



**Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge**  
**Mission Awareness Sunday, April 28, 2024**  
**Worship at Home**

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**CALL TO WORSHIP**

L: On this Mission Awareness Sunday, and every day, we are called to proclaim Christ in word and deed!

**P: Creator, help us proclaim you and your love!**

L: God is always calling the church to seek that justice in the world which reflects the divine righteousness revealed in the Bible. (\* *Living Faith*, 8.4.1)

**P: Christ, help us proclaim you and your love!**

L: God has told us what is required of us: to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God. (\*Micah 6:8)

**P: Spirit, Comforter, help us proclaim you and your love! Amen.**

**Hymn 635                      Brother, sister, let me serve you**

**PRAYERS OF APPROACH, CONFESSION and The Lord's Prayer**

Loving and Gracious God,

As we come together on this Mission Awareness Sunday, we ask for your presence to guide us. The world can be a scary and uncertain place, with so much violence and trouble happening all around us. But we know that you are always with us, offering hope and comfort.

Today, we're grateful to have Dr. Allyson Carr here to talk to us about mission and service. We pray that her words will help us understand how we can make a difference in the world. Please give her the wisdom and courage to speak to our hearts.

As we take a moment to think about our own lives, we want to be honest with you. We know that we don't always do the right thing. Sometimes, we can be selfish or unkind. But we also know that you forgive us and give us the strength to try again.

Help us to learn from Jesus, who showed us how to love others and make the world a better place. We want to follow his example and help those who are struggling. Give us the courage to speak up against injustice and stand up for what is right.

Thank you for always being there for us, even when things seem tough. Help us to remember that your love is always with us, no matter what. 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 740                      Make me a channel of your peace**

**Prayer for Understanding**

Gracious God, as we prepare to hear your word, shine your light upon us. Open our hearts to understand the central message of love in today's scripture readings. May your wisdom guide us and your love inspire us to live out your teachings. Amen.

**SCRIPTURE PASSAGES                      Psalm 9: 1-10; 1 John 4: 7-21; Luke 4: 16-21**

**SERMON                                      Proclaiming Jesus in word and deed**

Today is Mission Awareness Sunday, which is the theme I was invited to speak on. But what is “mission”? We read in Living Faith—a statement of Christian faith within The Presbyterian Church in Canada—that mission is both evangelism: sharing the Good News, and also service: helping people in need. Living Faith says, “as God sent Christ to us, so Christ sends us into the world. We are here to proclaim Christ in word and deed.” (9.1.1)

And yet the world we live in and are called to mission in is increasingly grim. I’m a pretty hopeful person by nature but just trying to think let alone pray and discern while writing this sermon amidst watching violence and disaster intensity in the Middle East, with manufactured famine looming in Gaza, violence in Ukraine, in Sudan; authoritarianism threatening many places around the world, the reality of climate change wrecking havoc at an even quicker pace than expected, and the starvation it and conflict are increasing is... difficult, to say the least.

I asked myself, how in the world am I going to write a sermon about mission amidst all that??

So I did what I often do when seeking faithful understanding: I went to Scripture. I reasoned, Jesus lived in hard times, with lots of conflict, in a land facing the threat of brutal violence from Rome, under Roman occupation. He will have something to say about this.

The Gospel reading we heard today—the story of Jesus in the synagogue reading out of the book of Isaiah—is set as the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry, where he might be understood to be setting out an explanation for what he is all about, what he is here to do. And he begins by quoting from the prophet Isaiah what he was sent to proclaim. He frames the ministry he is about to begin in terms of proclamation. As Jesus’ disciples today, the church is called to continue that ministry of proclamation and action. Our mission is really “proclaiming Jesus”—and what Jesus himself said he was

proclaiming.

Now if you've read a little further in Luke chapter four, you know what happens next, when Jesus starts talking about what he read: the community becomes very angry when Jesus mentions that this message isn't just for them (by reminding them that both Elijah and Elisha, the two most powerful and revered prophets, had ministered to people outside the community of Israel). In fact the community attempts to throw him off a cliff. Jesus escapes unharmed, and starts his ministry.

