



Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge
2nd Sunday in Lent, March 16, 2025
Worship at Home

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

CALL TO WORSHIP (provided by Presbyterian World Service and Development)

L: As we seek your face, O God, on our Lenten journey,

P: may we remember your covenant of grace with your people.

L: Give us eyes to see your compassion and glory in Christ Jesus

P: that we may be astounded by your greatness.

L: Help our hearts to take courage as we wait for you, O God,

P: so that together we can sing and make melody.

Hymn 371 Love divine, all loves excelling

PRAYERS OF APPROACH, CONFESSION and The Lord's Prayer

Inner peace, inner stillness, inner rest—O God, how many of us long for this? A clear purpose, a path ahead, the lifting of confusion and distress—O God, how many of us seek this? Genuine relationships, the chance to give love, to be appreciated and loved in return, to be heard, respected, and valued—O God, how many of us yearn for this?

Hear us now, in the silence, as we lay our hearts before You. (pause)

You know our fears, even those we cannot name. You know what weighs us down, what keeps us restless. You know the thoughts that send us running in all directions.

Yet in the midst of it all, You speak—even now. "I am with you. I am in you. I am trying to take root in you." Will we open up and let You in? Will we release what needs to go? Will we place everything before You and trust You completely?

O God, we commit ourselves to this, even when it is hard. Begin Your work in us—or begin it again. Transform us, slowly but surely, until something new is born again. And now, we pray 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 400 Spirit of the living God

Prayer for Understanding

Holy God, as we open Your Word, shine Your light upon us. By the power of Your Holy Spirit, cast out our fear and fill us with Your transforming love. Open our hearts to receive Your truth, that we may be renewed and born again in faith. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Responsive Psalm 121

1 John 4: 15-18; Romans 13: 8-10; John 3: 1-17

SERMON

The Love that casts out Fear

What is fear? What are we now afraid of? We have many fears: fear of mistakes, failure, rejection, betrayal, losing control, car accidents, incurable illness, etc. The list of fears can be endless. In particular, I think we are all worried about jobs in industries like cars and energy, problems with the U.S., and how this affects our country. The trade issues are causing stress and making many people feel unsure and upset.

Fear is like an iceberg. Sometimes our fears are hidden behind our concern for better security and protection in our lives. Political philosopher of the early modern world, John Locke, described human beings as driven by a fear of death and an instinct for self-protection. That is why we are motivated to work together as people in order to maximize our security and protection. Security can come in many forms: material, social and spiritual. We want to have enough money in the bank and safety in our homes and communities. We want to know that we will not die alone and that we will be safe after we die.

But even if we are sufficiently healthy, secure in our lifestyle choices, comfortable, and relatively free of fear, there is another challenge: It is a feeling of emptiness we experience in our hearts, along with a sense of life's meaninglessness. Money can only go so far to fulfill us. Our work or profession can only go so far. Getting involved in social activities and getting involved with children, family, and friends is also very fulfilling, but it cannot provide us with what we need to solve the feeling of emptiness.

Today's gospel reading gives us some guidance and an answer to these feelings of fear and emptiness. The gospel points to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is an energy that produces dynamic power and transforms the way we feel, the way we think, and the way we choose to live.

The gospel tells us of the reality of fear: the fear of Nicodemus and the religious groups of the Pharisees. In the story, Nicodemus comes to see Jesus at night. He is afraid to visit Jesus in broad daylight, so he makes a nighttime visit. Nicodemus is a man driven by fear. He is one of an elite religious group of Pharisees in Jewish society, a group with clear views about morals and society.

They don't like Jesus because Jesus speaks with an authority that threatens them. He is motivated not by fear but by love. He is far too accepting of people with moral flaws, even those who are moral failures.

Jesus talks to Nicodemus about the movement of the Holy Spirit. When we have some connection in the Holy Spirit, or when we are caught up in the Holy Spirit, fear is weakened and disappears. Without any doubt, fear is a part of all of our lives, and is a healthy component in making us aware of danger, in making us mindful of many things. But fear is an unhealthy hindrance, a block, for the deepest transformations in our lives, for the richest flowering of love in our lives, for the greatest purposes in our lives. Fear may have its place, but it should not be our primary motivator. Fear should not be at the center of our being.

How then can we overcome unhealthy fear? In today's gospel reading, Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit as God's invisible presence. And the greatest sign that the Spirit is working is when love wells up inside us. We visit someone in the hospital or in their home. This might be someone whom we have often found a challenge to see. We may have problems with their character, their negative attitude, and their choices in life. But then we have this experience of something rising within us. We make a connection during our visit. This person shares with us some intimate details of their lives. They speak with wisdom. We see their courage and strength. We feel warm toward them, and we feel love. *This* is the movement of the Spirit of God. In the gospels, Jesus frequently asks his followers to pray for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the gift of love.

The first letter of John puts forth the basic tenet that "Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love...and there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." We experience our fears falling away when we experience a personal transformation in our lives that is grounded in and motivated by love. We begin to trust, and love begins to grow, setting even deeper roots within us. We discover a new peace, a more durable peace. We open up to people with whom we might otherwise be closed. We are less prone to judge, more prone to see the good in them. We see beauty in the world around us, despite all the degradation of our planet, the bad attitudes in society, the cruelties and the tragedies. Despite all this, we see and experience beauty, goodness, gratitude, and awe.

What does it mean to believe in Jesus? This is what Jesus has in his mind when he speaks about "being born again" to Nicodemus in the story: To believe in Jesus is to receive his Spirit, the Holy Spirit. It is an experience. For some of us, it doesn't happen all at once. Usually, dramatic conversations happen for those who have major crises; however, for most of us, life happens in stages, with some advances and some setbacks. And so the kind of personal transformation we need is the kind that makes us better able to deal with the situations in our lives, the relationships in our lives, the challenges that stretch our limits and our patience.

