They remind us of what happens when we rebel against God and try to go our own way. They also serve to help us relate to other people who have wounds.

We also need to understand that failing means

3. The future is Open.

The future is as bright as the promises of God. Failure does not mean that you are finished. God can not only forgive your sin, he can redeem what you have done. You are not doomed to repeat your mistakes and relive your lifestyle. Your future is not dictated by your past. Something new awaits you. It is a future designed by God. Jesus said, *“I am making everything new”* (Revelation 21:5).

The apostle Paul knew how to face the future, for he said, *“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 3:12-14 NIV).

Now, going back to Peter, there wasn't anyone then, however, who helped him understand this. Or he was just too downcast that no words of encouragement could lift up his sagging spirit. It would require a major miracle to put back the sparkle in his eyes. So, feeling sorry for himself, he went back to what he did before – fishing. That was his occupation before Jesus called him to follow him. Instead of being about his master's business, he went about his own business.

Verse 3 says, *“I'm going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We'll go with you.”*

But Peter was in for the biggest surprise of his life. At his most desperate hour, Jesus appears out of nowhere to restore his joy and calling.

Verse 4 *“So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.”*

Peter was the most confident of Jesus’ disciples. He really believed that even if everyone fell away from Jesus he would still stand. But when it came down to it, he was the one who betrayed Jesus in his most difficult hour.

Three times he denied that he even knew Jesus. Immediately after the cock crowed, red-hot shame burned within him, hotter than the fire around which he and the others were standing. He lived with that shame for several days — the day of the crucifixion, the days of Jesus’ burial, even after the resurrection — until one day he and some of the other disciples were fishing out on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus called to them from the shore: *“Friends, haven’t you any fish?”*

They answered in the negative. They were even failures at their old profession. They felt like they couldn’t do anything right. But Jesus called them “friends” — these who had deserted and denied him. Peter jumped out of the boat and swam to the shore, longing to be reconciled with the Savior he loved. When he came to the fire, Jesus looked him in the eye and asked: “Peter, do you love me?” The fire brought back memories of his betrayal and Jesus’ words pierced him like a knife. He said, “Yes Lord, you know that I love you.” But a second time the question is thrust into his heart: “Peter, do you love me?” Again, Peter agonizingly answers in the affirmative. Then a third time, Jesus asks the question again. Peter is distraught, but answers what he knows in his heart to be true, in spite of his failure: “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

It seemed to him like Jesus was asking repeatedly because he didn't believe him, but then the truth dawned on him: Jesus was giving him three times to affirm his love for him, after he had denied him three times. Jesus gave him a chance to redeem himself.

He took his denial and turned it into a proclamation of love. And he wants to do the same for you.

What I'm saying here is that God has the power to restore the joy in your life. He can turn your mourning into dancing.

How does he do this? How does God restore your joy? By now, you have guessed it already. The same way he has done with Peter, he will do for you.

God Gives You a Second Chance, if not, Multiple Chances

A second chance. You know, it's not every day that you get a second chance. Ask the person who got the pink-slip when their factory was moved down to Mexico. Ask the mother whose husband ran off and left her with four hungry kids. It's not every day you come by a second chance. Hip hop Singer Eminem had a hit song that said, "You get one shot, don't mess it up." But you know, often the gospel is referred to as "The Gospel of Second Chances" because no matter how unpleasant your past may be, there is forgiveness offered in Christ Jesus who stands not only ready to forgive but also to restore.

It is wonderful that God gives us a chance to do it over. The Bible says, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.*"

(2 Corinthians 5:17). Now, this verse refers to someone who has just become a Christian. But we have to admit that a Christian can mess up and then God can clean up that mess.

Some of you already know that I made a big mistake of turning away from Jesus early in my Christian life when I experienced some disappointments. That led to 10 years of being backslidden, going back to my old ways, not going to church, even dabbling with cults and eastern mysticism.

In the end, I became a nervous wreck and when I got kicked out of my job in Australia I turned back to God and asked him to turn my life around.

I wasn't sure whether he would answer that prayer. But he responded in a quite surprising fashion to let me know that he still cares.

It was a nice Sunday morning but I was feeling depressed and decided to go out to buy a newspaper. There were still no iPads and tablets back then and you have to hold a real paper to read the news. So, I bought this newspaper and then I saw on the front page that a local radio station was sponsoring a contest. They were going to play all Beatles songs that Sunday starting at 9 am and ending at 6 pm.

