



Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge
26th Sunday after Pentecost, November 17, 2024
Worship at Home

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CALL TO WORSHIP

L: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.” (John 14:1)

P: **We come to worship to grow in our faith in God and to discover how such faith can bless every part of our lives.**

L: “Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.” (Mark 13:33)

P: **We come to worship to prepare ourselves spiritually now for whatever may come in the future.**

P: **Come upon us, Lord Jesus, and be our light as we journey.**

Hymn 290

Immortal, invisible, God only wise

Prayers of Approach and Confession

We come to worship from different places, O God. Some of us are carrying heavy burdens of stress and worry right now. Some of us feel the weight of loss: the loss of relationships, abilities, financial security, or the loss of someone dear to us. Some of us are carrying anger, resentment, or feelings of betrayal. Some of us, O God, feel consumed by envy—envy of others or frustration with circumstances we cannot control.

And yet, some of us, O God, are feeling good in this moment. We may feel successful, content, and satisfied. Perhaps we’ve come through an ordeal and find ourselves in a stable and peaceful place once more, feeling affirmed, loved, and grateful. Hear us now, O God, in the silence of our hearts, as we confess and share what is within us. (Pause)

You listen to us, O God. You celebrate with us, weep with us, and laugh with us. You see the beauty and possibility within us. You walk with us in our sadness, disappointment, hopelessness, and anger.

Lead us, O God. Lead us to the other side—to abundance, to peace, and to love. And now, we pray as Jesus taught us, saying together:

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 655

Give me oil in my lamp

Children of God Moment

Prayer for Understanding

Loving God,

As we open Your Word, may Your Spirit awaken our hearts and minds. Amid the uncertainties and challenges of our world, grant us wisdom to trust in Your unchanging love. Help us to hear Your call to live with vigilance, hope, and peace, so that our faith may grow, rooted in Your eternal truth. Through Christ, our guide and anchor, we pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Responsive Psalm 16

Daniel 12:1-3; John 14: 1-3, 18-19, 27 Mark 13:1-8, 32-37

Sermon

Faith in Times of Crisis

At the end of each liturgical year the Church asks us to consider the end of the world. Today's Bible readings are filled with ominous apocalyptic language about a coming cosmic collapse and signs of the end times. Terrible events are coming and everything is expected to fall apart! Trouble is to come. False teachers will seek to lead people astray. So, beware! There will be wars. There will be natural disasters. Even now, major world crises are prompting predictions that the end time has arrived. It is certainly true that there are challenges in our global community. Tension and conflict among nations and peoples is without doubt going on in many places. Advances in science and technology have made the threat that much greater. There are also the challenges of climate change and of vast gaps between rich and poor, the haves and the have nots. There is a growing fear of aging, or fear of the emergence of new and even more deadly viruses that might destroy whole segments of the population.

We have seen many changes even in our own lifetime. Things that once seemed so solid, such as job security, health, and even the church as a physical entity have all changed and are disappearing. As the Bible says, again and again, there is nothing permanent in the world. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

Yet natural disasters, wars, and international conflicts are a part of the human condition. There will always be earthquakes, famines, wars, rumors of wars, and false prophets. Even in our own times, natural phenomena such as tsunamis, earthquakes, super-storms, and solar or lunar eclipses can and do prove very frightening.

Jesus does not answer the disciples' question about when the end will come directly. There have always been prophecies and predictions about when the world around us will be no more. Only God knows when the world will end.

Instead, Jesus instructs them on how to behave when such difficulties arise. Such events can also be the beginning of a new way to live together. So in response to their questions about the end

times, Jesus simply tells his followers to watch out for those who will claim to be the Christ and try to lead people astray. His response is clear. No matter what destruction or persecution or change may come, God is faithful to love us, for God's love for us never changes.

Today's first reading is from Daniel, the most apocalyptic book in the Hebrew bible. The book is set during the Babylonian exile, even though it was probably written long afterwards. Daniel sounds like he is issuing a threat when he talks about the time of the end: "But you people, the chosen of God, shall escape," he says. Michael, the great archangel, will come as your protector. By God's grace in God's love, whenever the end will come, God's people will be in God's hands.

Jesus offered a perfect sacrifice once and for all. There will be forgiveness at the end of human history. Whenever the end comes, God's grace in compassionate love will be there. Even though Daniel offers God's limited love to some people for eternal life, he offers hope, the hope of resurrection. Resurrection is the great gift of God's love for us, and is a part of our entire journey from birth, death, and the life beyond.

Today's gospel reading from Mark is also decidedly apocalyptic in nature. It was written after the destruction of the temple in 70 C. E., about forty years after Jesus' crucifixion. The Jews are in revolt against Rome. There are many fanatics and much social upheaval. Poverty, slavery, and taxes are gutting family incomes. Rome meets Jewish resistance with violence and lines the highways to Jerusalem with people nailed on crosses. The ancient Jews have lost their temple and their land. They are in despair, because they believe that when the temple is destroyed, the world will end. Paradoxically, they desire the end of the world, because this concept has always been a central idea in their faith, culture, and tradition.

Mark's community of Christians in Rome knew persecution under Nero, and Jewish people were also being persecuted. Jesus warns his disciples in order to fortify them with the assurance that he will be with them always.

How can we survive and thrive in the midst of all our own contemporary challenges? Jesus offers an alternative vision in today's gospel of John. Jesus' faithful disciples are called to be living witnesses to the peace Jesus offered to his disciples and gives us now. The way of witnessing to such peace is by keeping vigilant, awake to the way we invest our time, money, energy and learning. We are called to a commitment of living faith grounded in love. Such a commitment of living faith is also a commitment of hope. It is a commitment to the earth and to all of life. Such a commitment does not come without sacrifice.

