



**Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge**  
**5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Easter, May 18, 2025**  
**Worship at Home**

Email: [northpelham.rockwaypc@gmail.com](mailto:northpelham.rockwaypc@gmail.com) Website: <https://northpelhamrockwaypresbyterian.ca>

## **CALL TO WORSHIP**

**L:** Peace be with you. Even when the doors of our hearts are closed by fear and uncertainty, Jesus comes and stands among us.

**P: We come with our doubts and questions, longing for peace and truth.**

**L:** The Risen Christ speaks to us now, just as he did to Thomas: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” (*Jn 20:29*)

**P: We breathe in his peace. We receive his Spirit. We open our hearts in faith.**

**L:** Come, let us worship the Living Christ, who meets us where we are, calls us by name, and sends us into the world with love.

All: Alleluia! Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed!

Hymn 321

**Praise to the Lord, the Almighty**

## **PRAYERS OF APPROACH and CONFESSION**

Risen Lord Jesus,

You come to us in our fear, through locked doors and weary hearts, and you speak, “Peace be with you.” You breathe your Spirit upon us so that faith may rise even in our doubts. We come before you now, bringing all that we carry—our questions, our struggles, our longings for peace.

You meet us where we are, and still, you call us forward: to believe without seeing, to love without fear, to hope even when the path is not clear. Forgive us, Lord, when we cling to certainty more than trust. Forgive us when we hold back love because we are afraid it will not be returned. Forgive us when we close the doors of our hearts and refuse to see you standing among us.

Hear us in the silence as we make our confession to you...(silence)

Breathe your Spirit into us again. Renew our faith. Strengthen our love. And send us into the world as your hands, your feet, and your heart. We pray this in the name of the Risen 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 400

**Spirit of the living God**

### **Prayer for Understanding**

Loving God,

As we open your Word, shine your light into our questions, calm our doubts with your peace, and breathe your Spirit into our hearts. May faith rise within us as we listen for your voice. Amen.

### **SCRIPTURE PASSAGES**

**Responsive Psalm 121**

**John 20: 19-31**

### **SERMON**

### **Faith Beyond Doubt**

Let's be honest—doubt gets a bad reputation in church. We sometimes treat it like something shameful or dangerous, something to hide or quickly fix. But what if doubt is actually a gift? What if it's not a weakness in our faith, but the beginning of something deeper?

Doubt is what drives us to ask questions. It keeps us from settling for easy answers or blind obedience. Without doubt, we wouldn't seek truth. We wouldn't recognize injustice or challenge it. We wouldn't grow.

Blind faith, while it may look impressive on the surface, often protects those who already hold power. It can silence hard questions and keep the status quo in place—especially when that status quo serves some while hurting others. But doubt disturbs that comfort. It insists that things can be better. That truth matters. That justice is worth pursuing.

In this way, doubt is not the enemy of faith—it can be the doorway to real, courageous belief.

But there is another side to this. Doubt can also destroy. Without trust—without faith, especially shared faith—we cannot stand together. We cannot support each other. Yes, trust must be earned. Yes, we must ask questions. But, in the end, we must land somewhere. Somewhere with trust that there is truth, that there is justice, and that there is a greater goodness that can bind us together for the welfare of all.

Trust doesn't require agreement on every issue. But it does require a shared commitment to one another's well-being, even when our paths to that goal may differ.

So then, let me offer two simple statements I believe we can all agree with:

We are always vulnerable to doubt because we do not know everything. There is as much mystery in life as there is clarity. The unknown looms as large as the truths we are certain about. We are always vulnerable to doubt because we cannot control everything. Even with all our plans, resources, and support systems, the outcomes of life's most important challenges—health,

relationships, finances, and society—are never fully predictable. And so, even with great faith in what we know, we doubt how things will unfold.

Still, this does not make the enemy of faith. In fact, doubt stretches our faith. It pushes us to go deeper, to learn more, to seek wisdom not just individually but within the community. Doubt keeps our faith honest and humble. It prevents arrogance and invites dialogue.

Even so, faith eventually calls for a leap. Faith takes courage. It means choosing trust in the presence of questions, hope in the face of uncertainty, and love even when it is not guaranteed to be returned.

But how do we find that kind of faith? How do we grow into it? And where do we find the courage to believe when so much feels uncertain?

