



Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge
Sunday May 15, 2022
Worship at Home

Email: northpelham.rockwaypc@gmail.com **Website:** <https://northpelhamrockwaypresbyterian.ca>

Our sincere thanks to Rev. Trish Archibald
for providing the Worship at Home Resource today

Call to Worship:

1 Peter 5 tells us to Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for us, actually, it says he cares for YOU. You can trust God.

Hymn: **Morning has broken** **#814**

Opening Prayer of Adoration and Confession:

Mighty God, who speaks a word of peace to calm our troubled sea; Caring God, who nudges us away from fear and toward faith; Ever-present God, who fills us with awe but also raises many questions without easy answers; Open our eyes to see you in our boat—today, Strengthen our hearts for the challenges that lie ahead, Open our ears this hour to hear the word you speak, our Father who art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us the day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and deliver us not into temptation, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, AMEN

Prayer of Confession

God of love and power, we listen to the stories of miracles and doubt that these things can happen today. We look at the waves of misfortune, distress, misery, distrust, and anger and wonder how we can still those waves. We feel the pressures of power and fear flooding into our lives, threatening to drown us and wonder where you are. Forgive us for the littleness of our faith. Forgive us for our doubts. Help us to place out trust in you, Lord Jesus. Help us to fix our eyes on you - For we ask these things in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Assurance:

Fear not! God is with us, stilling the storms and raging fears in our lives. Place your trust in God always.

Amen.

Hymn: Fairest Lord Jesus **# 375**

Scripture Reading:

Acts 27: 9-44 Paul is shipwrecked on the way to stand trial in Rome

9 Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Day of Atonement.[a] So Paul warned them, 10 “Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also.” 11 But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. 12 Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbor in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest.

The Storm

13 When a gentle south wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. 14 Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the Northeaster, swept down from the island. 15 The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. 16 As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly

able to make the lifeboat secure, 17 so the men hoisted it aboard. Then they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Because they were afraid they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor[b] and let the ship be driven along. 18 We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they

began to throw the cargo overboard. 19 On the third day, they threw the ship’s tackle overboard with their own hands. 20 When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.

21 After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: “Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. 22 But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. 23 Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me 24 and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.’ 25 So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. 26 Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island.”

The Shipwreck 27 On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic[c] Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land. 28 They took soundings and found that the water was a hundred and twenty feet[d] deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet[e] deep. 29 Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. 30 In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow. 31 Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved.” 32 So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it drift away.

33 Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. “For the last fourteen days,” he said, “you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food—you haven’t eaten anything. 34 Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.” 35 After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. 36 They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. 37 Altogether there were 276 of us on board. 38 When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.

39 When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. 40 Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. 41 But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.

42 The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. 43 But the centurion wanted to spare Paul’s life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. 44 The rest were to get there on planks or on other pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land safely.

Message: Shipwrecked!

We don’t have to be sailors to know a shipwreck when we see it. In fact, we might describe the situation in different words, some more and some less polite. We might call this mess a train wreck or a car crash in slow motion from which we cannot look away. I think the term nowadays is “dumpster fire” as in, “2020 was a total dumpster fire because of Covid”. These terms all describe those times in life when you’ve got a catastrophe on your hands- a total disaster.

Paul was going as a prisoner in chains to stand trial in Rome. He was in enough trouble as it was- but now, his ship is sailing straight into a storm. It’s late in the season, and everyone knew that there would be an increased risk of bad weather but the ship’s captain and crew were determined to winter somewhere closer to Rome. (Who wouldn’t?) They also wanted the payment for the cargo they were carrying. Again, that’s a pretty strong motivator. So they set out, Paul says after The Day of Atonement which is always early October. The beautiful blue Mediterranean can get ugly fast.

Soon it starts to sound like the Gordon Lightfoot song The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald when the winds of November came early. The crew first tries to lash the cargo down, then they realize the cargo’s going to take them down, so they ditch it. They try to secure a lifeboat, but eventually, they have to cut even the lifeboat loose in order to lighten their load.

Paul knew this trip was ill-advised and then knew that they were not likely to ride out a storm headed their way. (He must have been rather annoying saying, “I told you so” to anyone who would listen). By now, everyone sees what’s coming

and they brace for it like you might if you knew your car wouldn't be able to stop in time and you were going to ram into the vehicle in front of you.

But, instead of freaking out, Paul does the one truly helpful thing he can offer: he prays- and in the midst of howling winds and crashing waves he strains to hear what God has to say. He gathers everyone and tells them the most amazing thing: not that this is God's punishment for their sinful ways, not divine wrath, but that God has promised that they will be saved. They'll be wrecked, there's no helping that, but they'll live. All of them. Not one hair on their head will be lost. Crazy promises in a desperate time, but like there are no atheists in foxholes, the sailors clutch at any straw of hope. The centurion who was accompanying the prisoners considered killing them all to prevent them from escaping but told them instead to save themselves if they could.

