



**Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge**  
**5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany, February 2, 2025**  
**Worship at Home**

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**CALL TO WORSHIP**

**L:** “I may speak in the tongues of humans and angels, but if I do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. I may have the gift of prophecy, understand all mysteries and knowledge, and have faith that moves mountains, but without love, I am nothing.” (1 Corinthians 13:1-2)

**P: We gather to worship and to seek the sacred and essential truths of life.**

**L:** We come to rediscover love that flourishes in the soil of faith and hope, transforming us into the likeness of Christ.

**P: May God meet us here, surrounding us with God’s love and renewing our hearts as we worship together!**

**Hymn 314                      God is love: come heaven, adoring**

**PRAYERS OF APPROACH, CONFESSION and The Lord’s Prayer**

God of love,

We come before you, seeking to find you and to be found by your love. Will we find you in this hour? Will you find us? For some of us, O God, this is a difficult time. We struggle to feel your presence and love. We wonder if you hear our prayers or if you have abandoned us in our darkest valley. For others, this is a season of joy, a time of gratitude and strong faith, trusting that you are with us and love us as we are. For some, there is a gap between what we do and what we know we should do in a particular situation or relationship.

Hear us, O God, as we bring our silent confessions before you. (pause)

Hear us, O God. Receive us, O God. Ground us in your love, O God. Call us to abide in faith, in hope, and in love. Plant within us the seeds of new faith and fresh hope, that your love may grow ever deeper in us. We pray this in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray together, 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 481                   Blest be the tie that binds**

**Children of God's Moment**

**Prayer for Understanding**

God of love, open our hearts to Your truth. Strengthen our faith, renew our hope, and shape us by Your unfailing love. Amen.

**SCRIPTURE PASSAGES**

**Psalm 71: 1-9**

**1 Corinthians 13: 1-13; Luke 4: 16-27**

**SERMON**

**Love Grows in the Soil of Hope and Faith**

Have you ever experienced God's power to heal? I once met a man whose story left a deep impression on me. In 2007, while studying theology at Knox College, I got to know a classmate in his late forties. During a conversation, he shared his journey of faith. In 2001, he was diagnosed with liver cancer. Faced with this crisis, he made a solemn vow to God: if his cancer were healed, he would dedicate his life to serving God as a minister. Miraculously, his cancer disappeared. His doctor confirmed he was cancer-free, and to this day, he remains healthy. True to his vow, he enrolled in theology school to fulfill his promise. His healing was undeniably a powerful miracle.

Yet, I've also ministered to many faithful Christians suffering from illnesses like cancer. These were people of deep faith who prayed fervently, received prayers from others, and had access to excellent medical care. However, their stories often didn't end in miraculous recovery. Many struggled and ultimately passed away. This raises a difficult question: Does God hear our prayers? If healing doesn't come, does it mean God is absent or unloving?

These experiences have challenged me to reflect on how we perceive miracles and God's activity in our lives. I believe that God knows us intimately, loves us deeply, and desires to bless us abundantly. But God's blessings don't always look like what we expect. Our scripture readings today invite us to understand the power of love, grounded in faith and hope, that sustains us through both joy and sorrow, even when life's circumstances don't align with our desires.

In today's gospel reading, Jesus declares his mission in the synagogue: to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, liberation to the oppressed, and the proclamation of God's favor. Yet, his message is rejected by those in his hometown. They cannot see past their preconceived notions of how God works. They expect God to act in a specific, familiar way, and when Jesus doesn't fit their expectations, they close their hearts to him.

This reminds us that if we narrow our focus to a specific way we expect God to act, we risk missing the blessings God is offering in other areas of our lives. Just like the people in Jesus' hometown, we can resist God's work in our lives if it doesn't match our expectations.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians provides further insight into this idea. The Christians in Corinth were eager for external displays of spiritual power and miraculous signs. But Paul reminds them that the greatest spiritual gift is love. Love is not limited to moments of joy or easy relationships. True love shows its power in challenging times, in strained relationships, and in situations where we feel vulnerable or overwhelmed. Love is the enduring thread that renews our strength, offers hope, and helps us experience the fullness of life, even in the midst of pain.

Paul's famous words about love remind us that love is patient, kind, and enduring. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and never fails. This kind of love is rooted in faith and hope. Faith allows us to trust God in the present moment, and hope enables us to trust in God's goodness for the future, even when tomorrow feels uncertain.

But how do we cultivate this kind of love in our lives? One key is recognizing that God's power and blessings often come in ways we don't expect. When our prayers for healing, resolution, or success aren't answered in the way we hope, it doesn't mean God is absent. Instead, we are invited to remain open to God's presence and to trust that God is working in and through every circumstance. As Paul writes, "Now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face" (1 Corinthians 13:12). Our understanding is limited, but God's love is infinite.

It's also important to understand that God's power is not about control or force. God does not manipulate events or impose outcomes. Instead, God works through love, which respects our freedom and invites genuine relationships. Love does not demand or coerce; it creates space for growth, transformation, and abundant life.

This means that God's love can bring new possibilities even in the midst of life's hardships. When we face illness, loss, or failure, love can transform our pain into compassion for others. It can open our eyes to blessings we didn't anticipate and help us discover new ways to serve and live meaningfully. For example, my classmate's healing led him to a life of ministry, but others I've ministered to have found equally profound blessings in their suffering, whether through deepening relationships, finding peace, or becoming sources of encouragement to others.

