



Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge
Third Sunday in Advent, December 15, 2024 – 10:00 am
Worship at Home

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

CALL TO WORSHIP

(Based on the Advent liturgy provided by Presbyterian World Service & Development)

L: As we prepare for Christ's coming, we remember your calling to be filled with joy.

P: We come to know that our actions can help alleviate the burdens of others.

L: We light the third candle of Advent, a symbol of joy that uplifts the spirit.

(Light the candle of joy)

L: May the warmth and brightness of this candle encourage us to act with compassion and courage.

P: Holy One, strengthen us by your Spirit to commit ourselves to being people of joy and justice. Fill us with all joy and peace as we trust in you, so that we may overflow with hope. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.

Hymn 119

Hope is a star (verse 3)

Hymn 110

Come, thou long-expected Jesus

PRAYERS OF APPROACH, CONFESSION and ASSURANCE OF PARDON

God of life, God of joy,

We come to You with laughter in our hearts and joy in our very bones, for You bless us with the gift of life and call us to mutual joy in deep relationships with You and with others. You continue to nourish us, not with what we want, but with what we need.

You remind us to always rejoice in the Lord, but we often struggle to find joy. Our blindness of mind and spirit, human worries, busyness, loss, pain, hurt, and self-centred ways weigh us down. Sometimes, hope eludes us, peace feels distant, and joy seems impossible. Hear us in the silence as we open our hearts and minds to you. (pause)

Open our eyes and ears, O God, so we may see the glory of the Lord and hear the voices of angels. Strengthen our hands and hearts to share Your love, filled with joy and hope, for the sake of a world You long to save.

Meet us here and now so that we may rediscover true Christian joy in You, even amid life's many challenges. As Your beloved children, may we show others the spiritual joy You desire for us, transforming our lives in body, mind, spirit, and community.

We pray this in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray, 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

Loving God,

as we open your Word, may your Spirit shine light into our hearts. Guide us to hear your truth, embrace your love, and discover the joy that only comes from you. Prepare us to live with gratitude and to share your goodness with others. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Responsive Psalm Isaiah 12: 2-6

Zephaniah 3:14-20; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18

SERMON

The Gift of Spiritual Joy in Advent

I'll start with a joke. There was once a sincere Christian man out walking on a beach giving thanks for his joyful life. God said to him, "You have been so faithful that I'm going to grant you one special wish." The man was very excited and said: "I've always wanted to go to Hawaii, but I'm afraid to fly. So I would like you to build me a bridge so I can drive to Hawaii and have a joyful time there." God replied, "I am sorry, son. It's impossible to build a bridge across the ocean. Think of a more realistic request." After thinking a moment, the man said, "I wish I could understand women. I want to know how they feel inside, what they are thinking, why they cry, what they mean when they say, 'nothing!' and how to make them happy."

"Son," said God after a long pause, "Do you want two lanes or four on that bridge?"

At this time of getting ready for Christmas, many of us are excited and busy. Our days are filled with gift giving, Christmas music, greeting cards, church celebrations, special meals, Christmas trees, lights and decorations, nativity scenes, wreaths and garlands.

At the same time many feel lonely and this season brings not joy, but anxiety. Families quarrel and many people feel exhausted and find themselves deep in debt. There is a great deal of stress

connected to preparing for Christmas. Those who have lost loved ones, those who watch over the sick and dying, those who are unemployed, those who are stuck with hurts from the past, and those in family conflicts find little to celebrate. So how can we find and keep our joy no matter what is going on within us and around us?

Today is the third Sunday of preparing for Christmas. We have lit the Advent candle of joy and the lectionary readings have given us spiritual teachings about practical ways to be spiritually joyful, regardless of whatever happens in our physical and material lives.

Today's Old Testament reading is from the book of Zephaniah, a prophet who spoke when hard things needed to be said. The survival of a faithful remnant was at stake. In the midst of their difficulties the people shouted the Lord had removed judgment. In response Zephaniah told them "The true king of Israel is in your midst. Your saviour will rejoice over you and renew God's love for you. God will sing because of you." Zephaniah reminds us that the Lord will renew us with God's love from the inside and there is no reason to be afraid. It is a magnificent promise of spiritual renewal and joy – whatever our age or the condition of our health. In the same spirit, the prophet Isaiah confesses and teaches us that spiritual joy comes from the belief that God loves us and protects us, and that it comes through giving thanks to God for God's faithful love.

Offering thanksgiving to God for the gift of life in our daily lives produces spiritual joy. Let us give thanks to God even though we keep our eyes tightly closed against the morning light as long as possible. Because there are people who are actually blind. Let us give thanks to God even though we put off the physical effort of rising. Because there are people who are actually bedfast. Let us give thanks to God even though our family morning is hectic, the toast is burned and tempers are short. Because there are people who are actually lonely. Let us give thanks to God even though our table never looks like the pictures in the magazines. Because there are people who are actually hungry.

With revolutionary faith, the apostle Paul encourages the Philippians, and us now, "to rejoice in the Lord always." It is important to remember that when he writes these words to the Philippians, he is not writing from a resort or from the beach. He is writing from prison. "In everything by prayer and supplication give thanks. Let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God, which passes all human understanding will keep your hearts and your minds focused on Christ Jesus."

