



Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge
8th Sunday after the Epiphany, February 23, 2025
Worship at Home

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

CALL TO WORSHIP

L: God our Creator, we call You Love, Source of Life, Father, Mother:

P: Draw us closer to You, O God.

L: Christ our Savior, we call You the Son, the Messiah, the One who Saves:

P: Draw us closer to You, O God.

L: Holy Spirit, we call You the Advocate, the Inspirer, Breath and Wind of God, the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of Jesus.

P: Draw us closer to You, O God. Draw us into Your love, O Holy Spirit, so that we may walk with You each day—through our strengths and joys, as well as our mistakes and struggles. Amen.

Hymn 706 **Come, let us sing of a wonderful love**

PRAYERS OF APPROACH, CONFESSION and The Lord's Prayer

Loving and merciful God,
 we come before You, longing to find You and to be found by You. We want to be more loving and giving, more patient and kind. We desire to be people of peace, grounded in Your grace. Yet, we confess that life's struggles often bring out our worst, not our best.

In our relationships—with friends, family, and even within ourselves—we are quick to criticize, slow to forgive, and reluctant to understand. We envy, resent, and judge. We hurt others with our words, actions, and attitudes. Even when we speak the truth, love is often missing. Even when we long to be sincere, fear holds us back.

Find us, O God, in this hour. Some of us are searching for clarity in our lives and relationships. Some of us struggle with the gap between who we are and who we long to be. We bring to You the burdens of our hearts in silent confession. (silence)

Meet us, O God, with Your compassionate forgiveness and steadfast love. Call us to repentance and transformation. Be the ground of our faith, the source of our hope, and the Spirit who reshapes our hearts. Teach us to love as You love, to forgive as You forgive, and to live as Your people, walking in grace each day.

No matter how far we have strayed, may we know this truth: we matter to You. And so, we pray together, as Jesus taught us, 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 640 Softly and tenderly**Children of God's Moment****Prayer for Understanding**

Loving God,

open our hearts to Your restoring love, Your steadfast grace, and Your call to reconciliation.

Speak to us through Your Word and transform us by Your truth. Amen.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES Responsive Psalm 33; Genesis 33: 1-11; Luke 15: 11-32**SERMON Is Our God Like This One**

Many people long for relationships that never change—whether with their spouses, friends, or family. As Christians, we often hold onto the false impression in our faith that human relationships can be absolute, perfect, and unchanging. Unfortunately, the truth is that relationships inevitably shift over time. There are no ideal or absolute relationships because they are dynamic and ever-evolving. This is why we must nurture and manage them daily; they require constant attention and care. But what about our relationship with God? Does it change as well?

Today's scripture readings tell us about the reality of human relationships and the relationship between God and humans. Here, no one behaves as they are expected to. There is embarrassment and shame, resentment and bitterness, and even astonishing and forgiving love.

The story of Jacob and Esau is told over several chapters of Genesis. Our reading this morning captures the final chapter. But the story began much earlier with various acts of treachery, deception, and trickery. Jacob, who is younger by minutes than his twin brother Esau, was spurred on by his mother to find a way to get the inheritance which traditionally goes to the oldest. Esau was to inherit everything, and then decide how to distribute it to everyone else. Yet Jacob managed to get the inheritance for himself by deceiving his father and cheating on his brother Esau. His father was heartbroken when he found out and Esau was furious. As a result, the family relationship broke apart and Jacob fled his brother's anger.

As the years passed by, Jacob builds a life for himself. He never deals with what he has done. He continues to use trickery and deception to get ahead. All of this comes to a fearful climax when Jacob is fleeing one bad situation only to be told he is running into another one: his brother Esau

is coming to meet him. And he has 400 men with him. Before we get to the shocking conclusion, let us consider the story Jesus tells as a parallel: There is a father who is a successful farmer who has two sons. The younger son wants to break free and he wants to break free in style. He doesn't want to wait till his father is dead to inherit his share of the family business. He wants it all now.

While the father doesn't want to lose him, if his son's heart is not in the family business, he will not pressure him to stay. Not only that, but he sells half his assets so that he can pay his younger son half of all he owns. Not only does the son use up all the money, but he spends it on useless pastimes. At the end of it, he is penniless and alone. And if this were not enough, he is reduced to feeding pigs and envies the pigs their freedom to eat whenever they are hungry.

Both Jacob and the younger son of the parable are in a dark pit. Have you ever been in a dark pit? Sometimes the pit is something we fall into because of a series of events and occurrences beyond our control. But the darker pits are always ones where we feel some level of complicity in our own situation. Could I have chosen differently, acted differently, done something differently? We can become swallowed up by ifs, ands, and buts.

In the story Jacob comes up with a plan. He will use his crafty ways to survive. He divides up his family and his goods into two different camp trailers. Esau can only attack one. Moreover, he sends the most vulnerable one ahead, hoping this will soften Esau's will to attack. Jacob stays back and spends the night wrestling with an angel, wrestling with his conscience, his history and the accumulated guilt of all the years of plotting. God has been gracious to him even though he has never deserved it.