Let's turn to today's Scripture. If anyone needed faith in the face of doubt, it was the disciples on that first Easter evening. Just imagine what they were feeling. Everything Jesus had said and promised seemed shattered. Their memories were filled with horror: his arrest, the brutal beatings, the public crucifixion. The trauma of seeing their teacher mutilated and mocked hung heavy in the air.

Faith, by all appearances, had died on that cross. And yet—right in the middle of their fear and grief—something happens that changes everything. Jesus comes to them. Alive. Present. Real. And his first words are: “Peace be with you.” It's not just a greeting. It's a gift.

“Breathe in my peace,” he says, “and rediscover the calm of trust in me. I am here. I am with you. Yes, you saw me suffer. Yes, they tried to crush everything we stood for. But I am risen. And if you open your hearts, I will rise in you too. Look—my scars are still here. It's really me. But I am more alive than ever. Receive my peace. Let your fear fall away. Let new life begin.”

What a moment.

But Jesus gives more than words. He breathes on them. And with that breath comes the Holy Spirit. In John's Gospel, Pentecost comes early—right here on Easter day. The disciples receive not only the peace of Christ but the power of his Spirit, so that faith can rise within them, even amid their fear and doubt.

And isn't that often what we need? When we are overwhelmed by doubt, especially in the most challenging times, we need more than our own strength. We need what we cannot imagine or create ourselves. We need the breath of God.

Faith, real faith, is a gift. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. Just like genuine peace, faith is not something we manufacture—it is something we receive.

Even though the world remains chaotic—even though evil still seems to win—this inner peace keeps us grounded. And from that peace comes a renewed energy for good. We speak up, we act,

we advocate—not because we see immediate results but because faith tells us goodness is never wasted.

Jesus also gives the disciples a purpose: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

They are no longer just followers. They are now apostles—sent ones. Their faith becomes the seed of hope and love they will carry into a world wounded by fear and doubt.

Then, Jesus gives them a sacred responsibility: “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

This is a call to justice. It’s not just about personal piety—it’s about holding the systems and powers of the world accountable. Yet this justice must be rooted in love. It must never become vengeance or hate. Even when we “retain the sins” of others, we do so not as a final word, but as part of the journey toward healing and reconciliation. Because nothing God has made is beyond redemption.

Then, we meet Thomas. He was not there when Jesus appeared, and when the others told him, he just couldn’t believe it. His hope had been crushed, and his heart was broken. He needed more.

Jesus comes to him. Gently. Without judgment. “Touch my wounds, Thomas,” he says. “See for yourself. Believe.” And Thomas, overwhelmed, cries out: “My Lord and my God!” Then Jesus says something for us: “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

It’s as if Jesus asks: “Thomas, it’s good that you believe because you see me. But what about when I’m not standing right in front of you? Will you still believe in my love? Will you trust in its power when the world seems indifferent, ungrateful, even hostile? When the results of your faith aren’t immediate or visible, will you keep going?”

That’s the heart of faith: to believe without seeing, to love without proof, and to hope when hope is hard. It’s important to be encouraged by moments of clarity—by signs that Jesus is alive and love is real. But more often, we walk by faith, not by sight. The fruit of our work may be hidden, and the outcomes delayed.

And yet, we keep going. As Jesus once asked, “When the Son of Humanity returns, will he find faith on the earth?” Will he find it in us? Will we still be breathing in his Spirit? Will our faith rise again and again, year after year, even when doubt whispers loudly?

Or will our hope shrink into sentiment—soft and sentimental, like a warm blanket on a cold night, but lacking courage?

May it never be so. Let our faith rise strong. Fierce. Tenacious. Full of compassion. Let it move us to action—forgiveness, justice, and love.

Jesus calls us today, just as he did then: “Breathe in my peace. Receive my Spirit. I send you into the world. Be my hands, my feet, my heart. Hold each other accountable, but never lose sight of forgiveness. Believe in me—even when you don’t see me. Especially then.”

May you hear Jesus’ gentle call. May you ride the waves of doubt—not to sink, but to grow stronger. May you trust in the power of love, even when it is hidden from view. And may your faith begin again today, with courage and peace. Amen.

