



Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge
Advent I Sunday, December 1, 2024
Worship at Home

Email: northpelham.rockwaypc@gmail.com **Website:** <https://northpelhamrockwaypresbyterian.ca>

CALL TO WORSHIP

L: As we enter the season of Advent, we remember God's call to seek justice in the world God loves.

P: We come longing for a brighter future for all.

L: We light the first candle of Advent, a symbol of God's hope, which shines in the darkness.
 (Light the candle of hope)

L: May the light of this candle ignite a fire within your people, who are often afraid or hesitant to work for change.

P: Holy One, strengthen us by your Spirit to commit ourselves to walking with those who are oppressed and marginalized. May our actions reflect your hope, which transforms your world. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Hymn 119 **Hope is a star (verse 1)**

Hymn 122 **O come, Oh come Emmanuel (verses 1-5)**

Prayers of Approach and Confession

Loving and gracious God,

Here we are, just as we are—the good, the flawed, and all the in-between parts of who we are. Some of us carry shame and guilt, O God—sometimes too much, for the wrong reasons, or in unhelpful ways. Others of us resist carrying enough of it, avoiding the truth of our mistakes.

You know the depths of our hearts, O God. You see the times we resist taking responsibility, preferring to blame others, dismiss the harm we've caused, or hope the consequences will fade without genuine repentance. Yet You also see the wounds we bear—the pain of injustice, the weight of loneliness, the ache of inadequacy, and the fear that grips us so tightly it leaves us breathless.

In this season of Advent, as we prepare to welcome Christ anew, help us face these burdens with honesty and courage. Hear us now as we bring before You all that we hold inside, whether we can find the words for it or not. (pause)

We long for Your forgiveness and grace, O God. We yearn for the assurance that when we take responsibility and turn toward You, new life can bloom in us. Help us find freedom, joy, and

peace; restore our trust in You and in others; renew our hope that Your love transforms even what seems beyond redemption.

May this Advent season be a time of preparation—a clearing of our hearts and minds, an awakening of hope, and a deeper concentration on You. We pray this in the name of Jesus, who comes to us with healing and light. With open hearts and spirits, we now pray as Jesus taught us, 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 110 **Come, thou long expected Jesus**

Children of God Moment

Prayer for Understanding

Gracious God,

As we prepare to hear Your Word, open our hearts and minds to Your truth. Teach us to anticipate with hope, cleanse our inner lives, and center our souls on You. May Your Spirit guide us to prepare for Christ’s coming with sincerity and love. Amen.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Responsive Psalm Psalm 23

Romans 13: 11-14, Matthew 24:36-44

Sermon **Preparing for Christ’s Coming**

As the first season of the church year, Advent is all about spiritual preparation for the coming of Jesus, who is God. God came as a child in human flesh and blood 2000 years ago. That is the message about Christmas as best we know it. Furthermore, the bible speaks about the resurrected Jesus coming again someday in glory. And when Christ comes in glory, the world will become what it is in heaven on earth: a place of peace, joy, abundance, and love for all life under the Spirit of God. But each Advent is also an invitation to prepare for an individual spiritual coming of Christ in our hearts, minds, and lives.

Just as life changes every year, we also change. Some changes are fabulous. There can be new relationships and new opportunities, growth, and achievements. But every year is also about changes involving loss, discoveries of how unpredictable life is, and how breakable and vulnerable relationships are. We grow older, but not necessarily stronger. Life is full of joys, but with the joys come the hurts of trust broken, confidence betrayed, loneliness, and disappointment. Every year, we experience a lifetime lived, some awesome and life-changing, some frightening and confusing.

Every season of Advent is an opportunity to integrate all the changes in our lives into a larger spiritual meaning as we sing hymns and meditate on the stories of the birth of Jesus. How should we spiritually prepare to encounter Christ entirely fresh this Christmas? Today's scripture readings are all about preparation and speak to us of three spiritual preparations: anticipating with hope, cleansing our inner house, and concentrating our soul upon God.

