



Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge
4th Sunday of Easter, April 21, 2024
Worship at Home

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CALL TO WORSHIP <Adapted from Psalm 100>

L: Let the entire earth resound with joyful praise to the LORD. Let us approach the LORD's presence with hearts full of gladness, lifting our voices in songs of joy.

P: Let us acknowledge that the LORD is our God. He is our Creator, and we belong to him; we are his cherished flock.

L: As we enter his presence, let our hearts overflow with gratitude and our mouths with praise. Let us express our thankfulness and exalt his holy name.

P: For the LORD is infinitely good, and his steadfast love knows no bounds. His faithfulness endures throughout every generation.

P: Let us unite in worship, embracing the joy of being in God's presence!

Hymn 410 **Joyful, joyful we adore you**

PRAYERS OF APPROACH, CONFESSION and The Lord's Prayer

O God of Mercy and Grace,

In Your boundless mercy, we humbly come before You. In Your infinite grace, You have called us into Your presence. As we gather, may Your ever-present love fill us with boundless joy, continuously renewing our lives so that we may experience the abundance You desire for us in this world.

O God of all life, You are the source of all existence, the foundation of all that has been, all that is, and all that is yet to come. Your divine will is for life to be overflowing with peace, abundance, and joy. Yet, we acknowledge the reality of our world, O God. It is a world marked by pain, suffering, injustice, and grievances. We confess that we often feel unreconciled with many aspects of our lives – with circumstances, situations, and even with people. We admit that true joy sometimes eludes us, overshadowed by worry, disappointment, anxiety, grief, and fear. In this moment of silence, O God, we invite You to search our hearts and minds. (pause)

In the midst of our struggles, You tirelessly seek us out, O God. You call us to acknowledge where we have fallen short, to confess our wrongdoings, to repent, and to seek forgiveness. Forgiveness may not always come easily, but Your will for our lives remains constant. Through Jesus Christ, You proclaim universal truths, O God. You speak peace, wholeness, and joy through repentance, forgiveness, restoration, and reconciliation. This is the path to true healing and restoration, O God. We pray that You meet us in this hour, beginning the work of healing within us.

Pour out Your Holy Spirit upon us, O God. Shape us into joyful worshippers, fully surrendered to Your will. Make us vessels of Your love and instruments of Your peace. We offer this prayer in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray together, saying,

THE LORD'S PRAYER

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 421 Rejoice in the Lord

Prayer for Understanding

Gracious God, As we listen to Your word today, help us understand the depth of joy in our lives. Guide us to focus on others and find comfort in Your promises. Bless our time together, and may Your message touch our hearts. Amen.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES Psalm 65; 1 Peter 1: 3-9; Luke 15: 1-10

SERMON True Joy of Christians

Joy, Happiness, Pleasure—these words represent what we want and seek. Many people say that finding joy and happiness is the meaning and purpose of their lives. But is there a difference between joy, happiness, and pleasure?

The word joy is often associated with other words in our world today: words that, to me, are superficial, words that disregard the challenges and struggles of life. If joy is going to mean something in real life, then it has to mean something for us all, ordinary people who struggle with life as much as we rejoice in it.

Happiness is something everyone wants, but it is often tied to superficial and materialistic things. Yet even though these things unquestionably contribute to happiness, we need to learn the deeper meaning of happiness from people who are struggling with serious challenges: losses, disappointments, rejections, breakdowns, and things not going the way they hoped they would.

There is a difference between happiness and joy. Happiness is about what happens in life. It depends on the happenings. But joy is about experiencing the richness, wonder, and beauty of life in spite of the losses, disappointments, and hard knocks.

Pleasure is another word that represents something people want. We usually see pleasure as the opposite of pain. Pleasure is about thrills, excitement, ecstasy, and escape. It is about forgetting the problems of life. But if that is what pleasure is, it is not only unrealistic, and it has nothing to do with joy on the inside.

As Christians, we are called to have joy in all circumstances. However, that is often very difficult because our lives are uncertain, insecure, and fragile. For some guidance, let us ponder our scripture readings to discern the biblical meaning of joy on the inside.