The Holy Spirit is God's invisible movement and energy, living in and through Jesus, granted to all of us who call on God and recognize God in Jesus. In verse 16, we are told: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." And verse 17 clearly tells and teaches us God's love, saying: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved

through him.” The authentic love of God transforms us. It overcomes those places of fear, those places of insecurity in our lives, those places of emptiness, where we feel life is missing something fundamental.

As imperfect, limited, and vulnerable beings, we all experience fear in each stage of our lives. We look for some security and protection in our lives. We experience times when we feel emptiness. However, as Christians, our primary resource is reaching out to God in prayer and faith. We are looking for ever new levels of change and renewal in our lives, of being born again and again from above. As we face new fears and worries, we pray for God’s peace. As we recognize new spaces of emptiness and insecurity within us, we pray for love to give us a purpose and a trust so that we don’t have to be afraid of what is and what will be.

May the Holy Spirit come to us and within us, filling us with God’s love that heals, nourishes, and transforms. May we feel Your presence in every moment of fear, every space of emptiness, and every challenge we face. Let Your love cast out our fears, renew our hearts, and guide us to live with courage, trust, and joy. May we see Your beauty in the world and in one another, and may we be vessels of Your peace and love. Amen.

Hymn 389 Breathe on me, breath of God

Invitation to the Offering

Doxology

Prayer of Dedication

Loving God, we thank You, for You so love the world. You fill our lives with beauty—open our eyes to see it, and our hearts to be transformed by it. Bless these gifts, given from grateful hearts. Use them for Your holy work—within this faith community and beyond, for the good of the world You love. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and for the People

Gracious God,

You visit us in countless ways—and for this, we thank You. Sometimes, we do not recognize Your presence right away, for Your blessings are often preceded by challenges—moments that force us to rethink, to confront regret, to face wrongs committed and suffered, to name our pain and loneliness. Yet, You are there, always. Waiting to transform us, even through our struggles, so that Your abundant blessings may be made known in our lives.

Find us, O God, in this season of life. Find us in our confusion. Find us in our moments of hopelessness. Find us when we feel weary, joyless, or uncertain about the future. Find us when anger and resentment cloud our hearts.

And find us, too, in our moments of joy. When we feel uplifted, accomplished, and full of life—keep us grounded, keep us sensitive to those who are struggling, keep us humble and grateful, aware of the many gifts and resources that sustain us each day.

O God, as we give thanks, convict our hearts. May our gratitude extend beyond ourselves,

as we lift up those around the world, who face struggles far greater than our own.

We also bring our concerns for the world. We pray for those facing uncertainty and hardship: for those affected by economic shifts, trade policies, and financial instability, struggling to provide for their families; for those in countries relying on aid, trade, and support, now facing turmoil and fear; and for communities where division and selfishness threaten cooperation and compassion.

We pray for all who feel vulnerable in this time—for those marginalized by race, religion, gender, refugee status, or economic struggle. May Your justice roll down like waters, bringing peace where there is hatred, unity where there is division, and healing where there is suffering.

We also lift up the personal burdens carried by many: The rising cost of living—groceries, housing, medical care, and transportation; The stress of caring for loved ones—both young and elderly, especially those with special needs; Those awaiting life-saving medical treatment in an overburdened system; Students in need of extra support, and families struggling to make ends meet; Those seeking affordable housing and mental health care in times of uncertainty.

Lord, You are the God of all compassion and provision. Help us to trust in You when we feel overwhelmed. May we find strength in community, joy in togetherness, and hope in the assurance that You are working in all things.

In this season of Lent, renew our hearts and open our eyes. May fear and uncertainty never diminish our love—a love that is passionate, compassionate, and bold. May we be people of peace and justice, standing firm in faith, moving forward in trust. Breathe Your Spirit upon us, O God. Let Your love move through our hands, our feet, our voices, and our hearts, that we may bring light to dark places and healing to those in need.

Finally, we take a moment in silence to name before You the concerns, situations, and people who need Your healing love today. (pause)

For healing, we pray, O God, in all its forms—healing of body, mind, spirit, and relationships. May Your presence bring peace, comfort, and new life to those who seek You. And so, we pray for blessing: For faith that is resilient, For hope that is steadfast, and for love—a love that fills us, transforms us, and sends us out into the world with courage and joy. We pray this boldly in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and our strength. Amen.

Hymn 676

Jesus, lover of my soul

BENEDICTION

May the love of God, who casts out fear, the grace of Jesus Christ, who brings new life, and the power of the Holy Spirit, who transforms and renews, go with you 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, March 23, at North Pelham**

***Alarm System Update:** Rockway will hold tutorials on the new alarm system after the service on March 16 and March 30. The alarm system will be activated after March 30. Please get your new code from Bonnie Roland.

***Presbytery Mid-Week Lenten Worship Services 2025:** Our Presbytery's second Lenten worship service, part of a four-service series during the season of Lent, will be held on March 20 at North Pelham. Join us for a time of prayer, worship, and fellowship as we journey through Lent together with our Presbyterian churches.

***Ham Dinner at North Pelham Youth Hall** will be held on Saturday, April 5, 2025, from 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM. Tickets are \$20.00 per person and can be purchased in advance or at the door. Enjoy a great meal and good fellowship!

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

***Wednesday Bible Study led by Diane McMillan** 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 for pastoral visits.** Reach Jacob at jacoble0501@gmail.com or 289-213-2797.