The songs were going to be played alphabetically and you had to follow the sequence based on a list that was printed on the newspaper. Every now and then they would stop after a song was played and ask the listeners to call in and identify the song that was just played. The twist is, you must be the fifth caller to win. The prize was a Yamaha CD Player which cost around A\$400 at the time. There would

be 15 winners and out of those 15, one would be drawn the next day to win a Beatles anthology, a collection of all Beatles albums on CD's.

Well, feeling a bit excited I hurried back to my apartment because it was almost nine and turned on the stereo. I determined to listen the whole day because I was depressed anyway and perhaps the Beatles songs would inspire me somehow even if I didn't win. I sat by our landline phone because there were no cellphones back then. Well, there were actually but really bulky ones looking like walkie-talkies.

So the Beatles music came on and I listened. My three roommates wondered what was going on and I explained it to them and they just brushed me off. Then, after the fifth song, the DJ said, "If you know the title of the last song we played, just call in and if you're the fifth caller, you will win a Yamaha CD player."

So, I dialed the number nervously, hoping that I wouldn't get a busy signal. And I didn't.

A guy answered the phone and said, "What's the title of the Beatle song we just played?" I looked at the newspaper, making sure I get the title correct, and said, "All My Loving." And he said, "You're right. You just won a Yamaha CD Player. And you're entered in a drawing to win a Beatles anthology." Then, he took my name.

So, I was just the first of 14 others who would get the chance to win another prize. The winner will be drawn the next day at 7 am by the same radio station. You have to be listening in order to claim the prize. I was good with the CD player. I didn't expect to win in the raffle. I never won before.

I excitedly told my three roommates that I won and they didn't believe me at first but when the station replayed my conversation with the DJ and my roommates heard it, they themselves sat by the radio the whole day and then took turns dialing the phone in the hopes of winning a Yamaha CD Player too. But all they got was a busy signal.

The next morning, I woke up earlier than usual in order to catch the announcement of the winner of the Beatles anthology. I turned on the radio and put my ear close to the radio while nervously wringing my hand. Then, the program started and my heart was beating fast as the DJ started to read the name of the winner. "The winner is Roselle, Rosello, something." He couldn't pronounce my name. And he continued, "Just give us a call if you're listening."

So, I won. And I couldn't believe it. Two wins in two days. What were my chances of winning? I never won in a contest like that before and certainly not in a raffle and have never won since that time. After that, I never doubted that it was God who arranged the circumstances, who controlled the events just so I will know that he still cares for me. He restored my joy because he worked in a personal way. And that episode made me realize that God was giving me a second chance.

Now, if I messed up, why would God give me a second chance? You know why? It is because

He is a Forgiving God

One time EZ came to my office and asked for a bond paper. Then, he left and after a few minutes came back and rather sheepishly said, "Daddy, I colored outside the

lines too many times. Could I start over on a clean sheet?” “Of course,” I said. The mistake he did, I didn’t take it against him. You know, our father in heaven loves you more than any earthly father could. No matter what your mistake is, no matter how many times you commit them, God will give you another chance. David wrote in Psalm 32:1 (MSG) , *“Count yourself lucky, how happy you must be— you get a fresh start, your slate's wiped clean.”*

You see, God has set for us certain boundaries, laws that are there to protect us but when we go outside those boundaries we call it sin, and when we confess those sins, we are saying “Can I start over?” And God stands ready with a new sheet in hand, waiting to give you a second chance.

You see, God wants to forgive you. God wants to give you a fresh start. For some reason we have in our minds this image of a God who is anxious to punish us, clasping His hands, just waiting for the chance to send us to hell. But with all the second, third, fourth and sometimes fifth or more chances He gives us, it seems that God is looking more for ways to get us home than for ways to keep us out. I challenge you to find one soul who came to God seeking grace and did not find it.

Max Lucado wrote about a time when his daughter had disobeyed him. He wrote, “My oldest daughter, Jenna, is four years old. Some time ago she came to me with a confession. “Daddy, I took a crayon and drew on the wall.” I sat down and lifted her up into my lap and tried to be wise. “Is that a good thing to do?” I asked her. “No.” “What does Daddy do when you write on the wall?” “You spank me.” “What do you think Daddy should do this time?” “Love.”

