



Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge
Sunday November 20, 2022
Reign of Christ Sunday
Worship at Home

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Our sincere thanks to **Rev. Martin Wehrmann**
for leading us in worship today.

CALL TO WORSHIP

L. Jesus is Lord. Jesus is Lord of all!

P. May *we* be made strong in faith, with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may *we* be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled *us* to *share* in the inheritance of the saints in the light.

All. Amen. May it be so! (based on Col.1:11,12)

HYMN # 350 To God be the Glory

OPENING PRAYER OF ADORATION

Glorious God, our heavenly Parent; Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus:

we praise and honour You in this time of worship together. Whether we are in our home or in Your house, we believe You are among us, and it humbles us to know this! We are not worthy of Your Love and Presence. We are not worthy of Your mercy and forgiveness, for we are sinful creatures, spoiled by the Temptation to do evil; born into a fallen world – but

forgiven by Jesus. Washed clean in His blood and adopted again into His holy family! All glory, honour and praise are His! Now and forever and ever! Amen

God, today, as we celebrate Jesus' Lordship and sovereignty over the Church and over the world and over all 'that is', we pray for those who still don't believe. We pray for their hearts and minds to be opened and inspired.

We confess that our own faith is weak – as our lives betray daily – in the choices we make, in the words we use and as we choose our friends and avoid those we think of as not worthy of receiving 'our time of day' –

Lord, in this critical time for the future continuation of the earth, in this time of anxiety about another universal war, in this time of deteriorating relations among nations, races, religions and democratic principles – we need your guidance and helping hand. We need your justice and

righteousness and Spirit of mercy and forgiveness. We need to be reconciled to our neighbours and reconciled with those we see as our enemies --

Without You in our life, Lord Jesus, we revert to our basest thinking and behaviors. We will destroy one another in some way, eventually –

but WITH YOU, Lord Jesus, we bring forth the goodness Creator 'breathed' into us

and WITH YOU, Lord Jesus, our cleansed hearts can admit failure and sin and receive Your forgiveness, and we ourselves can forgive and love – as You love us; as only Your people can love

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Lord Jesus, hear our prayers. Answer these pleas from our heart, for we do wish to be your servants and disciples, making known your mercy and glory so others may share in it. Amen

Assurance of Pardon

Be assured that God hears prayer. That Jesus gave His life for you. That you are loved by Him!
Amen

HYMN # 376 Lord, the light of your love is shining

Prayer for Understanding

Scriptures: Responsive Psalm 46
Old Testament : Jeremiah 23:1-6
New Testament : Luke 1: 57-58; 66b-79

SERMON: “Preparing for God’s Saviour

As we prepare for our Saviour's return during the Advent season and celebration of Christmas – we want to 'punctuate' the past year in which we remembered the life, ministry and passion of our Lord Jesus – by **celebrating** Jesus!! **Today** we want to 'retell' *a small part of what led to that wondrous God-initiated event*, which persuaded much of the world that Jesus, born a poor baby in an animal shelter in Bethlehem; child of poor parents – that **Jesus is our Lord and Saviour of the world!**

So, today, as we celebrate the Reign of Christ as a special designated Sunday in our Christian year – we begin with one of the first recorded stories about events that led to the arrival of Jesus as God among us; as “Emmanuel”!

As you probably noticed, Luke begins his Gospel with stories about two women that are found to be pregnant *against their wildest expectations!* One is Elizabeth, the wife of the priest Zechariah, already advanced in age. The other is Mary, a young maiden – probably a servant-girl – engaged to a carpenter named Joseph. For both women it was a blessing to receive this news from

God, but it was also, as you all know, extremely disconcerting or upsetting – as Elizabeth had given up hope of ever having a child and had suffered her entire married life with that shame – and Mary, who wasn't married yet – now had to deal with the rejection of her fiancée and the gossip of friends and neighbours! – And yet, this was God's Will for both women! They were cousins or relatives, living very different lives – but soon, God's Plan for the world, in which they both had a part, would bring them together again in a fantastical, wonderful way!

Our Gospel reading retells the *prophecy of Zechariah*, who has just realized that the prediction or promise of God's angel to him had come true!! Elizabeth had indeed become pregnant! *Now, God had 'loosed' his tongue again so he could speak & in his joy, by the inspiration of God's Spirit *proclaim what we have read ourselves, again, today*, as we celebrate the Reign of Christ in this worship time! *Zechariah's words make it clear to us that this child is no ordinary child. Sentence after sentence in his message to relatives, neighbours and friends, Zechariah explains why his son will be named JOHN – which means 'God is gracious'. [*If you get yourself a good study Bible with explanations you'll see clearly that Zechariah refers to countless promises of God to his people Israel in the past. He 'foretells' about God's grace in the events that will unfold in the life of John! – *All these promises, to be 'lived out' or proclaimed by JOHN, will bless God's people:

Prophecy is being fulfilled in that God has visited and redeemed God's people v.68

God has raised a Saviour (a horn) of salvation from the House of David as prophesied, saving God's people from the hand of their enemies & showing mercy as promised and sealed by an oath known by their ancestors vs.72-73

They will be freed so they can serve God without fear, and in holiness and justice, be pleasing to God! etc. etc.