From this story, it strikes me that Jesus is beginning his ministry framed by three things we should consider: first, he is rooting himself and his ministry in the tradition. His ministry is not a break with the past, but a continuation of it.

Second, the tradition is pretty broad, so it's also worth highlighting what Jesus drew on to focus and explain his mission; Jesus chose the tradition of the prophets to set up his ministry. Prophets are often thought of today as heralders of the future but if we look at the Old Testament prophets, perhaps the most central theme among them isn't what is going to happen (though they certainly speak about that at times) but rather being concerned with the present. Specifically, the prophets are often disrupters and critics of the present. They are reformers, calling people back to right relationship with God, with the land—really, with the land: go back and re-read all of Micah chapter 6 for just one example of that—and with each other. That is the tradition Jesus situates himself in, as told by Luke's account of the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

And third: right from the start, Jesus notes that what he is proclaiming is not only for community members, but for people the community considered "outsiders" too—and he expects his ministry will upset people. (Unsurprisingly, Jesus is right.)

In order for any of us to answer the question of how our ministry "proclaims Jesus"—and any disciple of Christ is called to do ministry, in different ways, using the gifts and talents we each have—we really must, I think, look at what Jesus seemed to understand as his ministry.

We see from the text Jesus quoted that a significant portion of what he considered his ministry to be was bringing actual, concrete improvements to the embodied lives of people around him in need. Think about how Jesus lived out these commitments in the stories of his ministry that we hear throughout the Gospels. Some of the key events during Jesus' time ministering include his outlining of what "loving your neighbour" means when he tells the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke chapter 10, where the physical needs of someone who was set upon and beaten were attended to—even so far as to pay for housing and food and medicine for this person, without knowing a thing about them, beyond that they needed it! Consider too the miracle of loaves and fishes in Matthew chapter 14, where an assembled crowd was given physical sustenance so they wouldn't go hungry; or the story in Luke chapter 8 of Jesus healing the woman who was constantly bleeding and so constantly considered

unclean; he didn't just heal her body (though I'm sure she appreciated that too); he helped her be included again in community. Being considered constantly unclean would have been intensely isolating.

And then, there's the shocking moment you may remember from much later in Luke chapter 19, where Jesus starts flipping tables in the Temple on seeing the economic exploitation happening there. In the Gospels of Mathew and Mark, when they tell the story of Jesus in the Temple flipping tables, we learn that some of Jesus' greatest ire was directed at people selling doves or pigeons (which, you may or may not know, were the offering listed as acceptable for those who were poor or had only small means)—and that they were doing so in the only area of the temple that Gentiles were able to enter; the Outer Court. Jesus makes clear the reason for his anger when, as explanation for the table-flipping incident, he again quotes Isaiah, saying “my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” and immediately follows it with another quote from a different prophet, Jeremiah, “but you have made it a den of robbers.” So we know that part of what caused his actions that day was anger over not allowing Temple access to a group of people labeled “outsiders”, and the other part was over the economic exploitation going on, in which the religious system had become enmeshed.

As I thought about all this, and about what proclaiming Jesus means today, I realized that surely it is sharing all these things, the Good News that Jesus spoke of and all he came to do in these concrete ways of loving our neighbour (ensuring they have food, housing, medicine, and are not excluded from community). But just as surely, reflecting on the Temple story, I realized that part of proclaiming Jesus is, following his example, calling out where we the church have gone wrong—just as Jesus did in his own day.

The witness of the church, we must admit, has a troubled history. Part of the ministry we must do to proclaim Christ today is to work for all those concrete things Jesus ministered to while he walked this earth. But another part comes out of the prophetic tradition Jesus himself rooted his ministry in. We must admit, even proclaim, where we have been wrong. We must speak of the harm we have been involved in. We must overturn our own tables where we have set up alongside systems of exclusion and exploitation. If we are really, following Jesus, to work to set the oppressed free we must first admit where we ourselves have been oppressors and work to redress that.

