



Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge
Sunday December 4, 2022
Worship at Home
Second Sunday of Advent

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Our sincere thanks to **Mark Smith**
for leading us in worship today.

Call to Worship

One: The light shines in the darkness,

All: We come to worship, seeking the peace of Christ.

One: Shine into our lives and your world this Advent.

All: Renew in us Jesus' call to be peacemakers this day.

Advent 2 Reading – The Candle of Peace

Reader 1: We are people of peace.

Reader 2: God seeks justice and compassion. God listens to the cries of the vulnerable and longs for wars to cease.

People: We pray God's peace is at work in our hearts, our homes, our neighbourhoods and the world.

Reader 1: The second candle of Advent reminds us that we are called to live as people of peace.

Reader 2: We light this candle as an invitation to work for justice and peace.

(Light the candle of peace)

Reader 1: Let us pray:

People: Holy One, help us to fan the flame of peace. May our lives reflect the warmth and wonder of this candle. Make your church a place of peace and sanctuary in our community. Amen.

Hymn: Hope is a Star vs. 2

#119

Opening Prayer of Adoration and Confession

All: God of wisdom and understanding,
of peace and promise,
you are the giver of life and you live in us.
You have welcomed us as your children,
and called us to live out your image with hospitality
toward each other.
In Jesus Christ, you offer us living water
to wash away our sin and sorrow,
and call us back to paths of justice and righteousness.
With the Holy Spirit, you baptize us for service

and life in community, refreshing us each day
with your presence and purpose.
Glory and honour and praise be yours,
Creator, Christ and Spirit,
this day and every day, now and evermore.

God of peace and promise,
we confess that we have taken your commitment
to us for granted.
We assume what we do is acceptable to you,
yet we judge others more harshly.
We have been slow to welcome others,
especially if their cultures or convictions differ from ours.
You call us to repentance,
but we resist seeing anything needing change
in our hearts or our habits.
Forgive our self-satisfied attitudes,
and challenge us with your vision of a peaceable kingdom
where all can be made new.

Assurance of Pardon

Receive the Good News in peace. With great mercy, God forgives what we have confessed and offers us new life in Christ. Receive the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and be at peace with God, with yourself and with one another

Hymn: There's a Voice In the Wilderness Crying # 128

Prayer of Understanding

God of peace and possibility, we turn to your Word to hear your will and your wisdom for our times. Open our hearts and minds by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit so that we might hear what you are saying to the church through Christ, our Prince of Peace.

Scripture:

Responsive Psalm 72 (vs 1-7, 18-19)

O.T. Isaiah 11: 1-10

Matthew 3: 1-12

ONE: For the Word of God in scripture; for the Word of God among us; for the Word of God within us.

All: Thanks be to God

Sermon: Be Prepared Seek God's Peace

Most gracious God, fill us with the knowledge of your will, in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that we might lead lives worthy of the Lord: fully pleasing to him, and that we might bear fruit in every good work.

Show us, O God, what you would have us know and do. Bless we pray the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts at this time, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

A while back, I was reading an article, which was outlining a description of what it would be like to live in a perfect world:

‘In a Perfect World a person should feel as good at 50 as they did at 17, and they would actually be as smart at 50 as they thought they were at 17.

In a Perfect World you could give away a baby bed without getting pregnant.

In a Perfect World pro baseball players would complain about teachers being paid contracts worth millions of dollars.

In a Perfect World the mail would always be early, the check would always be in the mail, and it would be written for more than you expected.

In a Perfect World potato chip might have calories, but if you ate them with dip, the calories would be neutralized.

In a Perfect World every once in a while, at least, a kid who always closed the door softly would be told, "Go back and slam the door."

I truly believe, there are many times when we all dream for a perfect world or for a world that is at least a bit better than this one.

The good news of our faith is that there is a better world coming:

a perfect world, a world located right here, a world made up of things that we can see and touch.

Isaiah announced the coming of that world as part of his vision:

"A shoot shall come up from the stump of Jesse, from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord."

Isaiah goes on to describe how this child of David, this child of God, will judge or rule the world. Then he adds, as we heard earlier:

"The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and fatling together, and a little child shall lead them..."

There is more, but all in all, what Isaiah describes is a perfect world:

a world of peace

a world of justice

a world of harmony.

It is the testimony of both the Old and New Testaments that one day that perfect world will come.

But meanwhile, both Testaments are clear that the time of universal peace, the time when God rules over all that exists, is not yet.

This will be the final gift that God will present to us, a gift that God will give to us when we are ready to receive it.

So how do we get ready for this world?

How do we prepare to receive God's gift?
 How do we hurry up the process of receiving what God wants to give us?

Through the Bible, the answer is clear:
 we bring closer the kingdom of God, in fact we begin to sense it, to partake of it, to participate in it
 and to spread it around to others before it arrives in it's fullness,
 when we accept another gift of God:
 the gift of repentance
 the gift of turning about and to acknowledging our need for God's help, of confessing our
 sinfulness and then being able to start anew, walking in the path that God shows us.