Jesus teaches that trust in God and in God's vision for the world is the way forward for our world, regardless of whether the world accepts such a vision or not. We Christians must live out this vision, keep awake and vigilant, warning people, and representing an alternative. As followers of Christ, trusting in God's love, we are invited not to retaliate in our personal relationships, but to forgive. We are invited to spend our time and money for the sake of others and the earth because we care. We are invited to restrain our consumption and our appetites, learning to conserve, re-use and recycle, and to live lightly on this blue dot. Because we are growing in our capacity to love others, we witness to a faith, a trust in God and God's way, God's way of peace,

whether we live or die. We are bound by eternal principles, truth and right, justice and love that lives forever. We are ruled by and rooted in love and peace that extends beyond this world and goes deeper than just finding security for ourselves.

I admit that all of these things are learned through trial and error. True faith, grounded in love and commitment to others and to the earth, offers a vision of hope even if things are getting worse. It is like the hope of resurrection in the Book of Daniel, a peace that lives in us even if there is great unrest around us.

Even though the world might think this is a pathetically foolish way of surviving and thriving, we as followers of Jesus, full of God's love, should be able to witness that the inner strength to survive, to endure, and to thrive comes most to those who have learned through hard experience that trusting in love is the only spiritually authentic way to survive and thrive, whatever hardships, suffering and loss may be coming.

May we beware that no one leads us astray. May we live trusting God's never-changing love for us, living out God's love, and keeping the peace of Jesus alive inside us.
Amen.

Hymn 665

Lord Jesus, you shall be my song

Invitation to the Offering

Doxology

Prayer of Dedication

Faithful God,

We dedicate these gifts to You, trusting in Your never-changing love. Use them to bring hope, peace, and renewal to a world in need. May our lives also reflect this trust, as we strive to live with vigilance and love, serving others and sharing Your vision of peace. In Jesus' name, we pray.
Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and for the People

Awesome God,

You have created a spectacular world, filled with wonder and potential. Yet, we often experience this world as a place of fear and uncertainty, a place where we have little control and not much security.

Even in the brokenness, we catch glimpses of your vision—a vision of marvelous beauty, connection, and restoration. You see us, and all of creation, as bearers of your image, designed for relationships, delight, and the sharing of life's blessings. Help us to live not as users and abusers, but as stewards of your gifts, sharing and replenishing for the good of all.

Hear us, O God, as we pray for a world in pain, suffering, and need: For places of hunger, disease, conflict, and abuse, where people long for safety and hope. For communities devastated

by natural disasters, overwhelmed by the task of rebuilding and beginning anew. For prisoners who suffer injustice and endure inhumane treatment.

We pray for those burdened by fear and worry about the future, for those who feel lost in their work or family life, and for those who seek purpose and peace. We lift to you all who are sick, lonely, or grieving. We ask your healing hand upon those facing serious illnesses, those recovering from surgery, and those in need of strength and comfort.

Finally, Lord, we pray for our Rockway and North Pelham family, for all who are hurting in body, mind, or spirit. In the silence of this moment, we lift to you the names and situations we carry in our hearts. (Pause)

Help us, Lord, to embody the love and healing of Christ, sharing your hope with a world in need. May your blessing bring new life, growth, and peace to all creation. We make this our prayer in Jesus' name, Amen.

Hymn 461 **Be thou my vision**

BENEDICTION

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who calls us to live with vigilance and trust, the love of God, whose never-changing presence gives us hope, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us to walk in peace, 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, November 24, at 10:00 am at Rockway**

***Thank You for Your Generosity:** Thank you for your generous contributions during our 196th Anniversary Celebration! We collected \$500 for the Brock Chaplaincy, and the funds have already been sent to support students in need. Your kindness is making a real difference, and we are deeply grateful for your support of this Anniversary mission.

***Apparel Drive — Thank You for Your Generosity:** As part of our Anniversary Celebration, we collected generously donated gently used winter coats, hats, mittens/gloves, and scarves for Brock Chaplaincy's Winter Coat Program. Thanks to your kindness, we were able to send a significant amount to support students in need this winter. We are deeply grateful for your contributions to this meaningful mission!

***Pop-Up Choir for Christmas Benefit Concert:** A big thank you to the pop-up choir for their beautiful performance on Anniversary Sunday! We are excited to announce another opportunity to sing at the Christmas benefit concert on November 23rd. Practice will be held at North Pelham Church on Friday, November 22nd at 7:00 pm. If you'd like to join or have any questions, please reach out to Jessica. All are welcome!

***Mitten Tree Donations for Community Care:** The Mitten Tree will be set up at Rockway on November 24 and December 8 to collect donations of mittens, hats, scarves, socks, and similar items for Community Care of West Niagara. Donations can also be brought to North Pelham on December 1, and they will be transported to Rockway.

***Presbytery Meeting:** The Presbytery meeting will be held on November 20 at Scottlea Presbyterian Church, starting at 7:00 PM.

***Christmas Joy Benefit Concert,** Saturday, November 23 | 2:00 PM, First Presbyterian Church, North Pelham: Join us for an afternoon of festive Christmas carols! A free-will offering will support the Open Arms Mission of Welland, helping those in need. Come and share the joy of the season through music.

***Wednesday Bible Study:** Diane McMillan leads this group at North Pelham every Wednesday at 10:00 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.

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