The ship does run aground and breaks up on a sandbar as the surf pummels it into pieces. By some miracle, everyone makes it to shore.

I'm reminded of that Tommy Lee Jones movie the Fugitive at this point in the story- where the busload of convicts attempts a jailbreak and the bus ends up running off the road and crashing down into a ravine. The protagonist, Dr. Richard Kimble who has been wrongly charged in his wife's murder takes advantage of the chaos and escapes.

I can imagine that all of the prisoners on Paul's ship wondered if this too was their opportunity to flee. I wonder if it crossed Paul's mind. He was likely going to be sentenced to more jail time or even death when he arrived in Rome and, now, surprisingly and suddenly he found himself liberated by the shipwreck.

But he held onto the first part of God's angel's promise in the vision- the part that was meant for him alone: God wanted him in Rome. He was saved along with everyone else because he was supposed to get to Rome. His chains might have been gone, but he still belonged to Jesus Christ whom he served with his life. And so, unlike other times when a miracle had busted open his prison doors to set him free, this time he remained.

There is so much here to unpack- but I think it may be good for us all to linger here for a few moments thinking about how we react in a crisis, and how we might learn from Paul, without all the "I told you so's".

When your world falls apart, when everything you count on crashes and burns, what keeps you together?

Now, if I'm asking people who don't particularly identify with church, they might say, the love of their family, or friends. And that's probably true for all of us who have a good circle of support. Friends can keep you sane, their kindness can be your life preserver when your little boat is wrecked by grief. But if I ask people to dig a little deeper, beyond the friend circle, most will usually say that they try to find meaning in the tragedy.

There's often some fumbling with the language of a faith from long ago in an effort to make sense of the senseless thing that has befallen them. They might feel that the God they've ignored and failed to give much credit to over the years is actually engaged now in some long overdue payback. God's punishment or God's will, it's all the same in the end, leaving us with a harsh God

who gives and sure as heck takes away. Maybe folks arrive at that conclusion because they just can't make sense of it any other way. It must be God to blame.

Ask a person of faith, and they may say that when everything falls apart, and their life is on the rocks, it's their conviction that God is right there with them that keeps their head above water.

I once imagined Christ's act of salvation as us, silly, foolish humans, going out over our heads in rough water, and landing in deep trouble, sure to drown. And Jesus, comes along in a lifeboat. We can choose to take his outstretched hand and be rescued, or we can insist we can make it to shore on our own and keep swimming until we are exhausted and slip under the waves. The rescuer is there, all we have to do is accept his help and be pulled in to safety.

When traumatic events happen in our lives, and of course they certainly will – whether it is the ordinary traumas of leaving home, or having children, or getting older and kids leaving home, retiring and having to develop a new way of life, or the traumas of loss or violence or injustice- these are the things that your faith helps you make sense of and to withstand.

Paul is in the midst of a crisis, and he takes time to pray. He wants to understand where God is in all of this. I'm guessing most of us resort to prayer eventually, usually after a whole lot of running around and trying to fix things and do it

ourselves. But the example is there for us- when things start to go bad, when you see the storm clouds gathering, take time to pray.

Paul's prayer wasn't just a drowning chorus of "help, help, help" like most of our panicked prayers- he took time to listen to what God had to say.

And then he took God's word for it.

He didn't appear to second-guess it, he just went with it and conducted himself accordingly.

It's amazing how fear hijacks our logic and our behaviour, isn't it? If you feel you have something to lose, if you are feeling threatened, you will shift into defensive mode, maybe even attack mode, reverting to our more basic primal responses to protect ourselves and what we have. When you remove fear, you have room to think things through. Paul was facing a terrifying situation. He was likely to die. But he trusted God was with him in this, and that was enough, apparently for him.

I'm sure we all wish that God spoke a little more clearly to us when we are in need- I bet we'd all welcome an angel sent from God to tell us that everything will be okay, right? That happens, but less often than we'd like. I think we have to listen really close- listen really hard- to hear what God is saying.

I have said on more than one occasion that during this year of grief that I have become sure of one thing when it comes to "so-called signs": when you see one meant for you, your heart knows. Your mind might tell you it's silly, or coincidence, or not logical and it will try to override your heart, but trust that heart; it knows what it knows.

I think God answers prayer the same way. If we really listen, we may very well feel a peace settle into place in our hearts where the worry lay. The answer may come in that we start to see things differently – perhaps more often than the miracle of circumstances changing. Our hearts will know.

But our doubting minds will niggle at that peace until it looks like Swiss cheese if we let it. We can overthink an answer to our prayer in no time at all if we don't control the impulse. And what is it that drives that impulse to doubt? Fear. So, cast out fear and trust what God has told you. We need to cast out fear like those

sailors dumped the ship's cargo when the going got bad. Fear weighs us down. Love lifts us up.