In the comic strip, Calvin and Hobbes, Calvin says to Hobbes:
 "I feel bad that I called Susie names and hurt her feelings. I'm sorry I did it".
 "Maybe you should apologize to her," Hobbes suggests.
 Calvin ponders this for a moment and then replies: "I keep hoping there's a less obvious solution."

One of the interesting realities of life is that God has given us an obvious solution to one of our
 greatest problems, our lack of peace; that peace which should be within us and that peace that
 should exist outside us.

God has given us an obvious solution, but often we're tempted to
 avoid that solution and seek something a little more obscure.

Now, John the Baptist comes on the biblical scene as something of a throwback. He's a figure out
 of an earlier age.

You probably wouldn't want him at one of your Christmas parties. He's a disaster zone, with his
 camel leather clothes and his matted hair. But, almost with humour, Matthew tells us that all
 Jerusalem and Judea went out to hear him.

I wonder why?
 I wonder if you and I would have gone?
 I think we might have.

I think we might have because John had a profound gift.
 The same sort of gift that Jesus had.
 A gift of cutting through the advertising jargon and the new age nonsense and just telling people
 the truth.
 And something in us ultimately prefers the truth over comfortable lies.

John's message can be reduced to one word, "repent".
 Jesus' message, in large measure can be reduced to three words,
 "repent and believe".

Both of them used the word repent, but, neither of them explained what they meant by it.
 So I have to conclude that they believed their audiences knew what they meant. When Jesus or
 John said "repent" their listeners got the picture.

But do we, I wonder?

When you hear words like "confession", "sin" and "repentance", what comes to mind?

Either they create bad images of the worst of church experiences, or we've heard them so often that they lack any energy, they just fall off our tongues and lie there at the end of the row of pews, feebly waving their arms but unable to engage us.

Too many people hear those words and think of a formula, a religious routine, perhaps on bended knee.

We tell God we're sorry for what we've done, and God sends us forgiveness and then we continue on as we did.

If that's what repentance means, then there is no way that John or Jesus or the living word of Almighty God will ever get through to us.

So forget for a few moments that you've ever heard the words: confession and sin and repentance or ever participated in those acts.

Listen again, as if for the first time, to one crying in the wilderness this advent season to make straight the royal road.

Let me ask you a simple question:

What is Christianity, at its most basic, all about?

I think many would answer that it's about relationships:
with God and with my neighbour.

The two are inseparably tied together. We prove the reality of one by the quality of the other.

How we answer that question "what's Christianity about" is really important because that gives us the clue to the next question:

What is sin?

Again, a simple answer.

Sin is the straining of or the breaking of the relationship.

So, when I confess what I'm doing, is admitting or acknowledging that my relationship with God, my relationship with my neighbour, is not all it can be.

That shouldn't surprisingly strike you as being all that revolutionary a thought!

It's simply acknowledging what I feel to be true. I don't always live up to my own standards. Forget any talk about what I "should do" or what I "ought to do"

I don't always manage what I know I can do!

I'm not always the Christian I can be.

Heaven knows, I'm not always the husband, the father, the son, the brother, the friend, I can be.

That shouldn't be particularly surprising, about you or about me.

What we call sins are all the many different ways that we strain and break relationships.

And, ultimately, God is not prepared to leave us in our mess.

God wants us to have his peace and to spread his peace.

That is why he sent the prophets to Israel,

That is why he sent John to prepare the way for Jesus in our lives,

That is why he pours out the Holy Spirit upon us.

God wants us to have and to live new lives, as citizens of his kingdom of peace.

So then, what is "repentance"?

Well, repentance is a gift of God, a gift that can go into every part of our life. It is the announcement that we don't have to go on forever repeating the same tired mistakes, crying the same bitter tears, falling into the same worn traps.

That's what repentance means.

It means a break with the past, a change in direction.

It's active not passive.

In other words:

if I was driving East out of St.Catharines on the QEW and I want to get to London to visit our friends, then I have to repent my direction, I have to change, or I won't get to my destination.

Thinking about it, discussing it, feeling sorry about it won't change anything.

Feeling sorry or regretful sitting in church is only a very preliminary first step.

It's the step of looking, of looking in the right direction, of knowing what way to turn, but it needs more, it needs another step, which leads us to the second thing concerning what repentance is.

Repentance is something we live out each day. Not by being sour and mournful, but by seeking to do what God tells us to do through the scriptures, by trying to do what God urges us to do in the quiet depths of our heart.

Notice what John tells people to do:

He doesn't say, get a camel leather wardrobe like mine.

He doesn't say, switch your diet for mine.

He doesn't say, grow a beard like mine.

He says: please God in the work you do each and every day.

Repentant people are real people, not plaster saints or sticky, holier than thou caricatures of humanity. They are real people, taking responsibility for their lives because they know that God has promised to help us make the changes we know ought to be made.

But we have to make the choice to take the gift.

Christmas season is a time of giving gifts.

