

First Presbyterian Church
Luke 22:24-34, 54-62, “Back To Reality”
by Pastor Matt Johnson, 4/13/2025

How many times do I have to be brought back to reality?

I once thought I would be able to charm the girls at my church
in junior high and high school.

So I did my best to be a good friend, to not say mean things,
basically...I played the friend card.

But I was always hoping it might turn into something...a little romantic.

One girl I had a crush on opened up to me at youth group, and said,
“Matt, I just hate guys.”

And I was left going—hey...I’m a guy!

But rather than give up in defeat, I thought maybe this
is my opportunity to get my foot in the door.

So I said, “Well, what about me?”

Seriously, this happened, actually several times...

the girl comes back with,

“Oh, not you, Matt, I don’t think of you as a guy!”

Wow, talk about a setback.

Turns out I was like the eunuch of my youth group.

That conversation really brought me back to reality.

When I was young, I thought I would be a great soccer player.

I worked hard, had a lot of fun, listened to the coach.

But coach stuck me back at defender...because when you’re in grade school

all the real athletes play midfield and forward,

the biggest kid plays goalie,

and the uncoordinated kids are left

with the defender spots.

But one week, I actually found myself out of position at midfield
and I let a shot fly out.

To my complete shock, it somehow went in—

I scored a goal! I completely freaked out—

running around, screaming.

But after the game...the older brothers of my friends
came up to me and said,

“What is wrong with you? You scored on a complete *fluke*
and you screamed like a little girl?”

Brought me back to reality.

I was probably not going to be a great soccer player.

I once thought that I would get strong by working out with my friends.

Quickly realized that I don't care enough to *actually* get strong.

I've only consistently worked out when I've had
an extremely flexible schedule,

and when the weather's been nice.

If you've ever tried to get on a consistent exercise schedule,
you know that's never enough to get it done. Back to reality.

Sonja and I once thought that we had my finances together.

We installed the Mint money management app.

We connected all my bank statements, visa cards,
mortgage payments and auto-bill-pay accounts.

Then I looked at all the pie charts to see what percentage of my money
was being spent on restaurants, housing, groceries, taxes, and giving.

I felt like the more pie charts I saw,
the better I would be with my spending habits.

Thought we would finally be a good stewards of our money
and live on a budget so we could save more for the future.

But it basically still came down to us asking each other,
"Is the bank account number going up or going down?"
reviewing all the reasons it was going down,
and then brainstorming what we would do to get it
going the direction we prefer.

Not exactly a financial planner. Back to reality.

Now I don't want you to leave today and tell someone,

"Jeez I went to church today and my pastor
dumped all of his junk on me!"

So here's why I share those things with you:

I've been around enough people to know that
we've all got our own versions of that list.

For most of us, it's not just one or two things,
there are whole *lists* of things that we keep in our heads,
things that tell us where we're weak,
where we haven't been good enough.
Places where we've failed ourselves, our families,
and even places where we've failed God.

How many times do we have to be brought back to reality?

Today's text is a classic story of being brought back to reality.

Like all of us, Peter has a tendency to live with inflated expectations.
He is the self-proclaimed leader of the disciples
throughout the gospel of Luke.

He's the one who declares Jesus to be the Messiah,
he's the one who calls for tents to be made for Moses and Elijah
at the transfiguration, he's the one who speaks for the group.

Do you think there's a chance he's involved in the dispute about greatness
we read about in v. 24?

Here we are at the end of Jesus' ministry.
The disciples have spent three years with him.
The tension between Jesus and the Jerusalem powers
is nearing the breaking point,
and these disciples are talking about who is the greatest?

It seems hard to believe. But I have noticed that when anxiety is high,
people look for the easiest available outlet to relieve it.
When we are feeling tension and worry and uncertainty,
we are more likely to act out in stupid ways
that offer an escape hatch for us.

Jesus saw a teaching opportunity: Who is great among you?
The one who rules or the one who serves?
The one who feasts at the table or the one who brings the food?
Jesus ... looking at Peter, I suppose ... says,
"But I am among you as one who serves."

If you want to talk about being great,
you have to understand what real greatness is about.

But Peter was still in escape mode. Oh, he knew he'd be great.
He was the one who understood it all!
So he told Jesus he would stay true to him
even if he had to go to prison. Even if he had to die.

With his teaching, Jesus tried to bring him back to reality.
There were forces at work here beyond Peter's capability to control.
Before the rooster crows twice,
Peter would disown him three times.

The words were spoken, but there are some lessons a person can't learn
just by hearing the words. Some lessons need to be lived.
Jesus was arrested. He's forcibly taken away by surprise.
Peter was unprepared for this moment ...
he didn't know how to respond.