Don't we all want that? Don't we all long for a father who, even though our mistakes are written all over the wall, will love us anyway? Don't we want a father who cares for us in spite of our failures? Don't we want a Father who will give us a second chance? Well guess what... We do. And the Bible is filled with people who came to God seeking a second chance, and God granted their request.

In Jeremiah 31:34, God says, *"For I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more."* God is talking to his people the Israelites. But God is also talking to each one of us here. God wants you to know that there is nothing bad you have done that is out of reach by his grace.

The Psalmist says in Psalm 103:12, *"As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."*

Folks, that's what God is offering you. A brand-new start. You can start anew even though you have messed up big time.

What can you do then to accept God's offer of a new beginning? What can you do to be restored? Let me give you three simple steps. I call these the ABC of Restoration. First,

1. Admit Your Mistake

Some people can never get restored, can never become joyful again because they have not gone beyond this first step. Instead of admitting their own mistakes they either make excuses or blame others. What are some common excuses?

“It’s not a big deal.” “Others do it anyway.” “It could be worse.” “The devil made me do it.”

Before restoration can happen, we must be humble enough to admit our mistake, our failure, our sin. The Bible says in James 4:6, *“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”*

Admit your mistake. The second step is

2. Believe that Jesus Has the Power to Save You

If you’re not a believer yet, your greatest mistake is relying on your own good works to save yourself. Why is that a mistake? Because no amount of good deeds can outweigh your evil deeds. Jesus says in Matthew 5:28, *“But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”* How about his saying in Matthew 5:21, *“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ 22But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.”*

That’s how serious and heavy sin is in the sight of God. In fact, Habakkuk 1:13 (HCSB) says, *“Your eyes are too pure to look on evil, and You cannot tolerate wrongdoing.”* So, one sin is enough to send you to hell.

That’s the bad news. The good news is you don’t have to save yourself or try to save yourself since it’s futile. All you need to do is to believe that Jesus can save you from your sins. The Bible says in 1 Timothy 2:5, *“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”* He is the only rightful

go-between between us and God. Talking about Jesus, Peter said to his hearers in Acts 4:11-13, *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”*

Friend, Jesus died for you. He sacrificed his life on the cross so that you may have eternal life. And on earth, he wants you to start anew. He wants to give you a new beginning in life. Just admit your sins to him and he will forgive you. That’s the reason he came to earth and die.

Now, if you’re a believer already, don’t mope and sulk and act like there’s no tomorrow. Don’t backslide. Don’t go back to fishing. Believe that when Jesus died on the cross for your sins, it covers all the sins you have ever committed and will ever commit. It’s a one-time deal. Of course, the guilt is there. You’ll feel remorseful. But that should make you repent and ask for forgiveness.

The Bible says in 1 John 1:9. Many of us know this by heart. Let’s say it together. *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*

Jesus has the power to save you from your sins and from your past.

Admit your mistake. Believe in the power of Jesus. And

3. Continue Your Walk With God

If you believe that God is giving you a second chance, then, by all means, forget the past and look forward to another day.

The worst thing that can happen is for you to remain where you are because you are afraid, because you don't want to take chances anymore.

Earlier, I told you about Jordyn Wieber who was expected to win the all-around event in the gymnastics competition but did not qualify because of the mistakes she made in her routine. She was, of course, devastated. She worked hard over the years to reach that point only to come up empty. Did she mope? Did she sulk? Did she think about what could have been? Yes, she did. She was sad for a couple of days. But on the third day, she regrouped and helped her teammates to win the gold in the women's gymnastics team finals. The 17-year-old called her performance "redemption."

Folks, like Jordyn, we just need to regroup. Yes, the feeling of disappointment, of devastation, will set in. But we need to believe that God can redeem us. Confess our sins to God to receive his healing touch. He can restore our joy if only we come to him and open up our hearts to him. He knows what's going on anyway. We cannot hide anything from him. Just be honest and God will honor that. If we don't, we'll keep on living in the past, a prisoner of our own mistakes and sins. Don't let the enemy continue to accuse you. He doesn't want you to experience the abundant life that Jesus promises.

He says in John 14:10, *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."*