Imagine that sometime in the next week, a friend comes to your home or office and knocks on the door. You open the door and they're standing there with a package in their hands.

What's the first thing you say?

"For me"?

No, it's not for you, I always wander around your neighbourhood with gift-wrapped packages! Of course it's for you!

So we take it and put it on a table and try to carry on the conversation.

Finally we ask "should I open it?"

Of course not, I always give you presents just so you can admire the wrapping paper!

But that's the key.

For until we open a gift it remains nothing but potential.

Until we open it, it retains an infinity of promise, but only promise.

John came to prepare the way for Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

He came and offered a gift of God: a gift that enables us to meet God more fully. The gift of repentance.

To confess, to repent, is often very difficult.

Admitting our need for help, and believing that help is available, even for us can be a hard thing to do, but it's the key to unlocking the future: a future of inner and of outer peace:

the peace promised long ago,

the peace that Jesus brings even now to those who accept God's gift and which he will bring fully to the whole world on the day of his return.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Hymn: On Jordan's Bank

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Invitation to the offering

This Sunday we celebrate the Advent of Peace, born for us in Jesus Christ. Think of your gifts as seeds of that peace which we can plant in the world God loves for Christ's sake.

Doxology – Give Thanks

Give thanks with a grateful heart

Give thanks to the Holy One

Give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ, His Son

And now let the weak say, "I am strong"

Let the poor say, "I am rich

Because of what the Lord has done for us

Give thanks, give thanks

Prayer of Dedication of Offering

All: God, our Peace and our Promise, receive our gifts as seeds of gratitude for your gift to us in Christ Jesus. Bless these seeds with growth so that peace will take root in people who face conflict and danger, and places seeking to establish peace in the face of violence. Be their peace and their promise, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and for the people

God of the peaceable kingdom Isaiah envisioned,
 where predator and prey are reconciled,
 and children play in safety,
 we give you thanks for every step taken towards reconciliation among rivals.
 and every program provided to give children a reliable future.
 Thank you for policies implemented on behalf of the climate
 and every vulnerable creature,
 to give us all hope for an enduring future in the world you love,
 for peace will not come if the earth keeps tilting out of balance.

God of peace with justice,

Make us better stewards of the gifts you give us.

God of John the Baptist's rallying cry,
 You raised up John in the wilderness as a voice calling us to conversion.
 We thank you for signs of renewal and change in the church,
 and in communities grappling with historic injustice and current outcry.
 Guide advocates who work for change with both courage and compassion.
 As we await the coming of Christ,
 awaken the church to new ways to undertake ministry and mission,
 and give us the energy and resources to reach out in ways we have yet to imagine.

God of peace with justice,

Make us better stewards of the gifts you give us.

God of steadfast encouragement,
 St Paul called the followers of Christ to live in harmony,
 and welcome those perceived as strangers to you and to them.
 Thank you for welcoming us when we were strangers
 to a new community, a new church or a life changed by unexpected circumstance.
 We pray for people who dread this Christmas season
 because life has changed for them,
 or circumstances leave them feeling lonely and discouraged.
 Draw close to those who suffer in body, mind or spirit,
 and guide us to reach out to someone who needs comfort or encouragement.

God of peace with justice,

Make us better stewards of the gifts you give us.

God of justice and equity,
 The psalms, the prophets and the gospels proclaim your care for the poor,
 and your expectation that your people will look to the needs of the vulnerable.
 We thank you that Canada has resources to share,
 and pray that our leaders will attend to longstanding injustice and urgent need
 without excuse or delay.
 We pray for places torn apart by war,
 and for communities devastated by storm, flood, fire or drought.
 Challenge any who would hoard scarce resources or profit from the needs of others.
 Open our hearts to share what we can, even in these difficult times.

God of peace with justice,
Make us better stewards of the gifts you give us.

Hear our prayers, O God, and strengthen us to serve you in faith and obedience.
 We offer our prayers through our Lord Jesus Christ who taught us to pray together:
 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: Herald! Sound the Note of Judgement #117

Commissioning:

All: In the power of the Holy Spirit we now go forth into the world, to fulfil our calling as the
 people of God, the body of Christ, blessed to be a blessing, and living in thanks for the life we
 have received.

Benediction

Go in peace this day, ready to bear fruit worthy of your commitment to Jesus Christ and his
 kingdom of justice and peace.
 And may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in
 hope by the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sung Response: "Go Now In Peace"

Postlude

<p>We acknowledge that we meet on the traditional Territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe</p>
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Next Sunday worship will be at Rockway at 10:00 am with Mark Smith

The RPCW will meet on Wednesday, December 7 at the church at 1:30 PM. We will be filling 3 cheer baskets following the meeting.

Following the service at Rockway on December 11, there will be a continental style breakfast served downstairs. Everyone welcome

Rockway Mitten Tree will be up until December 11. All donations go to West Lincoln Community Cares.

North Pelham Tree of Lights - place your list of names and donation on the offering plate in memory or in honour of loved ones. Proceeds to Pelham Cares