God's power of love is most clearly seen in Jesus, who journeyed with humanity through both joy and suffering. He showed us that even in the darkest valleys, new faith, hope, and love are possible. Jesus' resurrection demonstrates that life and love are stronger than death and despair.

Life is full of complexities and mysteries. We all face suffering, loss, and eventually death. Yet, we are also created in the image of God, who is eternal. This means that even as we experience pain, we are capable of experiencing incredible joy, peace, and gratitude. Every season of life, even the most difficult, holds the potential for renewal and transformation through God's love.

As we live in faith and hope, we open ourselves to experiencing this love more fully. Faith and hope are like the soil in which love takes root and grows. They allow us to trust that God is with us, working for our good, even when circumstances don't go as planned.

So, what does it mean for us to live in this love? It means trusting God not only for physical healing or external blessings but for spiritual renewal and growth. It means being open to God's presence in every situation, believing that even when life feels hopeless, love can create new possibilities.

If you or someone you love is sick, of course you pray for healing. But even if physical healing doesn't happen, love rooted in faith and hope can open the door to other kinds of healing— healing of the heart, healing of relationships, or healing of our perspective on life. Through God's love, we may receive blessings we never imagined, and we may even become a blessing to others.

As followers of Christ, we are called to cultivate this love in every aspect of our lives. When we trust in God's love, we find the strength to endure, the courage to hope, and the capacity to love even in difficult circumstances. And when we love in this way, we reflect God's love to the world, becoming instruments of God's grace and peace.

May we be open to the miracles of God's love, whether they come in dramatic transformations or in quiet moments of grace. May we trust in God's faithfulness, and may we allow God's love to shape us, renew us, and guide us through every season of life.

Let us remain grounded in faith and hope, trusting that the God who created us is always with us, inviting us to experience life abundant through the power of love. Amen.

**Hymn 526 (R)                      Faith of Our Fathers**

**Invitation to the Offering**

**Doxology**

**Prayer of Dedication**

Loving God, we offer these gifts as an expression of our faith and hope in You. May they be used to share Your love, bring healing, and open hearts to Your presence. Shape us to be instruments of Your grace, that we may reflect Your unfailing love in all we do. Amen.

**Prayer of Thanksgiving and for the People**

Awesome God, Maker of heaven and earth,

In this sacred moment, we turn our hearts to you in thanksgiving. Too often, we dwell on all that is broken in our world and in our lives. Yet, if we fail to give thanks for what is beautiful, life-giving, and transformative, how can we fully receive your strength and love?

O God, we need your renewing presence—love that strengthens us and reveals life abundant in ways beyond our understanding. We need to feel your love as solid ground beneath our weary hearts, to trust it when we feel inadequate or broken, and to believe that you have a purpose for us, even when life's struggles remain unresolved.

You bless us when we open ourselves to your presence, however it comes and through whatever challenges we face. In love, you heal and restore us. In faith, you lift us up when we stumble. In hope, you remind us that our story is not just written in time but in eternity.

Hear us now, O God, as we lift words of compassionate concern for the world around us—a world that desperately needs to hear your presence of love. Life can feel so fragile, so uncertain. We pray for those caught in the midst of war, for those seeking shelter and safety, for those fearful of deportation or longing for welcome after fleeing devastation and loss. May your mercy and grace move the hearts of decision-makers and policymakers. And may we, as your people, open our hearts to love more fully.

We pray, too, for all those affected by devastating weather events—those who face great loss and uncertainty as they rebuild their lives. May your gifts of courage, resilience, and hope sustain them in the weeks, months, and years ahead. O God, even in the midst of hardship, life offers moments of hope.

We pray for peacemaking efforts in the Middle East and throughout the world—strengthen partnerships between nations, that people might live not in division, but in dignity and mutual care. Help us listen for your voice calling us to the way of peace and to embody that peace in our lives.

We also lift before you the concerns of our own community. We pray for Margaret Rice and Guy Cook as they recover from surgery—grant them healing and strength. We hold in our hearts Kathy Keenan, Jim Eybel, Luana Ray, and Trish Reynolds in their grief—may your comfort surround them. We ask for your sustaining care for Diane McMillian in her illness and for Robert Lampmen in his time of urgent need. May all who struggle feel the embrace of your presence.

And now, in the quiet of this space, we name before you those we carry in our hearts... (moment of silence)

Loving God, may your peace, which surpasses all understanding, take root in us. May we go forth from this place strengthened in faith, filled with hope, and renewed by the power of your love. We pray this in and through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

**Hymn 324                      Great is thy faithfulness**

### **BENEDICTION**

May God's love sustain you, Christ's grace renew you, and the power of the Holy Spirit fill you with faith, hope, and love, now and always. 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 9, at North Pelham**

**\*RPCW Meeting on February 5:** The RPCW will meet on Wednesday, February 5, at 1:30 PM at the church.

**\*Joint Session Meeting – Feb 12:** Rockway and North Pelham's joint session meeting will be held on Monday, February 12, at 7:00 PM at Rockway. All elders are encouraged to attend.

**\*Out of the Cold Meal Service – Feb 14:** Rockway will serve hot meals to those in need at Knox Presbyterian Church, St. Catharines, on February 14 at 6:00 pm as part of the Out of the Cold program.

**\*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!

**\*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](mailto:jacoble0501@gmail.com) or 289-213-2797 for spiritual support, discussions, or getting acquainted.