But then there is an unexpected twist: "Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept." Whatever Jacob has stolen from him is totally forgotten, swept aside. Jacob is overwhelmed and says: "Truly to see your face is to see the face of God – since you have received me with such favor."

This connects directly to the parable of the prodigal son. Down in the pit of despair, hopeless and helpless, an idea comes to him: "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'"

Even while he is far off, his father recognizes him, runs to him and embraces him. He refuses to grant anything less than a full restoration. The father's love is overflowing. We discover what God's love is from the love of this father: unchanged and overflowing love without any conditions, nothing held back. The son never knew his father's heart this way. Only when he hit rock bottom could he and his father build a relationship that was more like communion. The son must accept his father's love in compassion totally and for what it is, a compassionate and pure gift.

That is not the end of either story, however. Jacob continues to live his life in his family and through the generations that follow. There is further treachery, jealousy, backstabbing, and even

murder. In the parable, the older brother has no interest in celebrating his brother's return. He says to his father, "For all these years I have been working as a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command, yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you have killed the fatted calf for him..." Evidently, the older son doesn't know his father's heart.

But here is his father's response: "Son," he says, "you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found..." In other words, join me in communion with your brother. He has come back. He has suffered enough. You, too, are suffering. But your suffering is more hidden. You have hatred, bitterness, and resentment in you. You too are in a prison. Let your heart embrace your brother in love. Let us restore our family and let us build it on a healthier spiritual foundation.

These stories challenge us. Do we believe in a God of punishment and judgment or a God of rich, overflowing love? Do we cling to resentment, or do we allow grace to transform us?

Maybe you have felt like Jacob—burdened by past mistakes. Maybe you have been like the younger son—lost and ashamed. Or perhaps you relate to the older brother—faithful yet struggling with bitterness. Wherever you find yourself today, know this: God's love is relentless. It is a love that sees beyond our failures, brokenness, and what we think we deserve.

May we experience the God Jacob saw in Esau's embrace. May we encounter the Father who runs to us with open arms. May we know the love that restores, redeems, and never runs out. Amen.

Hymn 670 Amazing grace

Invitation to the Offering

Doxology

Prayer of Dedication

Gracious God, You have shown us restoring love and steadfast grace. As we offer these gifts, may they be used to bring healing, reconciliation, and hope to others. Teach us to give as You give—freely and with love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and for the People

Loving God,

Life itself is a gracious gift from You, and love is its most fantastic blessing. Yet, we often take love for granted—seeking it, withholding it, or forgetting its power to heal. We get caught in busyness, self-promotion, and worry instead of nurturing the relationships that nourish our souls.

Teach us, O God, to love more deeply—with patience, kindness, endurance, and grace. Open our hearts to those who are hard to love, those who challenge us, and those we struggle to forgive.

We pray for the needs of our world, O God. For the hungry and those burdened by rising costs—guide leaders toward solutions that bring justice and relief; for those seeking work, those facing uncertainty, and those feeling lost—open new pathways where old ones have closed; for the lonely, the anxious, and those entangled in conflict—bring peace, healing, and reconciliation; for those carrying deep wounds, unable to forgive—O God, work within them, bringing light where there is darkness and hope where there is despair.

We also pray for our nation’s economic future, O God. In a time of instability, trade disputes, and economic uncertainty, may we find a way forward without becoming mean-spirited or vindictive. Help us to remember Christ’s call to love our enemies, to seek peace over conflict, and to trust that love is always stronger than hate or indifference. May we, through our personal and collective actions, bear witness to the truth that love can transform the world—not through threats or coercion, but through justice, kindness, and mercy.

The needs are great, O God. The suffering is deep. But Your love is greater. Give us greater love, deeper peace, stronger trust, and expanded hope.

Finally, we pray for those in our church family—at Rockway, North Pelham, and beyond—who are struggling with fragile health in body and mind. In the silence, we name before You those we carry in our hearts. (pause for silent prayer.)

Bring healing, renewal, and strength for the journey ahead. Fill us with joy in challenges and faith in what lies before us. We offer this prayer in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Hymn 471 We are one in the Spirit

BENEDICTION

May God, who welcomes us in grace, Jesus Christ, who restores and reconciles, and the Holy Spirit, who fills us with steadfast love, guide you in peace and transform you in love. 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

***Worship on Sunday, March 2, at Rockway**

***Out of the Cold Meal Service:** Last Friday evening, Rockway's Out of the Cold team served those in need with hot food and salad, offering warmth and care to our community at Knox Presbyterian Church in St. Catharines. We give thanks to God for this opportunity to serve.

***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

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

***Rescheduled Joint Session Meeting:** Due to the winter storm and unsafe conditions, our Joint Session Meeting was postponed twice. It has now been rescheduled for Wednesday, February 26, at 7:00 PM at North Pelham. We hope the weather will allow us to meet as planned.

***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.

***Rockway's 2024 Annual Congregational Meeting** will occur on Sunday, March 2, immediately following the worship service. This is an important opportunity to reflect on the church's life and work over the past year and look ahead to this year.

***North Pelham's 2024 Annual Congregational Meeting** will be held on Sunday, March 9, immediately after the worship service. This is a time to review the past year and prepare for this year. Committee reports should be submitted to Janice or Carole as soon as possible.

***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.