



Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge
7th Sunday after the Epiphany, February 16, 2025
Worship at Home

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

CALL TO WORSHIP

L: *“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you. If anyone strikes you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt.”* (Luke 6:27-29)

P: **We come to worship, seeking to learn God’s love revealed in Jesus—in heart and in soul.**

L: *“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”* (Luke 6:37)

P: **We come to worship, longing to understand forgiveness as an expression of God’s love and justice.**

L: *“If someone has done you wrong, do not repay them with a wrong. Never take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s justice.”* (Romans 12:17,19)

P: **Lord, teach us to walk in the forgiving love of Jesus. Let us worship God in spirit and in truth!**

Hymn 290 **Immortal, invisible, God only wise**

PRAYERS OF APPROACH, CONFESSION and The Lord’s Prayer

We come before You, O God.

We long to be loved, yet loving others is not always easy. We seek understanding, yet too often, we judge before we try to walk in another’s shoes. We desire mercy when we fail, yet forgiving those who hurt us can feel impossible. When trust is broken, when anger and fear take hold, we struggle to extend the same grace we ask of You.

In this silence, O God, see into our hearts—what You already know. (pause for reflection)

How can You, O God, love us beyond our failures? How do You forgive us, even when we fall short? How do You see beauty and promise in us and never give up, even to our last breath?

Thank You, O God.

May we learn to see ourselves as You see us. May we begin to see others through Your eyes of grace. And may we live in the love that forgives, heals, and transforms. 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 740 Make me a channel of your peace

**Children of God's Moment
 Prayer for Understanding**

Gracious God,
 As we hear Your Word today, open our hearts to the power of forgiveness. Let Your truth shape
 us, challenge us, and transform us, so that we may reflect Your grace in all we do. Through
 Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40; Romans 12: 9-21; Luke 6:27-38

SERMON Forgiveness and True Justice

Today, I want to talk about one of the most difficult yet powerful teachings in the Bible:
 forgiveness. In Luke 6:27-28, Jesus says, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,
 bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one
 cheek, turn to them the other also.”

These are challenging words. It's natural to love those who are kind to us, but what about those
 who hurt us? Can we really love them? Can we forgive them? To help us understand, let's look at
 a real-life story that tests the limits of our faith.

Between 2010 and 2017, a tragic and shocking series of crimes took place in Toronto. A man
 named Bruce McArthur, a landscaper, targeted vulnerable individuals and took their lives. His
 crimes devastated families and communities, and in 2019, he was sentenced to life in prison.
 When the sentencing was announced, many responded with anger and grief. The families of the
 victims felt that justice had not been fully served. No legal sentence could ever erase their pain.

So, what does Jesus' command to love our enemies mean in such a case? How can we love
 someone like Bruce McArthur? Can we pray for him, bless him, or forgive him? At first glance,
 it sounds unreasonable—even absurd. But Jesus challenges us with the most radical kind of love:
 love for our enemies, for those who hate us, for those who seek to harm us or wish we didn't
 exist.

This kind of love isn't natural; it's supernatural. It requires us to confront our deepest hurts and
 choose a path that defies human instinct. Jesus exemplified this on the cross when He prayed,
 “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

I find these among the hardest words in all of Scripture. It's one thing to love family, friends, and
 neighbors, but loving an enemy? Someone who has caused irreparable harm? It feels impossible.
 Yet, Jesus calls us to this very standard. Jesus is challenging us today with the most radical kind

of love: love for our enemies, for those who hate us or seek to do us harm, for those who talk behind our backs and seek to malign us, for those who are ready to cut us down or take advantage of us, or who would be happy if we didn't exist.

How can we love someone who has harmed us? What kind of love does it have to be? It has to be special. It has to be God's compassionate love. Such a love has to include forgiveness because we can't pretend the harm or wrong has not happened. Yet how is such love possible? These past weeks I have been burdened by the case of Bruce McArthur. What kind of love are the families and friends of the victims supposed to have toward the killer?