So Peter was left wandering around in the courtyard
of the High Priest's house where this trial is happening,
and it's a cold night so he's warming himself by the fire.

Then a servant girl looks at him ... closely ... and she IDs him.
She can tell that she's seen this guy before.
So she says, "This man was with him."

Peter...denies it. "Woman, I don't know him,"

In quick succession, Luke lays out the second and third denials,
each coming within an hour or less of one another.
And, as we learn later, all coming with Jesus in his line of sight.

The third person to associate Peter with Jesus says,
"Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean."

The people around the fire must have listened to him talking
and picked up on his accent.

Now Peter has been cornered. You can't deny your accent.

[In Michael Caine voice]

“It would be like Michael Caine denying he’s English.”

Or like a surfer from Malibu saying,

“Hey—I do not appreesh the implicash
that I am from California.”

His cover is blown, and Peter’s physical safety could be in danger
if this crowd turns against him. He has been linked to Jesus
who has just been found worthy of death by the Sanhedrin.

So Peter swears to all of those within earshot,

“Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

The rooster crows *as Peter is speaking*.

And in the same moment ... picture it in your mind ...

Jesus, while being interrogated, preparing for torture and death,
turned and looked straight at Peter.

Only the text doesn’t say “*Jesus* looked at Peter” it reads, “the Lord.”

This conveys that when Peter looks into the eyes of Jesus,
he knows he is looking into the eyes of God’s Messiah.

Immediately, Peter remembered Jesus’ prediction of his denial.

He fell down and wept.

Back to reality, Peter.

But I’ve got to wonder...*why was it*

that Jesus predicted this failure of Peter’s?

Why did Jesus feel the need to set him up like that?

Did he do it to say, “I told you so?”

Did he do it so that Peter would feel like an idiot?

Did he predict this failure, so that Peter could add
one more story to his list of times

when he’d been brought back to the reality

of his human frailty and overconfidence?

None of those make sense to me. Jesus was only and entirely on Peter’s side.

In fact, he tells Peter to strengthen his friends after he returns!

Because of who Jesus is, this prediction of Jesus, which is fulfilled exactly,

must have been made for the *betterment* of Peter,

not to create anxiety or guilt or self-hatred in him.

When we think of it like this, it is clear that Jesus predicted this
so that Peter would know that Jesus is with him *even in his failure*.
What a shocking new reality *that* is.

If this is a story of Peter being brought back to reality,
then we have to ask, “What is the reality he is brought back to?”
Is it the reality that he’s a pompous jerk
who runs his mouth off but can’t back it up? NO!
Peter has been brought back to the reality that Jesus knows him
better than he knows himself, and that Peter is of immense value
to Jesus *even though he’s not perfect!*
Jesus *knew it, he called it, he predicted it, it happens,*
and he is *still* on the side of Peter
even as Peter weeps deeply at his lack of strength.

When Jesus looks at Peter his eyes don’t say,
“Remember that I told you so,”
they say, “Remember that I love you.”
This is a picture of *grace!*

Some might say the message of this story is,
“Don’t be like Peter, he really screwed up.”
But I think the message is, “Aren’t we all like Peter?”
And isn’t amazing that Jesus stands by us anyway?”

This is being brought back to the reality of *grace*
rather than being brought back to the reality of my incompetence,
the reality of my inability to stick with it,
the reality of my secret desires to choose the way of safety.

It can be shocking to realize that Jesus already knows who you are.
Being brought back to the reality of grace allows us
to be the people Jesus already knows we are,
and then to become the people that Jesus calls us to be.

Missional theologian Alan Roxburgh goes so far
as to say that the flaws we hold against ourselves are actually
the key to our participation in God’s mission in the world.

Roxburgh says this: **“The deepest flaws of our lives
are at the heart of who we are...Our flaws
(usually well hidden from ourselves or psychologized
out of the way) are the sources
of the character God forms in us.
Its how we contribute in the kingdom.”**

Our flaws provide the impetus for God’s healing in us
and therefore God’s healing in the world through us,
because when we recognize what God has done
in our places of weakness, we can tell the story
of the greatness – the true greatness – of God’s love.

and then you might look at your neighbors who
So...I encourage you all to change the way you tell your story.
What if you told your story through the lens of God’s grace?

I encourage you to go back through that list you have,
the list of all the places and times where you really blew it,
where you were really brought back to reality,
where you really let yourself down,
where you let God down.

Yes, our failures bring us back to the reality – the reality of God’s grace.
And through grace we can begin to see our failures
and the failures of the world around us
in a completely different way.