Perhaps you've heard it said that John was the 'last of the Old Testament prophets'? – In verse 76 Zechariah, the baby's father, is not gloating or bragging about his beautiful new baby! Instead, he is clearly inspired by the Holy Spirit of God; telling of this task, this 'job' God has set his little son when he grows up!

John will walk before the Lord – or as Isaiah said it: [he will] 'prepare the way of the Lord' and educate the people v.77

and his message will be that Forgiveness of sins is brought to God's people through the 'light from on high', to be revealed to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death ie. oppressed Judaism will know their Saviour

and the Saviour will reset their feet on the path of peace!

So, today, we hear that God's Plan began to unfold with the birth of baby JOHN – John will participate in that 'unfolding of salvation history' that Israel hoped for throughout the many generations of wars and deportations and oppression by the great powers surrounding her territory. As we heard a few Sundays ago, when I last led you in worship: Israel's greatest hope was always that God would again live among them and help them – this is called the Messianic hope. Today, our *Old Testament reading* shares the words of Jeremiah with us – Jeremiah is thought to be one of the great prophets – but he too was displaced to Babylon. He/Jeremiah thought it would be the Scythians that would overrun Palestine and Jerusalem – but he got it wrong – so the scholars say! – it was the Babylonians ... His error cost him his credibility as a prophet – and we can read about his discouragement in his Lamentations! But, with that experience, Jeremiah realized what God wanted was for him to call his people and esp. its leaders back to spiritual.

moral and social correction – which, as you can see – continues to be the theme of prophesy through the ages, and (if we can look ahead for a moment) this expectation of God will be the downfall of JOHN and the end of Jesus' earthly life too!

*And so, God was again answering that call for help as God had so often done! Now, under the yoke of Roman oppression, prophesy was again being fulfilled and *new history was being made*, and JOHN, this tiny baby that we've heard about in the prophecy of his proud father Zechariah, would be God's messenger/God's herald, that help was on the way!

I think we all know the stories about John as an adult. How he fulfilled his role as a preacher and prophet – which includes naming what he saw & calling those who sinned against God's Word to account! *If you don't, then continue reading in Luke's Gospel – I've already given you a short 'hint' of what is to come.

But, it's important for us also, to remember that in traditional Jewish circles among the faithful – John is not the messenger of God's forgiveness of sin or the herald of the Messiah; the Saviour, as we usually say –

- I. Have you ever attended a Seder meal. The Seder is the Jewish Passover meal celebrated in Jewish homes at *Passover* – which we call *Easter*. At that Jewish meal the story of liberation and exodus from Egypt is retold – and different foods signify the bitterness and struggle of that time. The Seder celebrates Israel's freedom to this day, despite its many dark moments in history! The table is set for the family and much of the dialogue is for the children, to learn the story of their people. One place-setting is left without someone in it – it is set for Elijah – who, it is believed – will precede the eternal age of Messiah and the redemption of God's people. **The seat remains empty because Elijah has not come a second time yet to prepare for Messiah!* *Maybe you also remember Jesus' question to his own disciples, asking: 'Who do men say that I am?' ** And you may know Peter's bold and insightful answer: 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!' (Matth. 16)

***We believe that Zechariah's inspired words point forward to Messiah. They want us to look forward to Messiah! They want us to believe that God's Grace is revealed in the name and life of JOHN. And with John and Jesus – whom he will baptize, God's Grace indeed came to Israel in its great hour of need again!

God's Grace came in many unexpected ways, beginning with the pregnancies of Elizabeth and Mary. God also came, unknown to many, *as we still see* in the 'waiting' of Jewish believers for Messiah today!

Many found Christ as they 're-examined' Scripture – we call these believers Messianic Jews. Others are still looking for 'proofs' from Christians that Jesus is who we say he is. *As in Jesus' own time, these skeptics resemble the pharisees of Jerusalem – but Jesus never bent to their demands to prove his divine Sonship! *Instead, he did the Father's work on earth, re-gathering God's lost sheep = His people. He healed and fed and preached forgiveness of sins for all who believe in him. And all who believe in him will have eternal life! (Jhn.3:16) *THIS IS OUR FAITH! Amen

Preparing for God's Saviour isn't an easy task! – as *John's death* shows us. Even his birth was controversial – because his parents didn't follow tradition and name him after his father Zechariah. The grace and love and mercy of God are not to be measured by 'proofs' or by our limited worldly understanding! God's gracious gifts are already planted within us. Our Lord and Saviour; the

indwelling Jesus, brings them 'to light', so to speak. He reveals the best in us, as we take on the work of disciples and ambassadors of our Lord.

Advent, beginning next Sunday will be more than a time of decorating the house, more than family parties or office parties – it is and always has been the time to share the good news about **whom** we are preparing to celebrate –

and of course, it is a time of self-examination too:
we ask ourselves whether we have room in our
busyness and in our lifestyle, and in our worrying ... for Jesus
to be our Saviour? – better still: have I given my life fully to
God!? What gives me *joy* in having done so?