In his first letter, the apostle Peter is writing to suffering people. And he is writing to them as someone who knows about suffering in the form of persecution. We are fortunate in this country because we have religious freedom as a fundamental human right. So, we live in a country where we are not discriminated against or mistreated because of our beliefs. People are free to express themselves in all their distinctiveness as long as it doesn't damage others. At least that's how it should work. But what if you are living in a time and place where people reject you, mistreat you, make fun of you and humiliate you for being you? If you are in such a context, can you experience joy?

Peter reminds such believers precisely that they are part of a much bigger and more eternal fellowship than the circumstances of the place and the time where they are right now. Their situation, painful and difficult as it is, is temporary. Eternity is a place of fullness and peace beyond their wildest imaginations. And because they are linked to God through their faith, they are linked to that eternity. And the word the apostle uses to describe the feeling they can experience when pondering such an eternity is: joy.

Let us listen to his words again: "Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Because of his great mercy he gave us new lives by raising Jesus Christ from death. This fills us with living hope, and so we look forward to possessing the rich blessings that God keeps for his people. He keeps them for you in heaven...Be glad about this, even though it may now be necessary for you to be sad for a while because of the many kinds of trials you suffer. Their purpose is to prove that your faith is genuine...You love him, although you have not seen him, and you believe in him, although you do not now see him. So you rejoice with a great and glorious joy which words cannot express, because you are receiving the salvation of your souls, which is the purpose of your faith in him." (1 Peter 1: 3-9)

In addition, today's gospel reading helps us to understand the true meaning of joy that comes from the inside. Jesus speaks of true joy to two groups of people in the parables. One group is the Pharisees and Scribes (the teachers of the Law). They are the moral police. But there is another group there, too. They are the tax collectors and other sinners. Sinners are bad people, according to the moral police, because they are not faithful to God's law. And the problem with their badness is that they are dragging all of Israel down with them.

The remarkable thing we need to note is that neither group is cheerful. The Pharisees and Scribes are not a joyful group of people. The sinners and tax collectors are not joyful people either. One group lives out of resentment, judgementalism, and grievance. The other group lives out of shame, guilt, and moral failure. For this reason, Jesus tells them the parables.

The stories seem to be about lost animals and lost money on the surface. But the main message is about lost people. The focus of God in Jesus is on finding what is lost.. And this experience is a cause for rejoicing and joy. "I am so happy I found my lost sheep. Let us celebrate!" In the same

way, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine respectable people who do not need to repent... ‘I am so happy I found the coin I lost. Let us celebrate!’ In the same way, I tell you, the angels of God rejoice over one sinner who repents.”

What these stories are telling us about joy is that it is all about relationships. Think about God’s creation story in the first book of the bible. It also tells us about joy in relationships. We are told that God delights in the creation of the world, the earth, the animals, the plants and trees, human creatures and all. God is pleased with it all. God is full of joy. And even though this beautiful creation is marred by the bad choices human beings make, God’s passion and desire are still to delight in creation with joy.

The reverse of joy is focussing in on ourselves, whether it is our happiness, our pleasure, even our misery. It is all about us. It is all about me. Others are there to focus on me and my needs. Joy is not possible this way.

But if we follow God in Jesus as the parables challenge us to do, then we discover that true joy can only be experienced when we focus on the world and the people around us. And when we do, it is like the shades are pulled open and the sunlight of abundance and delight can break in and shine upon us. We gain a fresh perspective on our problems and concerns. We may discover again how much we are loved and cared for. We may experience gratitude as an experience that courses through our bodies as much as our minds and hearts.

Joy can then come in the most surprising and unexpected of ways, in the simplest of ways. It can come through tears and through laughter. It can come through the smile of a child. It can come when we open our eyes after a difficult surgery and behold all the people we love surrounding us. It can come as we look at a beautiful landscape or a beautiful lake. It can come when we find a lost sheep or a lost coin. It can come because our spirit is not blocked but open, free, ready to experience the sensation and fullness at the moment, something that changes the way we see and smell, touch, taste, and hear. Are we open and ready for joy?

It continues to be something of an intangible word: joy. And yet, I have tasted it in my life and continue to taste it. I hope you can, too. May we experience every day as a new enjoyment of life on the inside because it is God’s will and God’s way for us to live in this world God created and is creating. Amen.

