



Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge
4th Sunday in Lent, March 30, 2025
Worship at Home

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

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

L: Like the prodigal son, we sometimes waste our lives

P: running toward arrogant and unthinking excess.

L: Like the older brother, we sometimes lose our way

P: resenting the blessings others receive.

L: But to all, Christ offers grace—a new creation and a reconciled world,

P: so let us be glad and rejoice in the steadfast love of the Lord.

Hymn 324 **Great is thy faithfulness**

PRAYERS OF APPROACH, CONFESSION and The Lord's Prayer

Here we are, O God.

You know us—even before we think a thought, speak a word, or feel a feeling—good, bad, or uncertain. And yet, we are here, opening our hearts and minds, longing for connection with you.

You long to know us from our own point of view—not only from your divine wisdom, but from the fragile place of our human experience. You want to hear how we see ourselves, how we think about you, how we understand our lives and the world around us.

You are ready to listen—to our fears and our hopes, our worries and our dreams. So listen to us now, O God—to the confessions we can speak aloud, and to the ones too deep for words. (pause)

You see beauty in us, O God. You see possibility. You see brokenness that can be healed, and pain that can be forgiven and released. You see strength and purpose—a capacity to endure, and within each of us, the spiritual ingredients for abundance and peace.

At whatever stage of life we are in, in whatever place we find ourselves today—give us eyes to see ourselves as you see us. In Jesus' name, 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 115 (R)

There's a Wideness in God's Mercy

Prayer for Understanding

Loving God,

as we hear your Word, open our hearts to your mercy, our minds to your wisdom, and our spirits to your welcoming grace. Lead us home to you, where forgiveness, healing, and joy await. Amen.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Responsive Psalm 32

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

SERMON

Going Home or Leaving Home?

Home is the place where our stories begin. Home is where children find safety and security, where citizenship starts. Home is more than just shelter, though; it's where we love, where we feel, where we can be ourselves, and where life happens. There is nothing more important than a good, safe, secure home. Home is a place we grow up wanting to leave and grow old wanting to get back to. There's no place like home.

For many of us, home is not only a physical place but also a spiritual one. Home is about relationships, family, and community. I hope Rockway and North Pelham can be a spiritual home for all of us.

Today's gospel reading is also a story about home. The story, known as the Parable of the Lost Son, follows immediately after the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin. With these three parables, Jesus demonstrates what it means to be lost, and how God celebrates with joy when the lost are found.

In the story there is a father who has two sons. They live on a farm and the younger son asks his father for his portion of the family estate because he can't stand being home any longer. The older son stays home. But even though he is there physically, he is not at home spiritually.

The younger son leaves home because he wants to determine his own life in freedom. He wants to experience a big city. His father is remarkably generous and gives his son a full half of the value of the farm as an early inheritance. Perhaps he has to mortgage the farm to do so. In some ways it seems foolish, doesn't it?

Once he has his inheritance, the son sets off on a long journey to a distant city and begins to waste his fortune on wild living. In the end, he is left with nothing. When the money runs out, a severe famine hits the country and he finds himself in dire circumstances. He takes a job feeding pigs in order to survive. That's his only option. It is humiliating and desperate, but when you have no choice, you have no choice. Even so he does not have enough to satisfy his hunger.

The story tells us that he comes to his senses. He remembers his home where nobody starves, not even the most lowly of workers. Everyone has a roof over their head and some dignity and respect. To go back home, he needs to forget the privilege of being a son. He messed up. So what he expects at his father's home is the treatment of a basic worker. At least he will have food and shelter, dignity and respect, rather than starvation, humiliation, and ultimately, a cold, lonely death.

The story tells us that his father sees him from a long way off. To the son's surprise, he is not scorned. Instead, the father, who has been watching and waiting, receives his son back with open arms of compassion. He is overjoyed at the return of his lost son. He embraces his son and welcomes him back without any conditions. The father gives his son loving forgiveness.

How do we make sense of this? Are there no consequences for people's bad choices, mistakes, and failures? The son has suffered consequences, of course, but the father's heart is not about adding to those consequences. Instead, he gives his son the one thing most needed. He offers heart-felt forgiveness. To his son's effort to reclaim responsibility, he offers generous reconciliation and love.

The older son thinks his father is being recklessly generous. He dislikes the fact that his father loves his brother the way he does. He thinks that love should have conditions and people should be punished. He thinks that people should pay back what they have lost, even if they can never do it within their lifetime. He thinks they should pay for all the suffering and hurt they have caused.

The elder son's thoughts are all about reward and punishment. There is little joy in his life and little love in his heart. He doesn't do what he does because he finds it meaningful and rewarding in itself. He does it because he will get a reward. He is angry about his father and never experiences his father's unconditional love and generosity. He thinks that life and relationships are all about actions done to punish others because they have done something unpleasant to you.

Without a doubt, the thoughts of the elder son about his father are closely related to his thoughts about God. For the way we see God is united not only to the way we relate to others, but also to the way we see life. The two are completely intertwined. The God we believe in knows who we are entirely, because God has given each of us the gift of life through our parents. We have many strengths and talents, yet at the same time we are fragile, vulnerable and weak. God knows that our human journey to the place from whence we came is a learning time. Bad choices, mistakes, and failures are essential aspects of our uncertain journey, even though it is hard and painful for us to experience them. Yet God is infinitely patient, generous, and compassionate with us.