Can they forgive him? No. McArthur's sentence angered many. So I want to raise the following questions. Why does Jesus teach us to forgive, even when it seems unreasonable and impossible? And if we do find ways to forgive, how does that serve justice?

The reason Jesus teaches us to forgive is because of our identity: as imperfect beings we live in a broken world where people can and often do all kinds of bad things. That is an unavoidable reality and part of our human journey. There is another reason, however. If we do not forgive, we can not be free. We become instead imprisoned and defeated in our heart and spirit. The damage is multiplied and sticks deep in our heart. If we don't deal with it constructively, it grows within like a bad spirit, or like a virus poisoning everything we say and do, all our relationships, our outlook, and our hopes and dreams. We tend to think we can put our hurts, grievances, hatred and bitterness in some corner of our hearts whether it won't affect anything else. Psychologists say we cannot do this. We need to find ways to channel the energy, to separate hatred from anger, and even to separate anger from our commitment to justice and right. Unless we can move in such ways in the depths of our hearts and spirits, the wrong continues to live within us and has power over us.

At the same time, how can we forgive in a way that also serves justice? How can forgiveness serve justice, and not make a mockery of it? Spiritually, forgiveness is a more powerful blow to the wrong-doer than retaliation. Forgiveness means there is something wrong that needs to be forgiven. Forgiveness condemns the wrong as wrong. Forgiveness brings everything out in the open. It has to be faced for what it is.

Our instinct is to retaliate. We want to pay back evil with evil. In fact, that is the justice in our human society. Much we may want to dress up retaliation as justice. But forgiveness is a spiritual approach because it condemns the wrong as wrong and refuses to respond with more wrong. The wrong-doer may suffer more deeply from being forgiven than from brutal treatment. Yet it is good suffering, for when people are treated as human beings rather than junk, they are more easily confronted by the wrong they have done. It is painful to confront the harm done to someone who is innocent. This is always the first step to genuine change.

The only time someone who does hard time is healed of hatred to the point where they seek out forgiveness and change their lives is when somewhere in the justice system they have been shown love and understanding, and given opportunities for rehabilitation through education and

counselling and other kinds of spiritual direction. That is the only way Jesus inspires and teaches us so that genuine change happens.

In our broken world, we need laws and police forces and prisons, so that people might be protected from harm. Yet what Jesus and the apostle Paul are advising and teaching is the spiritual justice of the reign of God, which is rooted in a particular kind of love. It is forgiveness as love from a compassionate heart. In our broken world where there is so much pain and conflict, we need forgiveness as compassionate love, for this is the most important component of justice. Without it, justice is just retaliation and blow for a blow. If the focus of justice is punishment without love, wrong-doers can never change what has happened, and they can never gain back what has been lost.

Forgiveness is a key for us as Christians so that we might live in peace and join in building the reign of God in our hearts and on this earth. When we forgive, we do not have to pretend the wrong hasn't happened. By forgiving, we are focussing on the wrong as a wrong. We can only forgive when there is a wrong to forgive, and the greater the wrong, the more heroic the forgiveness. In forgiving, we liberate ourselves and also offer the possibility of liberation to those around us, including the wrong-doer.

Forgiving others is never easy. It is only possible through the grace of God. But when we choose to forgive, we open the door to healing, peace, and true justice.

Forgiveness is not a surrender to injustice, but a triumph over it. It does not erase pain, but it leads us toward healing. It is not merely a human choice, but a divine gift. Today, let us leave this place not weighed down by bitterness, but lifted by the hope of God's transforming love.

May we pray for the strength to forgive—not because it is easy, but because it is the way to true freedom and justice. And as we walk this path, may we reflect the heart of Christ, who forgave even as He hung on the cross. May we go forth as instruments of His peace, bringing light to a world in need of healing. Amen.

Hymn 632 Help us accept each other

Invitation to the Offering

Doxology

Prayer of Dedication

Gracious God,

We are grateful for the chance to give back to You, even when our offerings—like our hearts—are humble and imperfect. Bless these gifts, and bless us as we seek to live out Your love and forgiveness in the world. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and for the People

Gracious and Loving God,

We give You thanks for the love that surrounds us—in every heartbeat, every breath, in the beauty of creation, and in the giving and receiving that shape our lives.