1 John 4:18 says "(God's) perfect love casts out fear. Fear has to do with punishment, and through Jesus, our punishment has been set aside, so we don't have to be afraid. God has got us. God will see us through, whatever it is.

I think about Paul telling those fear-mad sailors and prisoners and guards that things were going to be okay because the God he served said so. They must have thought he was insane. All evidence pointed to their deaths. But they lived. What a witness that moment must have been! They were kind of looking at Paul sideways out of their eyes when they washed up on shore- how did he know these things? Then, when a poisonous snake bit him when he was gathering wood for their fire, they thought, sure enough, this guy is cursed and the gods are trying to kill him. The storm didn't, but this sure as heck will. But Paul shook off the snake and didn't die. Then, they were convinced he was nothing short of a god himself! God used the ill-advised timing of the trip, and the storm, and even the viper, to provide Paul will opportunities to witness to his faith in Jesus. And you know Paul well enough by now to know that nothing stopped him from doing just that.

In times of crisis in our lives, I wonder how our response might allow people to see Jesus more clearly. We've all been amazed by people who have been through hell and back and they still give glory to God. What a witness. May we be determined to have a faith like that. May we keep holding fast to Jesus even in the midst of a dumpster fire of a year. May we, like Paul, provide an example of the kind of faith that will be a lifeboat for someone else in rough waters trying to keep afloat.

For the truth we cling to, the truth we profess, is that in all the dark and stormy times in our lives, Jesus is our lifeboat, our life raft, our lighthouse- it is He who will see us safe to shore. Thanks be to God.

Amen

Hymn: Jesus, the very thought of thee

#367

Our Offerings:

Prayer of Dedication

Blessed our gifts and use them for the betterment of God's work both here and afar.

Prayer of the People: Loving through the storm

We know the worst storms, Jesus, are the ones caused by our fear, when we grow afraid of losing our power, or we grow suspicious of the power of others, when we refuse to acknowledge your mysterious authority;

Yet, it's in the storm that we find our capacity to love. In releasing our weak claim to power and opening to your reign, we discover a new way of seeing ourselves — as called and useful and beloved — and the other, whoever they may be — as dignified and precious and beloved.

Here in the storm, Jesus, we need you, and we need each other, and the love you give us to share, leads us through sacrifice and self-giving to peace and calm, if only we will loose our hold on fear.

We pray that those among us who are holding on as if their lives depend on it will feel safe enough to open their arms and hearts to you.

We pray that any who hear these words today may trust that you too, have heard them and will rescue; that you know exactly what it is that they need.

Lord hear our prayers.

We love you, and we are doing our best to trust you and follow you.

And all God's people said, "Amen".

Amen.

Hymn: Take my life and let it be #637

Benediction: An Invitation to Trust

When dangers invade our sense of safety and we wonder if our Redeemer cares, we hear the invitation: Be at peace. Be calm.

When we face financial upsets, and our sense of security is shaky, we hear the invitation: Be at peace. Be calm.

When our congregations experience decline and we wonder if we are going under we hear the invitation: Be at peace. Be calm.

When controversial issues and rigidity of spirit threaten to tear at the very fabric of the faith community, we hear the invitation: Be at peace. Be calm.

When our lives feel chaotic and desolate because of illness or sorrow, or unrest in our families, we hear the invitation: Be at peace. Be calm.

Help us to know, O God, that the one who calmed the dangerous sea is present with us, cares for us, and can calm the stormy waters of our lives. Help us to trust more fully and more deeply in you. We pray in the name of Jesus, who invites us to be at peace.

Amen.

~ adapted by a prayer written by Connie R. Burkholder, Monitor Church of the Brethren in McPherson, Kansas.

We acknowledge that we meet on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe

Announcements:

Next Sunday worship will be at Rockway at 10:00 am with Rev. Elliston Bridger

Wednesday May 18 – Search Committee Meeting – 7:00 pm @ North Pelham

Saturday May 21 – Rockway Yard Sale 8:30 am – 1:00 pm @ Rockway Community Centre

Saturday May 28 – NP Plant and Bake Sale with BBQ – 9:00 am – 1:00 pm

Please keep both these sales in mind when spring cleaning or working in your gardens - good saleable items and plants and baking needed.

Moment for Mission – Sunday May 15th

In Malawi, unreliable rainfall patterns are a significant issue affecting farmers. As a result of climate change, these unpredictable rains greatly impact food security and limit what farmers can and cannot plant. To assist farmers in Malawi’s Karonga District, workshops that teach conservation agriculture techniques are held. Farmers learn how to use mulch and make compost to nourish the soil and grow better crops. Farmers also learn other essential techniques, including weed and pest management, to address the ongoing challenges of climate change. Since implementing a conservation agriculture approach, many farmers have significantly increased their crop yields. This agricultural project is supported by Presbyterian World Service & Development, in partnership with Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