Earlier this month a group of Christian pastors in the 'States did just that: they released a statement called “The New Haven Declaration of Moral and Spiritual Issues in the 2024 Presidential Election”. And what struck me about that declaration wasn't what they had to say about the upcoming US election itself, but what they had to say about Christian faith, the Bible, and about proclaiming. It's worth considering, so even though we are not faced with that particular political situation, I'll quote a short bit of it here. The declaration says,

“We know that a well-funded, coordinated political movement has co-opted our faith tradition and is exploiting so-called “traditional values” to undermine democracy and divide people across this land. This distorted religious nationalism has persuaded many well-meaning Christians to focus on a narrow set of divisive cultural wedge issues while ignoring the real moral issues that are at the heart of our Scriptures and tradition. We repent of not doing more to preach and teach against this misuse of our faith, and we pledge to proclaim in word and deed a public theology that is good news for all people.”

“The real moral issues that are at the heart of our Scriptures and tradition...Proclaiming in word and deed a public theology that is good news for all people.” I heard these words as I was reading and meditating on the Scripture texts for this week, which are all about love: love of neighbour, love even of enemy, love of brother and sister and sibling; love of God. And as I sat and thought and discerned and prayed about it, it helped clarify some things for me.

As the New Haven declaration I quoted from above admits, the world we are called to proclaim Christ in today, in word and deed, is increasingly polarized, using wedge issues that are not at the heart of Scripture to motivate people into mistrusting, even hating each other—and consolidating power for the people doing the polarizing, who will say “it’s us or them; choose your side and get in line.” What makes it really difficult to talk about mission—and if I’m being honest, really frightening sometimes too—are the competing narratives that are currently, right now, claiming to proclaim Christ in word and deed to the world.

What do I mean?

There are many people today using Scripture, using the name of God, of Jesus, to call for hate, or for further marginalizing the already vulnerable. But is that the kind of thing Jesus proclaimed? If you were someone who knew nothing about Jesus and just had to go on what people are saying in the news and on social media, you could be excused for being very confused about who this Jesus guy is, and what is important to him. Depending on who is talking you could easily come to the conclusion either that Jesus (or people in his name) should be seated in the highest seats of wealth, government and power crafting polices and legislation from some parts of Leviticus and Deuteronomy (but not those parts in Leviticus or Deuteronomy that talk about forgiving debt or caring for marginalized people); you might be excused for thinking that Jesus hates immigrants and refugees, distrusts healthcare and medicine, and is of the opinion that gay or transgender and non-binary people should have no place in society. You might hear, “God made this a Christian nation (what a claim, that—what does it even mean?!) and it has to stay that way.” From all that (and more), you might even be excused for concluding that the mission of the church is and should be entirely self-serving: to ensure it becomes more and more powerful and gains control over more and more of society because surely that is what will bring about the kingdom of God.

But if you are sitting here in this pew, you are not someone who knows nothing about Jesus.

Still, I know that (for me at least), it's sometimes hard to hear the Gospel over all that loud messaging about power and hate and conflict and fear—but remember what we heard about fear in first John: that there is no fear in love and perfect love casts out fear. So let's go back to Scripture and look at the Gospel we just heard again. Let's consider the Gospel stories of Jesus' ministry we've touched on here today, keeping in mind what we heard in Living Faith that mission is: proclaiming Christ in word and deed. Let's think about love. And let's ask ourselves, when we hear Christ proclaimed by people, do we recognize him? If we really sit and think about what we're saying and how we're acting, do we recognize Jesus in the words and deeds we're proclaiming him with ourselves, each of us?

Jesus says, in the Gospel of Luke and elsewhere, a lot about who we should be and how we should act; about what the church's mission is. Our mission is love; fulsome, dedicated love of God and love of our neighbour. And remember too how Jesus defined love, through parables like the Good Samaritan, and through the work of his own ministry: Loving our neighbour is ensuring people have food, housing, medicine; it is overturning tables of economic exploitation and exclusion. In a deep sense, loving our neighbour is working for justice.