God's compassionate love is not love with conditions. It is Agape love that is committed to us, come hell or high-water, yet without making excuses, without papering over the wrongs or pretending things are right when they are not. God's compassionate love is a commitment to truth and honesty and high-standards, but it is also a commitment to always extend a hand to a drowning person, even if they are always drowning.

The older son cannot understand such feelings. He resents his father and brother. His brother is getting an easy ride and his father is unwisely naïve. He feels distressed by his father, by life, by his brother, by everything.

The point of the story is that the older son doesn't have a heart that can feel steadfast love, forgiving love, or feeling love. If we are hardened inside, we cannot experience the circulation of love flowing into us from a compassionate God, rising within us as we relate to others and our world. If that is the case, we cannot feel true joy, abundance, or peace in life, even if we have it all materially, socially, and health-wise. If our hearts are closed, all these external blessings will just bounce off us, and we will be miserable and disconnected. We will complain and feel envy. We will be cynical of every good deed or sentiment, always looking for the fault, the imperfection, and the lie in it all.

The father, the younger son, and all the servants are ready to celebrate in a spirit of heartfelt communion. But the older son declines to join in, preferring his state of misery. He cannot find his way back home.

What about you and me? Are we on our way back home, or are we heading away from home? Let us open our hearts right now in those places of our spirits, our lives, and our relationships that are hardened and closed...Amen.

Hymn 670 Amazing grace

Invitation to the Offering

Doxology

Prayer of Dedication

Loving God,

you welcome us with mercy and joy. Receive these gifts, and use them to build up your church—a communion of faith, hope, and love. May they help share your grace with a world in need. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and for the People

Thank you, O God,

for trees and birds, for soil, rain, snow, and all that gives life—we thank you! For people of every culture, language, and tribe on Earth—we thank you. For family and community, for food, shelter, and clothing, for neighbours and friends—we thank you. For love given and love received—we thank you. For your steadfast love that runs to meet us—like the father in the story of the Prodigal Son—we thank you. For forgiveness, second chances, and new beginnings—we thank you. For comfort in sorrow and for hope after painful endings—we thank you. For reconciliation that brings us home again—we thank you. And even for your peace and strength when restoration isn't possible—we thank you.

Hear us now, O God, as we offer our silent thanks for the blessings in our own lives. (Pause)

God of all, we turn to you now with our concerns for a world that feels increasingly fragile and uncertain. We feel it close to home—in anxieties about work, health, finances, and mental well-being. We grieve with those around the world enduring immense suffering—victims of violence and oppression, especially in Palestine and Ukraine. We lift up those who fear for their safety and identity—refugees fleeing persecution, some individuals facing discrimination, women threatened by violence, people of colour enduring systemic racism—all who long to be welcomed and respected and to find a place to call home. Yet even in the chaos, you meet us—through acts of kindness, through creation, through doors that open when others have closed.

Finally, O God, we hold before you the people of Rockway and North Pelham, especially those burdened in body, mind, or spirit. Be near to the sick—grant them strength and peace. Sustain the weary, that they may find rest in your gentle care. Comfort the lonely, reminding them they are never forgotten. Calm the restless in mind and heart, and ease the storms within. Grant patience and hope to those recovering from illness or surgery—and day by day, may they trust in your healing grace.

Walk tenderly with those who are aging—especially those facing the slow trials of illness or loss of strength. Surround them with compassion, dignity, and the warmth of your love. May all who suffer come to know, deep in their hearts, that nothing—no pain, no fear, no sorrow—can separate us from your love. We ask this in the name of Christ, the Great Physician of our souls. Amen.

Hymn 307 God of the sparrow, God of the whale

BENEDICTION

May the love of God our Father, the grace of Jesus Christ, the Son, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit lead you home, fill you with peace, and keep your heart open to joy. 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, April 6, at North Pelham**

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

***RPCW Meeting:** The RPCW will meet on Wednesday, April 2, at 1:30 PM at the church.

***Presbytery Midweek Lenten Service – April 3:** Continue your Lenten journey at the third Presbytery Lenten Service on Thursday, April 3, at 2:00 PM, hosted by Knox (Hope) Presbyterian Church in Welland. *All are welcome!*

***Maundy Thursday Communion – April 17:** Prepare your heart for Easter at a special Maundy Thursday Communion Service on April 17 at 7:00 PM at Kirk on the Hill in Fonthill. *All are invited to attend.*

***April's Joint Session meeting of R and NP** will be held on Wednesday, April 9, at 7:00 PM at North Pelham.

***Good Friday Service & Walk at North Pelham:** Join us for the Good Friday Service: Meditations on the Seven Last Words of Jesus on the Cross on Friday, April 18. We will gather at North Pelham for the *Walk* event at 10:00 AM, followed by the service at 11:00 AM. Fellowship will take place after the service. All are welcome!

***Easter Breakfast & Service – April 20:** Join us for Easter Sunday at North Pelham! We'll begin with a delicious Eggs Benedict breakfast at 9:00 AM (Freewill offering to benefit Rose City Kids, supporting children and youth in Welland). Our Easter Worship Service follows at 10:00 AM. All are welcome!

***Spring Tea & 150th PCC Celebration – May 3:**

Celebrate 150 years of the Presbyterian Church in Canada at the Spring Blessings Tea on May 3, 2025, at 2:00 pm, hosted by Central Niagara congregations at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Welland. Enjoy worship with a joint choir, interactive Bible reflections through stained-glass art, kids' crafts, and fellowship over tea. Please bring: Donations for St. Andrew's Outreach (toiletries, hygiene items, reusable bags). A friend! Free will offering. All welcome.

***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.