

## Our Risky Callings & Fruitful Failures

Reflection on Matthew 4:18-22

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Trinity United Ottawa

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*“Follow me, and I will make you fish for people...  
Immediately, they left their nets and followed him.”*

Immediately...What a sudden, risk-taking response to Jesus' Call! Who among us would dare to **immediately** follow even the most charismatic spiritual teacher or the most powerful inner message? Jesus must have been *such* an inspiring Spiritual Presence. These fishermen immediately risked leaving their nets - their fishing nets for their livelihood and their family, (the only social safety net they had) - to go on the road with him. They changed their whole lives, without stopping to assess the risks or heed their fear that his venture might fail.

When is it wise to risk change and even embrace failure, for God's sake - for *goodness'* sake? Sometimes failure provokes us to hear our calling. How often are we stopped in our spiritual path by an experience of failure? The Apostles, leaving their nets and families and villages to become poor homeless followers of a radical Rabbi, were hardly a 'success story.' Their families were doubtless outraged by their desertion. Then their leader - supposedly the saviour of their people - was humiliatingly crucified by the authorities. If you take the end of Peter, Andrew, James and John's biographies as the end of the story, they were real failures!

But what fruitful failures their lives! How we admire them, even now!

Following our personal Callings always involves risk-taking and often involves some kind of 'failure,' so I thought we might acknowledge that today. And share some of the fruits of our failures. There is always learning from failing. Last week, we ventured into this topic of reframing 'success' and 'failure,' with Judi's Call story. This week, by one of those Spirit-incidences, my son's blog introduced me

to a website called [admitfailure.com](http://admitfailure.com). It's a place where courageous committed individuals are sharing their reflections about development and social action projects that failed, in an effort to learn the lessons that will make their sector more effective. My Liam suggests that when we admit failures to each other and learn from them together, we will also be able to more genuinely celebrate our successes together.

Let's risk reflecting about the times of our lives that felt - or feel right now - like failure. Maybe we'll find relief in sharing our hard truths, or re-evaluating what we or other people may judge to be our failings? Today after church, I invite you to share a failure story - and just see where that risk leads you? In sharing, we often hear from others what we need to change our own path - so that we can live God's calling to be fully our self, and thus a *real* success.

JK Rowling, the Harry Potter author and now the second richest woman in Britain, chose to speak at a Harvard commencement about 'The Hidden Benefits of Failure.' Let's watch together just 3 minutes of her wonderful speech. Here's a woman who dared to follow her calling, when she was a failure in life.

Click on link: <http://video.the-leaky-cauldron.org/video/1027>

I've heard lots of interesting - and sometimes heart-wrenching - stories of failure this week. But failure is rarely the end of the story. Like the disciples, our failures can turn out to be just the steep place on the path that provokes us to head our lives in a new direction. Given time, our failures are usually eclipsed by the meanings and learnings that can unfold from them - in God's time.

Remembering how the Apostles risked and failed might help us back onto the path of our Callings. We too may find our 'success' in letting go of judgement and self judgement, to just **be**: 'God's beloved ones.'

Desmond Tutu and his daughter Mpho conclude their inspiring book "Made for

Goodness” with a psalm that might help free some of us from the bonds of our so-called ‘failures.’ I asked Etienne to read it to us. Close your eyes if you like. Hear God calling to you:

“You are my child,  
My beloved.  
With you I am well pleased.  
Stand beside me and see yourself,  
Borrow my eyes so you can see perfectly.  
When you look with my eyes then you will see  
That the wrong you have done and the good left undone,  
The words you have said that should not have been spoken,  
The words you should have spoken but left unsaid,  
The hurts you have caused,  
The help you’ve not given  
Are not the whole of the story of you.  
You are not defined by what you did not achieve.  
Your worth is not determined by success.  
You were priceless before you drew your first breath,  
Beautiful before dress or artifice,  
Good at the core.

And now is time for unveiling  
The goodness that is hidden behind the fear of failing.  
You shout down your impulse to kindness in case it is shunned,  
You suck in your smile,  
You smother your laughter,  
You hold back the hand that would help,  
You crush your indignation  
When you see people wronged or in pain  
In case all you can do is not enough,  
In case you cannot fix the fault,

In case you cannot soothe the searing,  
In case you cannot make it right.  
What does it matter if you do not make it right?  
What does it matter if your efforts move no mountains?  
It matters not at all.  
It only matters that you live the truth of you.  
It only matters that you push back the veil to let your goodness shine through.  
It only matters that you live as I have made you.  
It only matters that you are made for me.  
Made like me,  
Made for goodness.”