But, let's slow 'the train' of our thoughts down again, for a moment; let's return again to the celebration at hand, and not think only on what's 'ahead' – like an impatient child –
Today is the Reign of Christ Sunday. It used to be called 'Christ the King Sunday'. This past year we have spoken about the many events and teachings that accompanied Jesus' life and ministry. In our worship we reflected on how Jesus has led us and the world through these very difficult 3 years; how Jesus has led the Church through these times – and in particular our Christian denomination. [A quick look at the Presbyterian Church's website and news from the last General Assembly in June is very rewarding! – although some people *cannot accept* the Living Faith we have always sought to understand and follow!]

- Think about this too: in Canada we've lost thousands of people to drug overdoses, to murders and accidents – at work and on the roads. 1000 graves of aboriginal children have been discovered. Some callous leaders both in government and in the Church in past times didn't care enough to acknowledge their passing & places of rest, nor were their families enabled to mourn for their children! We've experienced 3 terrible years with COVID 19 throughout the world. The deaths and illness associated with this pandemic far exceeds the Spanish flu epidemic of 1918. May God protect our children and elderly citizens from further deaths!
- Our country has become deeply divided over the masking-mandate; some people have *politicized* the medical recommendations; selfishly disregarding what the best science tells us that masks can help protect us against infection -- and protect others from us!
- what was it Jesus taught us? That we should love one another as he loves us? (Jhn 13:34)

Today is the Reign of Christ Sunday. We Christians celebrate Jesus' majesty ; not only as sovereign over our lives, but **over every life** – indeed over the heavens and all 'that is'. – But not everyone does.

We, like Zechariah look back and we look ahead – having the story of salvation too as told in both Testaments, and we see how God has helped humanity to survive; yes – **God is helping keep us alive even when the world's powers are hell-bent on destroying us!**

God's Grace has helped us master skills and to find the tools to use to **overcome the oppression of Sin in the world!**

Learn from God and from his Son Jesus the Christ our Lord!

Live his way. Be gracious yourself as you interact with one another.

Show what God has placed into your heart –

so others will learn from you, about the forgiveness of sin, offered to everyone, by our merciful

and loving Father God and Saviour Jesus!

God will be your help. Jesus is the Saviour sent by our heavenly Father.

** This is our joy and our reason for celebration today! Amen!

HYMN # 342 All who the name of Jesus bear

Prayer of Thanksgiving and for the People

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus: Having again heard the story about Your heavenly Plan to come among us as a small child – and having heard how carefully you chose women and men to be your heralds and disciples and witnesses, it is indeed humbling to know You have also chosen us; to live within us and to make yourself known in the world through our lowly selves. For this gift and honour we thank Thee, God. Help us Lord, to live up to Your calling and help us not to fail You! May the words of praise and prophecy by Zechariah and Elizabeth and Mary – be shared through us – in some way – to bring Your joy and hope to others – especially, if it is Your Will, to bring it to those who still reject or hate You and to bring it to persons feeling rejected, forgotten or oppressed by our society and by our prosperity ... Thank You Lord Jesus for Your teaching so our eyes are opened too, to those around us, who are also Your people and those You also came to bless and redeem – even when we think we are 'different' --.

Hear us as we pray for Your Church and for Your body on earth; the people of the Church. We pray that all decisions we make are given from Your Holy Spirit. We pray that we will all try to understand why Your Spirit is moving the Church back into the disputes and struggles of this present day and conflicted world – where Your Word and healing touch are needed so desperately.

We pray for anyone who is ill. May their lives and health be restored, if it is Your Will. We pray for our congregations and for all congregations who need Ministers and Elders to lead us. We pray for all leaders to be faithful and kind --

We pray for people to see the dangers of this pandemic and the wars ablaze in many places in the world; so they will not exploit their neighbours' vulnerability or their neighbouring nation's weakness! Turn hearts to Yourself and their swords into plowshares.

Bless all nations with faithful leaders. Bless them with humility and a reverence for life and a love for their people.

In all that is, Lord, be with us and lead us through these stormy waters, safely to the other side, into Your Kingdom.

To God be the glory. Amen

Continue in prayer as Jesus taught us to pray: 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 this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen

HYMN # 314 God is love, come heaven, adoring

BENEDICTION

L. People of God; citizens in Christ's kingdom, and members in his holy family: see that you also complete the task that you have received in the Lord.

All. We will. We will give glory to God, our Creator and to Jesus our Lord and Saviour.

L. The blessing of God the Holy Trinity be upon you and yours. Amen

(based on Col.4:17)

SUNG RESPONSE- Go Now In Peace

<p>We acknowledge that we meet on the traditional Territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe</p>

Next Sunday worship will be at Rockway at 10:00 am with Rev. Paul Shobridge – it is the first Sunday of Advent

Rockway will have a Mitten Tree up from November 27 to December 11. All donations go to West Lincoln Community Cares.

Willing Workers Meat Pie pick-up and Mini Bazaar – Saturday November 26 from 12:00 noon – 3:00 pm

Lessons, Carols and Cookies - Thursday November 24 @ 2:30 pm at Fonthill United Church