Love flows into justice; it's not a coincidence that in Living Faith, which is doctrine of the Presbyterian Church, there's an entire section focused on love (section 8.3) which immediately precedes an entire section focused on justice (section 8.4) that flows directly into a section focused on peace (8.5) And what does Living Faith say about love specifically? It says,

“Love means seeking the best for others, and is the mark of a Christian. Love for God leads to love for others. We cannot claim to know God, whom we do not see, if we hate those about us, whom we do see. Love of God and of neighbour fulfills the law of God.” (8.3.2)

The section in Living Faith on justice that flows from this section on love then goes about detailing how one might seek the best for others in love—which the church confessed here is the mark of a Christian. And while I encourage you, if you haven't already, to go read the section on justice in Living Faith, which is really great, in some ways we already know what seeking the best for others looks like, having just heard the Gospel stories from today and reflecting on what Jesus did, what Jesus' ministry was. That is love. That is mission. And that is what we are called to today.

**Hymn 650                    He leadeth me**

**Invitation to the Offering**

**Doxology**

**Prayer of Dedication**

Bountiful God, we thank you for the abundant blessings you bestow upon us, especially the gift of new life through the love of Christ. As we present our offerings today, may they serve to renew hope in the world, reflecting the love and generosity of Jesus, our Risen Lord. Amen

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving and for the People**

Lord Jesus Christ, we draw near to you in prayer this day, trusting that your love changes lives and your resurrection brings hope into the world God loves. You walk with us through every challenging time, and we give you thanks for every sign of hope in a world that is often on edge and the future seems uncertain. May we abide in your love.

We ask you to bless the ministries and mission activity undertaken through staff and funding provided by The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Thank you for each faithful servant serving in these challenging days, whether in Canada or in international ministries. Bless them with good health and courageous commitment, and equip them well to reach out in love and respect. May they abide in your love.

Loving and Listening God, we bring you now our prayers for others, friends and enemies, neighbours and strangers alike. We pray for people who are struggling with illness, loneliness, grief or sadness: *Hold silence for a moment.*  
May they abide in your love.

We pray for people in countries and communities where it is not safe to live out their faith or express their views openly. *Hold silence for a moment.*  
May they abide in your love.

We pray for victims of discrimination and acts of hatred, and those who fear violence day by day. *Hold silence for a moment.*  
May they abide in your love.

We pray for journalists and advocates for justice who live under threat for telling the truth. *Hold silence for a moment.*  
May they abide in your love.

We pray for churches, local organizations and businesses struggling under the pressure of economic challenges. *Hold silence for a moment.*  
May they abide in your love.

We pray for our families, friends and for ourselves, as well as those in the news whose situations tug at our hearts. *Hold silence for a moment.*  
May we all abide in your love.

Lord Jesus, we believe that you hear our prayers and will be faithful to our requests and concerns. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

**Hymn 730                    O for a world where everyone**

**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**

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

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**\*Next Sunday Service, May 5, at 10:00 am at Rockway**

**\*Introducing Dr. Allyson Carr:** Dr. Carr is the Associate Secretary of Justice Ministries in the Life and Mission Agency at The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Allyson works from an understanding and trust that intentional, prolonged engagement with Scripture ultimately deepens discipleship, and that discipleship calls us to justice. When not at work, Allyson can frequently be found spending time with family and friends, reading, or in the forests and fields, and walking the shores of Lake Ontario.

**\*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.

**\*RPCW Meeting:** The RPCW will meet at the church on Wednesday, May 1st, at 1:30 PM.

**\*Two Bible studies:** Join us for Wednesday Bible study at 10:00 AM at First Church, led by Diane McMillan. Our Thursday Bible study was suspended due to Fran's illness. She is currently at the hospital in Port Colborne for her physiotherapy treatment.

**\*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.

**\*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](mailto:jacoblee0501@gmail.com) or 289-213-2797.