Christian spiritual joy comes from God at work in us and in others. Very often we go looking for joy in material things and in far-away places. We go looking for emotional joy, which is fleeting and ephemeral. By contrast, spiritual joy is found with God and with others in ordinary things, in everyday happenings, and in ordinary people. We are led slowly and thoughtfully toward this great celebration of the incarnation, the mystery of God taking on flesh and being among us in the most ordinary of our ordinary days, the most overwhelming of our griefs, our most profound joys, and our deepest hopes. We may discover and experience the Word becoming flesh at every moment of our lives in our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. It is a truly spiritual joy if

we can find the God who is the Word made flesh that dwells among us. Spiritual joy already exists within our hearts. It is our job to discover and meet the God who is within us and others.

In today's gospel, three different groups of people—the crowds, the tax collectors, and the soldiers—ask John the Baptist what they must do for the coming of the Lord. To the crowds the Baptist says, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” To the tax collectors, John says: “collect no more than the amount prescribed.” To the soldiers, John says, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.” John tells people to change their behaviour. He does not recommend pious practices for others to see.

Today's scripture readings remind us spiritual joy is not a temporal or perishable pleasure. Joy as one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit is a distinctly spiritual matter. It has its springs deep down inside. And that spring never runs dry, no matter what happens. The apostle Paul says that the joy comes from our intimate relationship with God. The prophets Zephaniah and Isaiah teach us that joy can be found when we offer thanksgiving to God for the gift of life, for God's constant loving presence, and for God's many blessings for our daily life. Moreover, John the Baptist advises us that the greatest joy is love.

During this Advent season of preparation, we are to return to the well of God's grace and wait for the spiritual gift of joy God gives. May the light of the Advent candle show us that joy is not necessarily the absence of suffering, pain, stress, and loneliness, but is the loving presence of God.

May we know the joys of being alive in intimate relationship with God and doing good, of caring for others in need, of loving and being loved. May we know the truth of our mutual human journey by learning how to enjoy a little and to endure very much for the sake of the spiritual joy in which we are intended to live. Amen.

Hymn 332

O Lord my God! / How great thou art

Invitation to the offering

Doxology

Prayer of Dedication

Loving God,

we offer these gifts with thankful hearts, rejoicing in the joy you place within us. May they be used to share your love, care for those in need, and spread your unending grace. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Concern for the World

Tender God, maker of everything good, beautiful, and true in Your spiritual Word, we offer to You our deepest thanksgiving. Yes, God, no matter who we are or where we find ourselves, we take this moment to offer You our deepest thanks. Whatever our situation—however difficult, troublesome, or bleak it may be—we know we can never rise from the pit we are in unless we give thanks to You, the One who alone is able to raise the dead.

Yes, You are the source of life and love. You are the foundation of our hope, peace, and joy. You are the source of our transformation. You have designed thanksgiving to be a source of joy, for only in genuine thanksgiving can we refocus our energies on those things that reveal how truly fortunate we are and how much more we can do for our spiritual joy under Your rule and inspiration.

And so, O God, under the inspiration of Your Spirit, we offer to You in this moment of silence our individual thanksgivings. (pause)

Gather the positive energies within us, O God. Bring them forth, for we need to know them, sense them, and feel them, especially when we are harassed by all the negative energy around us, which also infiltrates and poisons our thoughts, speech, and actions. Make us purer reflections of Your image as revealed in Jesus. Make us people who are not so absorbed in ourselves. Make us capable of listening, learning, and applying ourselves to the plight of others.

In this holy season, we lift to You all who are lost or displaced—those suffering from injustice, war, or natural disasters, and those searching for safety and shelter. We think of those in Canada struggling with the high cost of living, left without a place to belong as the cold sets in. Stir our hearts to act with compassion, to advocate for change, and to share what we have so all may find refuge and care.

We pray for those burdened by mental health struggles, addiction, or grief. Comfort them with Your love and surround them with peace and healing. May Your hope and joy shine through us as we share Christ's light in a hurting world. Transform us, O God, to be instruments of Your grace.

As we go forth, we lift to You those among us in our church family who are unwell, weary, or burdened by sorrow. In this season of waiting, remind them of Your presence and fill their hearts with the deep, unshakable joy that comes from You alone. Renew their strength, comfort their spirits, and surround them with Your love through the care of others. May Your light shine into their darkness and bring them hope and peace.

Help us, as a community, to walk alongside them, sharing Your grace and kindness in all we do. We trust in Your promise to be near, rejoicing over us with love. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Hymn 324

Great is thy faithfulness

Benediction:

May the joy of the Lord fill your hearts, the love of Jesus guide your actions, and the peace of the Holy Spirit sustain you now and always. Amen.

Sung Response: "Go Now In Peace"

Postlude

The Life and Ministry of our Congregations, led by Rev. Jacob Lee:
Pastoral Charge of Rockway and First, North Pelham

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

Announcements:

***Worship on Sunday, December 22, at Rockway**

***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.

***Christmas Solace Service, Wednesday, December 18, 2:00 pm:** While Advent and Christmas are times of joy, we recognize that this season can also bring sorrow or struggle for some. We invite you to join us for the Christmas Solace Service, called **The Longest Night Service**, a peaceful and reflective service offering space for healing, renewal, and God's comfort. Through scripture, prayer, and anointing, we will experience God's presence and light in our lives. All are welcome to this particular time of reflection and hope.

***Christmas Eve Candlelight Service:** Join us for a special Christmas Eve Candlelight Service on December 24 at 4:00 p.m. at Rockway. 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** is on a Christmas break and will resume on January 8.

***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.

***Thankful Note from Arlene Burrige:** Arlene extends her heartfelt gratitude to everyone who celebrated her 90th birthday with cards, gifts, best wishes, and lunch outings. She cherishes these memories and thanks you all for your kindness.

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