

Fourth Sunday in Lent
March 15, 2026 • 10:30am
Trinity Episcopal Church • New Orleans, LA

The Rev. Lex Breckinridge

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Well, I have a confession to make. I confess today before God and this congregation here gathered that I am a Pharisee, at least some of the time.

I don't know, maybe most of the time. I say I'm a Pharisee not because I'm a strict rule follower, because I'm really not. Not because I believe that strictly following a particular moral code makes me superior to anyone else.

I don't believe that either. 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 I am right.

Which means also, of course, unless you agree with me, you are wrong. Sorry to have to tell you that. In this beautiful story we just heard, that was certainly the Pharisee's problem.

Their problem was their illusion that this poor man was born blind because of someone's sinfulness. Either his own sinfulness or his parents. And that was a question for an interesting debate.

Who's responsible for this man's disability? I mean we're always looking for scapegoats, aren't we? He must be blind because someone, either him or his parents, violated the law. Someone violated the moral code they were all supposed to live by. And so they're offended when Jesus comes along, spits in the dirt, makes a mud pie and rubs it on the man's eyes.

A miracle of miracles. Now the man can see. How can this be? The man was clearly an unrepentant sinner, or his parents were, or somebody was.

And Jesus, because he doesn't agree with us, he's 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. That's the Pharisee's 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 not to condemn the world, but to save it. God becomes a human being to invite us to shape our lives, to pattern our lives after the life of Jesus.

The human expression of how God calls the rest of us human beings to live our own human lives. To live the truth of Jesus's life. You remember, we'll hear Jesus say later in John's gospel, I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. Now, let me digress for a minute and tell you what that doesn't mean. It doesn't mean if you want to go to heaven, you better be a Christian.

Jesus never said such a thing. What he did say was this, if you want to know God, if you want to know God's will for your life, be like me. Follow me.

Know me. Be like me as far as you can. I mean, that's where salvation lies.

Now, I can't say this often enough. The Latin root word for salvation is *salvus*, which means health. It means wholeness.

You want to live a life filled with spiritual and emotional health and wholeness? Follow Jesus. Be like Jesus. Follow his life.

And what defines Jesus's life? Healing and reconciliation. Welcoming everyone, everyone to the table, most especially giving welcome to the poor and the marginalized and those whom polite society despises. Welcome them all to the table.

Let go of the need to be powerful and in control of everything. Let go of the need to be well thought of. Let go of the fear of scarcity.

Embrace the abundance of God's creation, 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. Yet there was the evidence right in front of them.

The man who said to Jesus, I don't know whether he's a sinner. One thing I do know is that though I was blind, now I see. Is that a familiar line? Yeah, right? That's a familiar line.

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 I'm 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 evil 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 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 Jesus was the way to life and healing and health, mind and spirit. He'd been blind, now he could see.

In a moment you'll hear the choir singing a beautiful interpretation of *Amazing Grace*. As they sing, just 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 we 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 and people you don't agree with or don't agree with you. See them for who they really are.

They are God's beloved, just like you. Because you know, I'm not the only Pharisee in the room today. There are a whole bunch of you out there, right? We're all 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, meaning who trusts in 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. My dear sisters and brothers, 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. 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 right relationship with each other really is amazing.

I had a wonderfully wise old friend in a former parish, I may have mentioned her before, Granny Mary. Man, she was a trip. Granny Mary often said, it's better to love than it is to be right, and I guarantee you folks listen to her.

It's better to love than it is to be right. Put that on a sticky note in your bathroom mirror so you'll see it every time you brush your teeth. 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 really 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.

My dear friends, we're 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. Let tomorrow take care of itself today.

Will I proclaim by my example the good news of God in Christ? Will I be like Granny Mary and choose love instead of working so darn hard to try to be right today? Will I be like Jesus and love the whole world?