



**Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge**  
**Second Sunday in Advent, December 8, 2023 – 10:00 am**  
**Worship at Home**

**Email:** [northpelham.rockwaypc@gmail.com](mailto:northpelham.rockwaypc@gmail.com) **Website:** <https://northpelhamrockwaypresbyterian.ca>

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

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

**L:** In a world too often divided, we gather to embrace the gift of peace.

**P: We come with hearts open to reconciliation and understanding.**

**L:** We light the second candle of Advent, a symbol of God's peace in a troubled world.

(Light the candle of peace)

**L:** May the light of this candle guide us as we seek to fulfill our calling as peacemakers.

**P: Holy One, strengthen us by your Spirit to commit ourselves to standing against injustice in our communities and the world. Affirm within us a dedication to foster your peace. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.**

**Hymn 119**

**Hope is a star (verse 2)**

**Hymn 461**

**Be thou my vision**

**PRAYERS OF APPROACH, CONFESSION and ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

Loving and gracious God, we come before You today with hearts open to Your Word and Your presence. You have called us from many places, uniting us as one family in Christ. As we gather in this holy space, we seek to draw closer to You, to know Your truth, and to be transformed by Your love.

Holy God, we acknowledge that we have fallen short of Your glory. Too often, we have been self-focused, neglecting the needs of others. At times, we have sought to justify ourselves rather than humbly seek Your mercy. In our words, actions, and even thoughts, we have not always reflected Your grace and compassion.

Hear us in the silence, O Lord, as we offer the brokenness of our hearts to You. (Pause)

Yet, O God, You are full of mercy. Through Christ, You remind us that we are deeply loved despite our imperfections. You call us to repentance not to condemn us, but to restore us. In Your presence, we are made new, forgiven, and invited to walk humbly in Your grace. As we continue in worship and prepare to share in the Holy Communion, may we remember that Your table is open to all, a sign of Your infinite love and sacrifice for us. Fill us with Your Spirit, that we might leave this place renewed to share Your light with the world. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

**Hymn 682****Just as I am, without one plea****Prayer for Understanding**

Loving God, as we open Your Word, help us to hear Your truth with open hearts and humble spirits. Teach us the way of repentance and guide us to live with compassion and grace. May Your Spirit deepen our understanding so we may grow as authentic followers of Christ, sharing Your love with the world. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

**SCRIPTURE PASSAGES**

Psalm 82; Isaiah 40: 1-8; Matthew 3: 1-12

**SERMON****Being a Faithfully Authentic Christian**

What are the signs of a genuine Christian? Baptism is one of the visible signs, and I imagine that one or two generations ago most Canadians would have regarded themselves as Christian, because of the sacrament of holy baptism and weekly attendance at Sunday worship. They were born into the faith. They didn't choose to become a Christian.? Yet if there was no genuine choice to become a Christian, how could being a Christian mean anything authentic?

But the world we now live in is entirely different, especially in cities. Whatever a person's background, being a Christian is an option: as is going to church or observing anything religious. There are many religious and non-religious options in our society today. So claiming to be religious doesn't necessarily mean being Christian and neither does it mean belonging to a church. Thus the question of what makes us authentic Christians is as relevant as ever.

I think there are three different types of people in our human society that are familiar to all of us, and this typology provides an insight into what makes a true Christian in this secular world. First of all, there is the person who is egocentric. We might call such a person a narcissist, a person who lives for the moment, paying as much attention as possible to his or her own interests, needs, and goals. I admit that most of us have a little bit of the narcissist in us.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with living for pleasure and being able to ignore all pain but our own. It is great to have a dream, and be able to afford such guilt-free pleasure. Yet one way or another, we also know that there is more to life. Life is about much more than just living in the moment, focussed on ourselves and what we want. And this is because we live in community as part of a greater life.

The second kind of person is what we might call a moral or ethical person. Such a person focuses on doing the right thing, simply because it is the right thing to do. There is the good teacher, the good lawyer, the good sales representative and the good neighbour. These good people are kind and considerate, and offer hope that there is still goodness in this world.

Certainly, this moral kind of person is a wonderful improvement on the self-centered person, given that the wider good of society and the welfare of others is much more important than just living for ourselves and our personal pleasure. As part of society, what is good for society is

good for us too. God created us in the image of God and imparted life to each of us, so all life is interconnected and intertwined. We live in a web of life. So as much as the ego-centric person may feel they are living in ecstasy because they can indulge their fantasies, they also experience great emptiness in life because they cannot feel the deep joy and satisfaction that comes through love and sacrifice that goes beyond one's individual self.

