



**Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter, April 7, 2024**  
**Worship at Home**

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### **CALL TO WORSHIP**

L: "Jesus came and stood among them. 'Peace be with you,' he said." (John 20:19) Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

**P: We, who gather in worship, seek inner peace.**

L: "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you.'" (John 20:21)

**P: We, who gather in worship, seek greater meaning in our lives.**

L: "When he had said this, he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" (John 20:22)

**P: We, who gather in worship, seek greater inspiration to live out our deepest convictions.**

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

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

Gracious and ever-present God,

We acknowledge Your omnipresence, knowing that You permeate every corner of existence, seeing and comprehending all things. Despite this, there are moments when we struggle to sense Your nearness, O God.

We give thanks for the abundance of blessings You bestow upon us, recognizing that every good thing emanates from Your boundless grace. Yet, we also acknowledge the challenges and uncertainties that weigh upon us. We grapple with questions, doubts, and fears, feeling frustrated, disappointed, and sometimes even hurt by the actions of others, whether intentional or not.

In this moment of reflection, we lay bare our hearts before You in silent confession. (pause)

We confess the actions and behaviours that harm us and those around us. (pause)

We confess the wounds we carry, which breed anger and hopelessness within us. (pause)

As we gather to worship, O God, we seek a renewal of Your presence and transformative power in our lives, relationships, and the world around us. May Your mercy, grace, strength, and revitalizing presence be made known to us afresh in this sacred hour. We offer this prayer in the name of the risen Jesus, who taught us to pray together, saying, "Our Father..."

### **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 260                    Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord**

### **Prayer for Understanding**

Gracious God,

As we gather today, we seek Your light. Help us embrace faith's journey, trusting in Your presence amid uncertainty. Guide us as we hear Your word. Illuminate our hearts to Your truth. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

### **SCRIPTURE PASSAGES**

**Psalm 16; Hebrews 11: 1-12; John 20: 19-31**

### **SERMON**

**Faith is a Journey, not a set of answers**

Who among us likes living with vulnerability, uncertainty, and questions? I don't believe anyone does. If we had a choice, we would choose security, certainty, and absolute truth. Yet it is an unavoidable truth that we are imperfect, complicated beings on an unknown journey, each with a strong sense of fear inside us.

Religion is belief in a supernatural divine power that has control over human destiny. According to scholars of various fields, all religions, including Christianity, were developed by imperfect, and fearful human beings. The ultimate purpose of religion, in this view, is to meet our greatest need: certainty in this mysterious, unpredictable, and insecure life.

There are many kinds of religions and many variations of Christianity, all offering the security of certainty, and absolute answers to questions. Some Protestant fundamentalist Christians believe there is absolute truth in their doctrines and understanding of the Bible. Some Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians believe absolute truth rests in their traditions, their bishops, patriarchs and popes. We find fundamentalists not only in religion, but in science also. Even atheists can be fundamentalists. The claim to absolute truth is very tempting. Absolute answers are very comforting.

By contrast, a living, biblical faith at its best believes that the search for truth must not be hindered by absolutes. Truth must be pursued wherever it leads. If we believe in God, we must trust that God will find us in some way in our search for truth. We who are made in God's image must trust that our honest search for truth will lead us to the authentic God and the real Christ. We must trust that the Holy Spirit will not abandon us, even if we have to live with our questions for a long time.

The difference between going after absolute answers and a more honest and open search for truth is what many would call the difference between religion and faith. Religion is about grasping security, possessing certainty, and embracing an impeccable authority without questioning it.

But living faith is about openness, humility, and trust. Faith is standing under something larger, more transcendent, more mysterious and magnificent than we ever imagined. Whether it is God or the universe, or the spectacular mystery of the tiniest insect, we stand under a far greater understanding if we do not close the door to further questions. As imperfect beings we can never perfectly grasp the unchanged and faultless truth. But we can be grasped by it.

Living faith is about praying, waiting, and listening to the feelings of our hearts. Living faith is about trusting that God will never abandon us. Moreover, living faith is about respect and love. We can never possess another person or even fully understand them. Once we try to do that, we remove the mystery and complexity that is always a part of another life. If we are paying attention we are always learning something new about another person, even if we have known them a long time. Another life always has a transcendence to it, something greater that we can ever fully comprehend.

In today's gospel reading Thomas is like us. He pursues certainty. He wants scientific proof that Jesus is really alive. He wants to conduct his own experiment by examining the evidence. That may work in some areas of life, but spiritual truth is always much greater than anything we can ever prove to our satisfaction. There is always an element of doubt in living faith. That is because we are always growing into new truth. And sometimes the new ways disclose just how limited, inadequate or mistaken was the old truth we believed in. Without having some doubt, we stop where we are. We believe we have all the answers we need. We reduce everything that doesn't fit our limited perspective.

The risen Christ challenges Thomas then and us now about how we should relate to him now he is no longer here in the flesh and blood. Do we still believe he is alive and real? How do we know? We need to learn how to trust even if we can never fully know to our practical satisfaction. We need to learn how to treasure the stirrings of our spiritual convictions, our conscience, and the fullness we experience in serving and loving others. We will encounter the risen Christ among us anew as our spiritual life is renewed through every new phase of life's joys and challenges. We need to experience Christ, not physically but spiritually. And if we are open to it, we may experience Christ spiritually in ways much more spectacular than a physical experience could ever offer.