Hymn 389

**Breathe on me, breath of God**

### **Invitation to the Offering**

#### **Doxology**

#### **Prayer of Dedication**

Gracious God,

In faith—even amid our doubts—we offer these gifts. Use them to bring peace where there is fear, love where there is hurt, and hope where hope feels hidden. Send us, with courage, to be your hands and heart in the world. Amen.

#### **Prayer of Thanksgiving and for the People**

Loving and Risen Christ,

we thank you for meeting us in this time of worship, not with judgment, but with peace. You come to us, even behind the locked doors of fear and doubt, and breathe into us your Holy Spirit. Thank you for the gift of faith that rises again and again, even when the way is not clear. Thank you for calling us to be your hands, your feet, and your heart—sent into a world that hungers for hope, healing, and justice.

We pray today for your world, where so many live in fear, where war and violence silence the voices of the vulnerable, and where injustice pushes people to the margins. Breathe your peace into all places of unrest. Guide leaders with wisdom and humility. Stir us to be people of reconciliation, courage, and compassion.

God of mercy and peace,

In a world shaken by war, disaster, and deep uncertainty, we lift before you the people of Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, South Sudan, the Congo, Ethiopia, and all regions caught in violence and fear. We remember the suffering of communities in Brazil, Myanmar, Tanzania, Indonesia, Somalia, and our own land of Canada, where floods, fires, and earthquakes have brought loss and grief. In the chaos, breathe your peace. In the ruins, plant seeds of hope. In every tear, let your Spirit move with comfort and strength. We pray for courage, not the absence of doubt, but the faith to trust that your love is still at work, even when unseen. May your healing rise, just as Christ rose, and may we, your Church, carry your peace into the places that need it most.

We pray for our country and communities—for those struggling with poverty, isolation, mental illness, or despair. Help us not to look away, but to reach out in love, trusting that even small acts of kindness can become seeds of your kingdom. We pray for your church around the world,

and for our congregations here. Help us to be a community where doubt is not silenced, but embraced as a step toward deeper trust. Make us bold in love, strong in mercy, and patient in hope.

And now, with hearts full of concern and compassion, we lift up those in our church family and community who are suffering in body, mind, or spirit. We pray for those who are undergoing tests, waiting for results, or living with uncertainty. We especially pray for one dear to us who is beginning treatment again, because the brain cancer has returned. O Lord, draw near with your healing grace, your comfort, and your strength. Be with their loved ones, the medical team, and all who walk this hard road with them. In the silence now, we name others we carry on our hearts...(silence)

God of peace and power,  
may your Spirit breathe through every wound and weary place, bringing new life, renewed faith, and deep, sustaining hope. We pray all these things in the strong and gentle name of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and our eternal companion. Amen.

Hymn 634                      **Will you come and follow me**

### **BENEDICTION**

May the peace of Christ, who meets us in our doubts, the love of God, who calls us beloved, and the breath of the Holy Spirit, who strengthens our faith, go with you and remain with you, now and always. Amen.

**Sung Response- Go Now In Peace**

### **Postlude**

<p><b>We acknowledge that we meet on the traditional Territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe</b></p>
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### **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**\*Worship on Sunday, May 25, at Rockway**

**\* Plant, Bake Sale and BBQ at North Pelham – Saturday May 24, 2025, from 9:00 am – 1:00 pm.** BBQ will start at 11:00 am

**\*Rockway Cleaning Bee:** There will be a cleaning bee at Rockway on Tuesday, May 27, from 9:00 to 11:30 AM. Work will be done inside and out. Everyone welcome.

**\*Lincoln Pelham Library Bookmobile** – beginning Monday June 2<sup>nd</sup> from 5:15 pm – 6:30 pm, the bookmobile will come to North Pelham Church for anyone in the community to access library services. This will happen bi-weekly

**\*Rockway's 216th Anniversary Celebration – Sunday, June 8!**

Join us as we give thanks for 216 years of God's faithfulness at Rockway! This special Sunday will include: **A powerful message** from our guest preacher, **Rev. Dr. Clyde Ervine**, a respected teacher, pastor, and leader in our Presbytery. **Our Anniversary Mission Project** in support of **The RAFT**, a local ministry that helps homeless youth in St. Catharines. All donations will go directly to their life-changing work and are eligible for a tax receipt. **A call to action:** