

St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Medina, WA
The Rev. Alexander Breckinridge
Church Year A
3/26/17 • Lent 4
John 9:1-41

I'll confess to being a Pharisee. At least some of the time. Actually, maybe most of the time. I say I'm a Pharisee not because I'm a strict rule-follower, because I'm really not. And not because I believe that strictly following a particular moral code makes me superior to anyone else. I don't believe that at all. No, I say I'm often a Pharisee because from time to time I live with an illusion. The illusion that I am not blind. The illusion that I have it all figured out. The illusion that I see with perfect clarity. The illusion that is to say, that I am right. Which also because, of course, that unless you agree with me, you are wrong.

In this beautiful story we just heard, that was the Pharisees' problem. Their problem was their illusion that the man was born blind because of someone's sinfulness. Either his own sinfulness or his parent's sinfulness. That was a question for an interesting debate. Who's responsible for this man's disability? He must be blind because someone, either him or his parents, violated the law: violated, that is to say, the moral code.

And so they're offended when Jesus comes along, spits in the dirt, makes a mud pie, rubs it on the man's eyes and, miracle of miracles, now the man can see. How can this be? The man was clearly an unrepentant sinner, or his parents were. And Jesus, because he doesn't agree with us, is clearly a sinner too, so how can he do such a mighty work? Only the ones who agree with us can do the works of God, seems to be the Pharisees' position. Only the ones who subscribe to our particular moral code. And that – right there – is the source of their blindness.

You see, in John's gospel, sin isn't defined by what a person does or doesn't do. Sin is defined by one's relationship with Jesus. Right from the beginning, John makes clear that in Jesus, God has come into the world. God becomes a human being. And we are invited to shape our lives, to pattern our lives, after Jesus. To live the Truth of Jesus' life. You remember, we'll hear Jesus say later in John's gospel, "I am the way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me"? Want to know God? Follow Jesus. Know Jesus. Be like Jesus. Jesus as far as you can. That's where salvation lies. Salvation, remember, whose Latin root word, *salvas*, means "health." Want to live a life filled with spiritual and emotional health? Follow Jesus. Follow his life. And what defines Jesus' life? Healing, reconciliation, welcoming everyone to the table. Letting go of the need to be powerful and in control of everything. Surrendering your own life to the will of God, surrendering your life to something larger than the satisfaction of your own egoic desires – including – and here's the kicker for a lot of us – surrendering your egoic desire to be right. To be righteous, To be self-important at the expense of others. Letting that one go can be pretty rough for a lot of us, me most especially included.

And it sure included the Pharisees. They couldn't tolerate that a man who didn't meet their definition of righteousness could do the work of God. And yet there was the evidence right in front of them. The man who said of Jesus, "I don't know whether he's a sinner. One thing I do know, was that though I was blind, now I see."

Is that a familiar line? It should be. It inspired a former slave-ship captain named John Newton to write one of the most well-loved hymns we know.

"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found. Was blind but now I see." As John Newton began to read the Bible and come to know Jesus in his life, he came to realize his blindness, and the inhuman misery that he participated in. His path on the way to Jesus led him to become an Anglican priest and to be a key ally of William Wilberforce, another faithful Anglican, in abolishing the slave trade in Great Britain. Grace came into his life, not because of any act on his part, but simply because he could **see** that the Jesus way was the way to life and health – mind and spirit. He had been blind. Now he could see.

In a moment, you'll hear the choir singing a beautiful interpretation of Amazing Grace. Sink into the music. Let the music fill your soul with God's grace. Let your blindness be healed. As you listen to those beautiful words that will be sung so movingly, feel what it's like to see – to really see. To see the beauty in the world. To see the beauty in other people. Even people you don't agree with or don't agree with you. See them for who they really are. God's beloved just like you.

Because, you know, I'm not the only Pharisee in the room today. Most of you are, too. We all are Pharisees from time to time. Blind Pharisees. Blind to God's love for the whole world and not just for us. Remember, a few Sundays ago we heard Jesus say, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that everyone who believes in him – who trusts him, who patterns their lives on his life, may have eternal life." God so loved the **world** . The whole world. Everybody and everything in it.

Let Jesus come to you. Let him spit on the ground and make a mud pie and spread it on your eyes. Don't you love how real and earthy that is? Let Jesus heal your blindness, your arrogance, your need to be right all the time. God, what a burden that is, having to be right all the time. The Grace that flows from letting go of our need to be right all the time and just getting into right relationship with God and with each other really is amazing.

We'll say our Baptismal Covenant in just a moment. You'll be asked this question. "Will you proclaim by word and example – **example** – the Good News of God in Christ?" The blind man was a beautiful example of the good news of the Gospel. Grace upon grace flowed through him. Grace upon grace.

You know, I think the hinge point, the turning point, in this story, isn't the healing of the blind man. It's when the blind man looks at Jesus and says, "Lord, I believe." Lord, I trust. Lord, I want to follow you. That's how he becomes an example for us. The grace – the amazing grace – that flows from becoming a follower of the Way, the Truth, the Life. We are always being invited to follow. Every day when we wake up. Will I be a follower **today**? Will I proclaim by my example – today – let tomorrow take care of itself – today – will I proclaim by my example; the good news of God in Christ? Amen.