First, the reading from Romans tells us of anticipation with hope: "You must do this, because you know that the time has come for you to wake up from your sleep. For the moment when we will be saved is closer now than it was when we first believed. The night is nearly over, day is almost here." (vv. 11-12a) This is the language of expectation as hope. In this season of Advent, we expect and hope for something life-giving, life-healing, and life-changing. It may not be dramatic; it may be quiet, gradual and deeply internal. It may be that the spiritual virtues of faith, hope, and love will come alive for us and we will discover new directions in the specific circumstances of our real lives. It may be a fresh appreciation for a particular person who cares for us, the importance of community, or a new passion. Nothing can happen or come to us this Christmas without expectation or hope. We need to start our prayers by asking God to give us an expectation and hope that we have never known or had in the past. Also, we must leave ourselves open to God's answer because what we ask is not necessarily what we need. So, we need to be open to whatever might come as an unexpected blessing.

For the second preparation, the book of Romans speaks of cleaning ourselves for refreshment and renewal: "Let us stop doing the things that belong to the dark, and let us take up weapons for fighting in the light. Let us conduct ourselves properly, as people who live in the light of day—no orgies or drunkenness, no immorality or indecency, no fighting or jealousy." (vv.12b-13) We human beings sometimes get drunk or high on drugs or become immersed in a life of seduction and excess. One of the main reasons we do these things is because we are seeking to numb the senses and suppress the pain, the hurt, the fear, and the stress when we find ourselves in hopeless situations beyond our control. But we will never find what we are looking for in such ways. We will experience some short freedom for a little while we are hurting ourselves, our families, and others. When we do this, we will also experience that we have lost hope and we have forgotten what it means to expect anything good, any life-giving possibility, or anything beautiful and graceful.

So to prepare the spiritual gift of Christmas, we need to pray candidly and honestly for anticipation with hope. At the same time, we must get ready to deal with the hindrances to that hope. We need to remove or let go of all those toxic habits that numb us into avoidance and escape from our lives. Instead, we need to refresh and renew ourselves with courage and openness to new meaning and new direction. We need help and guidance to clear up our inner, spiritual house and remove the obstacles that weigh us down our spirits.

Finally, our gospel reading teaches us about concentrating our souls upon God. Jesus refers to what the people were doing in the days of Noah right before the flood: "In the days before the flood people ate and drank, men and women married, up to the very day Noah went into the boat; yet they did not realize what was happening until the flood came and swept them all away..." (vv.38-9) Why did they not see the signs? Why were they not paying attention? It is because they

were distracted with busyness, life, and whatever. Jesus speaks of his coming as something people will miss for the same reasons. Jesus wants to come again and again to grow in us new faith, new hope, and love.

Then how can we ensure that we don't miss the most important things because we are distracted by less important things?

In addition to our prayers for anticipation with hope and cleaning our spiritual, inner house, we have to cultivate an ability to pay attention to our soul so that we can become authentic seekers after God and listeners for God. We need to cultivate our spirituality to see our own heart. We need to grow the courage of honesty and repentance, as well as the heart to forgive. We need to discern our self-deceptions, excuses, and blame of others for that which is also our own responsibility.

These are some questions we can ask ourselves: Am I true to myself as God's child? Or am I false to myself, and if so, in what ways? Where is the gap between what I should be and what I am? What are the choices I need to make? What is my biggest challenge? Is it overcoming apathy and complacency about something I should be doing? Is it impatience and judgementalism where I should have greater compassion and understanding?

I believe that if we can come to these questions honestly before God, God will challenge us to be more authentic with ourselves and others so that things will happen in our minds, spirits, and lives. The Spirit of God and Jesus will come to us in our prayers and meditation and in our public worship with others and we will bear the abundant fruits of the spirit to bless ourselves and others.

May we invite and encounter the Spirit of God and Jesus through the spiritual preparations of anticipation with hope, inner cleansing, and concentrating our souls on God so that we may become more sincere and authentic with ourselves and others in our lives. Amen.

Hymn 118 **Hark the glad sound**

Invitation to the Offering

Doxology

Prayer of Dedication

God of hope and renewal,

As we bring these gifts before You, we offer not only our resources but also our hearts. Use what we give to prepare the way for Christ's coming, bringing hope, peace, and new life to our world and to our souls. Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and for the People

Gracious and loving God,

We thank You for the hope and light that Christ brings into our lives. As we enter this season of Advent, we are grateful for the promise of Your presence—transforming our hearts, renewing our spirits, and calling us into deeper relationships with You.

