

Sermon: The Lord is my Shepherd

March 15, 2026

John 9,1-11(41)

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Dear God,

your people are gathered here because you have called us. We are your church, in your house, gathered (to welcome you in) and renew (or hydrate) our desires to be your followers during this week. Thank you for letting us experience your love through the people we shall encounter after this service, during coffee hour. Guide us like the sheep of your pastures, like lambs in your arms, like a shepherd holding us in your shoulders. Sweet Lord, no one else knows as you know the ways that *leadeth* us to greenest pastures, where you guide us with a faith, determination and questioning that comes from you.

Amen.

“He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters”; or, as King James Version says: “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters”. Community, last Sunday, rev Mark invited us to go back to the well. To build a church community, going back to the origin of the word *ekklesia*, written as “assembly”, or “those called out”. Rev Mark asked us if Church, our assembly, the house of the Lord, *if it was a building. If is it the place to hold rituals, and when did that change?* Now let me add today: In a society that continues to push religion away, how will we adapt, react or resist?

For those who live in Brookline, as an example of these changes, back in November of last year, the school board was trying to push away the religious calendar and only respect the federal holidays. This meant to “learn and teach better without frequent interruptions” as they described it. But The Brookline Clergy Association and families of the community showed their disagreement, as this takes away Yom-Kippur or Eid Al-Fitr. It leaves out Jewish and Muslim celebrations, while Christmas is a federal holiday.

Our gospel tells us about a man born blind, disciples, neighbors, the Pharisees, the parents of this blind man and Jesus. In this reading the feverish Pharisees are trying to push away Jesus and respect their religious holiday, their Sabbath, because Jesus's sign is against their observance. They wanted to show him as a man that was not sent by God, and demean his sign, as a transgression of their observance. Our history reminds us that communities are built through cycles of inclusion and exclusion, of those in and those out, as part of our human forms of gathering social groups and identities, when those in power need to exclude those whose signs, whose actions, whose voices are a challenge to their understanding of laws. I think we live in a society where Jesus, like the Jewish and Muslim calendars, both are an interruption, and one uncomfortable to those in power, those who are looking to go backwards in the name of simplicity, to exclude and ignore, to blind themselves and push away faith. I bet you noticed the parallel.

II.

You may have noticed our reader Carol Lohe read until verse 11, but this was going to be another long reading, yes, another twenty more verses. So let me summarize it. Jesus heals this man. And yes, he uses saliva. There was a back and forth argument with the Pharisees about healing him on Sabbath, and then they called the parents to confirm if he had been born blind. Then, the healed blind man, whose name we do not know, replies to the Pharisees in defense of Jesus, and then both talk. The reading ends when Jesus drops the mic, when he says a harsh sentence to the Pharisees about their own blindness, one that puts laws over people. What is this reading teaching us for this Sunday, my dear Unitarians, followers of Jesus? Caramba.

I want to invite us to reflect about being disciples of Jesus in a time where Christianity is considered aligned with a political project. When our faith is no longer in catacombs, but in the imperial seat. A time where our churches are in constant emotions of fear or anxiety to attract communities that are multicultural and ethnically diverse. In an article by Axios digital news, back in December of 2025, they report that “the US is undergoing its fastest religious shift in modern history, marked by a rapid increase in religiously unaffiliated and numerous church closures nationwide”. Churches want to attract seekers, but sometimes the green pastures are still inside their door. Back in my country, Colombia, my

green pastures were going to mass on Sundays so I could eat a cheese stick after. For others, being at church was being on their knees, to pray, to contemplate, to take communion like my mother, for my little brother, it meant an hour of people standing, and not paying him attention, and for my father it was to take my mother and buy us those fried cheese sticks. How can we find those green pastures, churches where we could be leadeth to be beside still waters, and to be able to drink from the well? This is my definition: an assembly, a church, is to hold inside the tensions. Our own selves, not uniformed, but united. Probably the Pharisees had an idea in mind of what a religious mandate should look like, interpretations that were probably accepted by the majority, but for Jesus the celebration of Sabbath should not exclude us from fulfilling God's will, to love our neighbor.

Our country, yes, mine too, is experiencing an ongoing transformation. While some places close, others open. For the generation that lived through Woodstock, peace and love guided their ideas; but for those born listening to Metallica or Nirvana, that generation of pacifists and non violent protesters seemed naive. For my generation, if I could claim this, we have received the living waters of the Civil Rights Movement, the chance for Same Sex couples to be married, Stonewall, the Immigration and Nationality Act or Roe v. Wade. And still, I feel things are not ok. How can the church adapt to this shift, keeping its distance out of State, and not being caught up in the nets of calendars, Sabbath restrictions and be an assembly of believers?