Hymn 670

Amazing grace

Invitation to the Offering

Doxology

Prayer of Dedication

Gracious God, As we give our offerings today, we do so with hearts full of joy. Thank you for the blessings you've bestowed upon us. May these gifts spread joy and love to those in need, reflecting the central message of today's sermon. Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and for the People

O God, the embodiment of love, peace, and joy,

Descend upon us, your creatures, and nourish us with your boundless love, serene peace, and radiant joy.

Some of us are conflicted and frustrated in our restlessness and weariness, even bitter and sorrowful. We mourn our losses and the things beyond our control. How can we find joy amidst such challenges, O God of joy? Inspire us and unlock new possibilities within our hearts and minds. Grant us courage, motivation, faith, and hope for a brighter tomorrow. May patience and forbearance guide our actions, approaching each situation with restraint, tenderness, and care. Expand our understanding to embrace diverse perspectives.

In these polarized times, where divisions are stark and injustices abound, we stand in solidarity with the oppressed, the marginalized, and the suffering. May our hearts remain tender, our compassion unwavering, and our actions speak volumes of love and solidarity. We lift up to you our world, O God, especially those trapped in places of social unrest, conflict, violence, and war. We pray for the Palestinians in Gaza, for the Jewish hostages, and for the escalating conflicts involving Iran. We also remember the people of Haiti, Sudan, Ukraine, and other regions enduring similar hardships.

Grant us the grace to hold onto faith, hope, and love amidst the darkness. We lift up those in our community and personal lives who are struggling, sick, or in need of healing. May your presence bring comfort, strength, and renewal to each one.

Finally, we pray for all those among us who are struggling, whether with finding peace in stress, coping with grief, managing chronic conditions, or feeling helpless. May peace become tangible, something we can touch, taste, smell, and see, even as challenges persist. In a moment of silence, we lift up those closest to our hearts. We pray for healing, strength, courage, and resilience. (pause) May we experience new blessings amidst it all, and may peace reign today and tomorrow. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Hymn 307 God of the sparrow, God of the whale

BENEDICTION

May God's eternal blessing, the peace of the Risen Jesus, and the fellowship we share in the Holy Spirit be with us all this day and forevermore.

Sung Response- Go Now In Peace

Postlude

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

***Worship on Sunday, April 28, at North Pelham**

***A Grateful Thank You from Doug Hallett:** "Thank you so much for the heartfelt words, touching stories, delicious cake, and warm reception to commemorate my 60 years of service as an elder at Rockway Church. I am truly grateful for your thoughtfulness." - Doug Hallett

***Rescheduled Joint Session Meeting:** Wednesday, April 24 at Rockway - Rockway Session will meet at 7 pm, and North Pelham will join at 7:30 pm

***Special Guest Speaker on Mission Awareness Sunday, April 28:** Exciting News! Join us on Mission Awareness Sunday, April 28th, as we welcome guest speaker Dr. Allyson Carr, Associate Secretary of Justice Ministries in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Dr. Carr recently penned the compelling article, "Love and Hate in a Time of Fear," featured on the front page of the spring edition of the Presbyterian Connection newspaper.

***Willing Workers' Clothing Drive:** The Willing Workers will be holding a clothing drive from April 14 to May 22nd. This is in partnership with the Kidney Clothes fundraising program from the Kidney Foundation of Canada. Clothing bags and a list of what is accepted are available from the Willing Workers in North Pelham.

***Bible studies:** Join us for Wednesday Bible study at 10:00 AM at First Church, led by Diane McMillan. Our Thursday Bible study has been suspended.

***Outreach - Thursday Walking:** Join us for the Wellness Walk and Coffee Chat! We gather at 9:30 a.m. at Canada Games Park to start our walk together. After the walk, we meet at Rockway for a joyful chat over hot and fresh coffee at 10:45 am.

***Spring Book Sale by the Canadian Bible Society:** The Niagara Branch of the Canadian Bible Society will host a Spring Used Book Sale at Fairview Mall on April 19-20, 2024. Please spread the word and bring books, DVDs, and CDs early on those mornings. Assistance in setting up tables and refreshing displays is appreciated.

***OPP Chorus Concert at Pelham Community Church, Saturday, May 25th @ 3:00 pm** Cost \$10.00 per person - To purchase tickets call Bonnie - 905-892-3492 or Jackie 905-892- 8726

***Connect with your Minister Jacob for pastoral visits.** Reach Jacob at jacoblee0501@gmail.com or 289-213-2797.