This is my conviction: I believe in Christ as the way, the truth, and the life of God. I believe God created the world through the Word and that God created me out of love, and for love, and in love. I believe that I am continually and infinitely forgiven because God created me as an imperfect being. I am free to learn and grow from my failures and mistakes and not be imprisoned by them. I believe that God's Spirit is all around me like the particles of air I breathe in and out. I believe that Christ shows me the way as I meditate on the gospels. I also believe that my life belongs to God, not only today and tomorrow, but forever. I don't have to worry and fear

what other people or life can do to me. I believe God hears my prayers. Even if there is no immediate answer, God cares about me and is listening to my prayers.

But there are unavoidable facts I have to accept. I have to live amidst insecurity, unpredictability and doubt. I come to my convictions again and again as I face new realities. I need to find God over and over again. As I do so my understanding grows, my faith gets deeper, my hope gets larger, and my love grows richer.

Surely, I am sometimes stuck, overwhelmed, or angry. Or I feel like I am drowning and lost. This often means I need to go in a new direction on my journey. Each time I find my way to life it is a little different. God feels different. Christ looks different. The Spirit of God and Christ show me new things I had not noticed or appreciated or discovered before. I have new strength, even if I may have lost something or someone. Life is like this and my relationship to God is like this.

Like the people of Israel journeying through the wilderness, who were given just enough bread for one day, sometimes we discover that enough is more than enough. We can be thankful that we didn't sell our souls for quick certainty or easy answers but found the courage for honesty and a resolve to be true to ourselves.

May we meet the risen Jesus, who was always faithful to God during his human journey. And may the resurrected Jesus find us in the very place where we need his faith, truth, love, and extraordinary courage. Amen.

### **Hymn 747            There is a balm in Gilead**

#### **Invitation to the Offering**

#### **Doxology**

#### **Prayer of Dedication**

Thank you, O God, for creating this day and everything, including us. Strengthen our faith and open our hearts to your truth. Bless the gifts we offer, dedicating them to your holy purposes. In the name of the risen Jesus, Amen.

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

Thank you, O God,

In a world that rushes by, we often forget to pause and appreciate the beauty around us. It's no surprise that we struggle to find you amidst the chaos. Yet, we are grateful that you never stop seeking us out. Sometimes, we are blessed to feel your presence. As we take a moment to breathe, we reflect on the things in our lives that bring us joy and gratitude. (pause)

But, we also carry burdens, O God, and we empathize with those who suffer. We gather here fully aware that we live in a world where many continue to experience Good Friday. There is war and starvation, constant fear and the threat of bombing and destruction. Armed gangs and soldiers force people to flee for their lives, with few places they can run to.

We pray for the seven aid workers who died in Gaza, asking for comfort for their families. We also pray for the people of Gaza enduring unimaginable suffering. May violence end and may aid swiftly reach those in need. Guide leaders and us with your love as we pursue justice and peace in our world.

We continue to pray for the people inside Ukraine, Haiti, Sudan, and other places in our world. What might Easter hope look like for people deeply immersed in Good Friday?

Refugees from many places, like Afghanistan and Africa, seek safety and a better future. We long for Easter's new life, moving past the struggles of Good Friday. Many people face hard times with money, housing, and food. Our healthcare and schools need help. Let's put people first, not politics. Let's unite for solutions. The climate crisis also affects us and future generations. Let's push governments for cleaner energy and stricter rules to protect our Earth.

We thank you, O God, for the moments of hope that uplift us, whether witnessed in acts of protest, support, or care among people. In the midst of our doubts, we find faith, believing that even small actions can make a difference in our world. When love is shared, we recognize you as its source and the risen Christ among us.

As we conclude, we pray for those dear to our Rockway and North Pelham families for their physical and spiritual needs: Tom Keenan, Fran Johnson, Liz Cook, and Lance Gay. We also name, in silence, all those in our hearts who are going through a difficult time right now. (pause)

We pray for new life, healing, new faith, and peace today and always, trusting in the name of the risen Jesus. Amen.

**Hymn 249                      The day of resurrection**

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

**\*Worship on Sunday, April 14, at North Pelham**

**\*Thank you for your generosity!** Our Easter Sunday breakfast was a success, raising \$407 in free offerings. We've joyfully donated this to Rose City Kids in Welland, supporting children and youth in need. Special thanks to Asa, the Willing Workers, and Jacob's family for their contributions. Your love and support make a difference as we celebrate Jesus' resurrection. Blessings to all!"

**\*Guest Preacher: Rev. Pearl Vasarhelyi on April 14 | Rev. Jacob's Study Leave from April 8-15:** We're delighted to welcome Rev. Pearl as our guest preacher on April 14 while Jacob is on study leave from April 8-15.

**\*Rescheduled Joint Session Meeting:** The meeting scheduled for April 10 has been rescheduled to April 24 due to Jacob's study leave. Additionally, we are pleased to invite Rev. Pearl as your preferred preacher on April 14.

**\*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. Don't miss this opportunity to hear her insights and be inspired.

**\*Willing Workers' Clothing Drive: Supporting Kidney Health** - 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 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.

**\*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.

**\*Connect with your Minister Jacob for pastoral visits.** Reach Jacob at [jacoblee0501@gmail.com](mailto:jacoblee0501@gmail.com) or 289-213-2797.