III.

In Buddhism, the Japanese Soto Zen tradition, there are the three great G's to achieve the practice of any enlightened being. The three stick chair. Great Faith, Great Doubt and Great Energy, translated often as Passion or Determination. The three G's I say.

In Jesus times faith may have been the big G. In verse 38 the healed man says: Lord, I believe, and it says that the man worshiped him. But in this modern period, we no longer hold Faith as central as Jesus' times. Maybe, our church, descendents of a line of great doubters, puritans and defiants, maybe we have the tendency to be great doubters. As your intern here at church, I notice your desire to ask, to look ahead at the lyrics of the hymns, to question, to inquire, to

point out if there is a comma instead of a dot. Your doubt is also sacred to me. Your doubt is welcome here too if you struggle, like the Pharisees, to explain Jesus' discipleship. An assembly, an ecclesia should hold that doubt too. Doubt has made hundreds of humans save their lives. Doubt could have saved The Titanic. In the gospel of John the Pharisees have also great doubt. They want to understand that this man was healed and that their parents could certify to them that he was born like that. Great doubt to ask twice to this man about how Jesus opened his eyes, and this man replies: "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?"

Where is the great determination? In Jesus. Yes, Jesus was determined. And not because this is one of the few times he heals with his saliva. No, *jaja* no one wants Jesus saliva. But because determination, courage, passion, energy, is what our great doubt needs today. Our churches need more determination than the other two G's. Determination doesn't mean activism, it is to learn to do the right thing at the right time. Determination to act on Sabbath, just as you could act on a St. Patrick's day or on a *Monday Monday, so good to me*.

Let us go back to what I told you about Brookline and their school calendar. Maybe in the name of doubt they want the easiest and simplest form to organize their days, so they don't have to care about religious celebrations at all. But the great faith of these families, Muslims, Jewish, and Hindus also matters. Great faith is not arbitrary. Faith reminds me of the words one member of this congregation told me a few Sundays ago: "I come to this church, to find a place of dignity" And I agree when dignity has a space for faith. Novelist Anne Lamott said: "The opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty" and certainty tends to undermine piety, and spirituality when, in reality, they are our best way to resist modern enlightenment and rational authoritarianism.

Dignity makes our church a green pasture, but not to be comfortable, it is a dignity to share one unto the other. Do you remember what I told you about praying with your families, rather than just praying for them? Let those who seek to be on their knees to keep their great faith, let those who come for coffee hour to share their doubts, let those who sing with determination and energy inspire your life. We can hold the tensions of our three G's and call ourselves community.

IV.

Let me finish with the wisdom from the Jewish faith. Rabbi Tarfon used to say: “It is not your obligation to finish the work, and neither are you free to desist from it.”¹ What is our great faith? To stay together, as an assembly, no matter if you came to get on your knees, like my mother, to bring your family and support them like my Father, Diego, or to get there for the cheese sticks, like me. What is our great doubt, ecclesia, assembly? Not to doubt in ourselves, but to doubt when the green pastures become comfortable, when the still waters invite mosquitos, and are not living waters. Doubt in easy answers and fast solutions, doubt that churches are doomed and doubt in those who use Christianity for a political project. Our doubt is to stop trusting that the road for liberation depends on one person. As a church, it is our task to be a church, no more, no less.

What is, finally, great determination? Courage. Color courageous discipleship, all shapes and kinds and colors of courage. Saliva, mud, the fire of the Spirit, Jesus' determination to heal during sabbath. The courage to wake up every Sunday morning to be here, the determination to do sandwiches, like we did last Sunday, the energy to sing, every service, the determination to share yourself during and after coffee hour, energy that doesn't end with retirement. Let us be determinate as a community, to love, like a song from The Beatles, like a promise of green pastures awaiting for us: “Here comes the Sun, Here comes the Sun, and I say, It's Alright.

¹ Pirkei Avot (Ethics of our fathers) 2:16

PASTORAL PRAYER

Help us, O Divine Spirit.

When truth is being covered up,
may we Reveal and expose injustice.

When victims are being denigrated,
may we Redeem their dignity and validate their pain.

When those who interpret events to their own favor seek our compliance,
may we Reframe the story and name the injustice.

When movements are hijacked or hope is diverted,
may we Redirect our energy and mobilize together.

And when we are intimidated or silenced,
may we Resist with great faith, with great doubt, and great determination.

Amen.

FINAL BLESSING

From Meditations of the Heart by Howard Thurman

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to rebuild the nations.

Amen.