Yet, we live in a world of pain, O God, and we cannot keep it outside. It invades our hearts, troubles our minds, and burdens us with suffering—our own and that of others. It dims our hopes, shakes our dreams, and makes us long for healing.

So we gather here to worship, to pray, to sing—not to ignore what is broken, but to remember that Your love is greater than all that is lost. In love, we find purpose. In faith, we find strength. And so, we entrust every part of our lives—our hopes, our wounds, our relationships—into Your eternal care.

As we give thanks, O God, we also lift up the world around us in prayer, for we are part of it, and it is part of us.

We pray for those struggling to rebuild their lives after war, disaster, and displacement. May those forced from their homes find refuge. May those who suffer injustice know restoration. Give us hearts that seek compassion over indifference, justice over vengeance, and forgiveness over resentment. May we not turn away but bear the cost of love, choosing generosity instead of self-protection.

We pray for those facing hardship—workers and small business owners navigating uncertainty, those seeking health, housing, education, and care. Grant wisdom to leaders so that policies may reflect justice, not driven by division, but by a commitment to the common good.

For those burdened by unforgiveness, broken relationships, or deep wounds, we ask for Your healing touch. Where anger and fear divide, may Your grace mend. Where trust is shattered, may Your mercy restore. Help us, O God, to walk the path of forgiveness—not because it is easy, but because it is the way of Christ.

Now, in the silence of our hearts, we lift to You the people and situations that weigh upon us today... (pause for silent prayer.)

How do we respond to the wrongs done to us, O God? How do we choose life instead of spreading more hurt? We need Your forgiving love to find us, fill us, and free us. We need Your healing mercy, especially when pain feels unbearable. We need Your peace, more powerful than the storms of anger and bitterness within us.

For healing, we pray. For grace, we pray. For strength to love as You love, we pray. And in Jesus' name, we place our trust. Amen.

Hymn 642

O Master, let me walk with thee

BENEDICTION

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught us the way of forgiveness, the love of God, who sees beauty in us despite our brokenness, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, who

empowers us to forgive others, be with you now and always. Go in peace, reflecting the heart of Christ. Amen.

Sung Response- Go Now In Peace
Postlude

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

***Worship on Sunday, February 23, at North Pelham**

***Joint Session Meeting After Worship:** The postponed Session meeting will take place immediately following the service in the Fellowship Room. Elders, please plan to attend.

***Get Your "World Famous" Meat Pies!**

The Willing Workers are now taking orders for their delicious 9” Ground Beef & Chicken Meat Pies! These frozen pies are perfect for baking and enjoying anytime.

- Order now using the online form or contact Janice Aulph at 905-246-9175 (call or text).
- Pick-up: Saturday, March 15th, 10 AM – 12 PM at North Pelham Church
- Open to the public after Sunday, February 16th!

Don't miss out—place your order today! Thank you for your support!

***Annual Congregational Meetings:** The 2024 Annual Congregational Meeting for Rockway will occur on **March 2**, immediately following the service. The meeting for North Pelham is scheduled for **March 9**, which also follows the service. Committee reports are essential for providing a comprehensive overview of our church activities. We kindly ask committees to submit their reports by **February 16** for Rockway (to Bonnie) and **February 23** for North Pelham (to Janice or Carole) Thank you for your cooperation and timely submissions!

***Holy Communion on March 2:** We will celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion during worship on Sunday, March 2. All are welcome to partake in this sacred meal.

***Quilting** Tuesdays at North Pelham at 9:00 am

***Wednesday Bible Study** meets at 10:00 am at North Pelham

***Outreach - Thursday Walking:** Join our Wellness Walk & Coffee Chat! Meet at Canada Games Park at 9:30 a.m. for the walk, followed by a joyful coffee chat at Rockway at 10:45 a.m.

***Connect with your Minister Jacob** at jacoble0501@gmail.com or 289-213-2797 for spiritual support, discussions, or getting acquainted.