However, some of the most moral and righteous people we know can also be some of the most self-righteous and arrogant. They are seemingly kind and helpful, but are tainted by a feeling of superiority towards others. This is what John the Baptist deals with in today's gospel reading. The people he harshly calls a "brood of vipers" are the Pharisees and Sadducees. They are not bad people, in fact They are religiously pious people who are keen to follow moral rules, the Torah, the Law of Moses. They are good citizens who work hard, give to charity, and pay their taxes. They are also honest and patriotic. Yet they regard themselves as superior to others. They look down on those they help and see them as flawed and failed creatures who have made bad choices and are rightfully paying for them.

John the Baptist undermines this sort of morality, spirituality, and sense of justice. He proclaims the gospel is a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Repentance means that failures and shortcomings are not just out there in other people. Failures, mistakes, and shortcomings are in us too, because we are also created by God as imperfect human beings. Repentance is therefore an essential part of becoming a person acceptable to God in terms of humility. Yet many of the religious people John the Baptist encountered didn't realize they were imperfect beings. Instead, they focused on other people as sinners who broke the rules, religiously and morally, and failed to see them as precious and beloved people to whom God had imparted God's life.

For John the Baptist, the highest form of humanity is the kind of humanity that lives in a spirit of repentance and humility, because we humans are created and made as imperfect, flawed and broken beings. Out of this right understanding of who we are there grows a wealth of compassion. In other words, authentic compassion can only grow out of the soil of true humility, and a deeply comprehensive self-awareness. If we realize that God always loves all of us, in the midst of all our human weaknesses, flaws, and limitations, how can we possibly hold something over someone else?

This means that condemnation, judgment, a sense of superiority, and the inner desire to put someone in their place is antithetical to becoming an authentic Christian. Only when we know this spiritual truth will we be less inclined to run others down as if they should have made better choices or had stronger wills.

To be faithfully and authentically Christian demands that we be more than just good people. It requires more than just being good citizens, good neighbours, good colleagues and good friends. It means more than following the rules and respecting what belongs to others. It means more than being honest and truthful.

To be faithfully and authentically Christian is also about understanding who we are, and being humble and truthful before God. Repentance is a necessary part of being an acceptable Christian because we are imperfect and often ego-centric beings. Repentance is not about feeling bad about ourselves, but means feeling grateful that we are loved in all our brokenness and even in our ugliness. A spirit of repentance means feeling grateful that we are embraced as infinitely precious, regardless of any shaming and blaming we may feel in ourselves toward others. It is about God's love cleansing us of our pretensions of sanctity, or our moral excuses, or our apathy. It is about being genuinely compassionate toward other sinners because we know we are sinners as well.

May God help each of us believe that all of us are precious, beloved, and important, no matter how much we might fail to be honest about our failings, regrets, and questionings. May God help us be less judgmental of others, and instead, more compassionate, so that we may experience more deeply God's infinite forgiving love, which brings us hope, new life, peace and spiritual joy. Amen.

**Hymn 571                      Lord, I want to be a Christian**

**Invitation to the Offering**  
**Doxology**

**Prayer of Dedication**

Gracious God,  
we offer these gifts with humble hearts, recognizing our need for Your grace and compassion. Use these offerings to spread Your love and mercy, that all may know Your forgiveness and hope. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

**Invitation to the Lord's Supper**

**The Apostles' Creed (p.539)**

**Hymn 548                      Let us break bread together (vv. 1-2)**

**Great Prayer of Thanksgiving & The Lord's Prayer**

One: The Lord be with you.

**All: And also with you.**

One: Lift up your hearts.

**All: We lift them up to the Lord.**

One: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**All: It is right to give God thanks and praise.**

**All: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.**

**All: Christ has died!  
Christ is risen!  
Christ comes again and again! Hallelujah!**

**All: “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.**

### **Words of Institution**

### **Sharing of the Elements**

### **Prayer after Communion (in unison)**

Gracious God,  
we thank You for feeding us at Your table and for the love that meets us in our brokenness. Help us to walk humbly, recognizing our need for Your grace and extending compassion to others. May we live as true followers of Christ, bearing witness to Your mercy and love in all we do. Send us into the world renewed by Your Spirit to share Your hope and peace with all. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

### **Hymn 548**

**Let us break bread together (v. 3)**

### **Benediction:**

May God the Father, who loves us in our brokenness, fill you with humility and compassion. May Jesus Christ, who calls us to repentance, guide you in His love and truth. And may the Holy Spirit, who empowers us to live with grace, send you forth to serve with mercy and hope. Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord. 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**

<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, December 15, at North Pelham**

**\*Mitten Tree Donations for Community Care:** The Mitten Tree is set up at Rockway to collect mittens, hats, scarves, socks, and other warm items for Community Care of West Niagara. Thank you for sharing warmth this season of Advent!

**\*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:** On December 8, we celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion, followed by a festive Christmas Brunch. Everyone is invited!

**\*Christmas Solace Service:** 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:** 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.

**\*Connect with your Minister Jacob** at [jacoble0501@gmail.com](mailto:jacoble0501@gmail.com) or 289-213-2797 for spiritual support, discussions, or getting acquainted.