We thank You for the many ways You have sustained us through life's changes—both the joys that lift us and the challenges that refine us. You are faithful in all seasons, and we praise You for the assurance that Your love endures.

Lord, as we prepare for Christ's coming, we lift up to You the needs of this world. We pray for those who feel lost, burdened, or without hope. For those who carry the weight of pain, loneliness, or fear, may Your Spirit bring comfort and renewal. We pray especially for those who must live every day amidst war, bombings, gunfire, and the relentless sound of emergency sirens. For those whose lives are overshadowed by fear and hopelessness and for those facing the moment of death without peace, we plead for Your mercy. Be their refuge, O God, their strength in the midst of chaos, and their light in the darkness. May Your Spirit move in the hearts of leaders and nations to bring peace and justice to the earth.

In particular, we pray for the friends and members of our church family. We lift Fran and Roy Johnson, Catharine Tirpko, Rosemarie Lampman, Tom Keenan, and all those suffering silently. For those facing difficulties in body, mind, or spirit, we ask for faith and hope in You, the source of comfort, strength, and eternal life. We also pray for those lovingly caring for their family members in difficult situations; grant them strength, patience, and encouragement.

We pray for those in our families and church who face pain, grief, or hardship, naming them silently before You. (Pause)

Guide us, O God, to prepare our hearts with anticipation, to cleanse our lives of what separates us from You, and to focus our souls on Your truth. May we encounter Christ in fresh and meaningful ways this Advent and carry the gifts of hope, peace, and love into the world around us. We offer these prayers in the name of Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer. Amen.

Hymn 133 **Go, tell it on the mountain**

BENEDICTION

May the grace of Christ, who comes to awaken hope in our hearts, the love of God, who calls us to prepare with joy and sincerity, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, who guides us to walk in light and truth, be with you now and always. Amen.

Sung Response- Go Now In Peace

Postlude

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

***Next Sunday Service, December 8, at 10:00 am at Rockway**

***Thank You for a Successful Christmas Concert:** We are grateful for the wonderful music performers, especially Joy and everyone who attended our Christmas Concert last Saturday. Thanks to your generosity, we raised \$741 to support the Open Arms Mission in Welland. All proceeds will go toward helping those in need. Your kindness and support genuinely reflect the spirit of Christmas. Thank you for making a difference in the lives of our neighbours!

***RPCW Meeting:** The RPCW will meet at the church on Wednesday, December 4, at 1:30 PM.

***Mitten Tree Donations for Community Care:** The Mitten Tree is set up at Rockway and will be available again on December 8 to collect mittens, hats, scarves, socks, and other warm items for Community Care of West Niagara. Donations can also be brought to North Pelham on December 1 to be delivered to Rockway. Thank you for sharing warmth this season!

***Tree of Lights at North Pelham:** During the season of Advent and Christmas, you are invited to donate to the Tree of Lights in memory or honor of loved ones. Please place your donation with a list of names on the offering plate by December 8, 15, or 22. Proceeds will support Pelham Cares.

***Holy Communion and Christmas Brunch:** We will celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion on December 8, followed by a festive Christmas Brunch. Everyone is invited!

***Christmas Solace Service:** If you're feeling the weight of loss, stress, or uncertainty this Christmas, we invite you to join us for a time of quiet reflection and hope. Please come to our Christmas Solace Service on Wednesday, December 18, at 2:00 pm at North Pelham. Together, we'll share music, prayers, and words of comfort, seeking light and peace in difficult times. You are not alone.

***Christmas Eve Candlelight Service:** Join us for a special Christmas Eve Candlelight Service on December 24 at 4:00 pm at Rockway, where we will celebrate the birth of Christ and the Sacrament of Holy Communion. We look forward to sharing this beautiful evening with you!

***Wednesday Bible Study:** Diane McMillan leads this group at NP every Wednesday at 10 AM.

***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.

***Two Special Holiday Events at Knox Presbyterian Church, St. Catharines:** Out of the Cold Fundraising Concert on Wednesday, December 4, at 7:30 PM, and the Festival of Carols on Wednesday, December 18, at 7:00 PM.

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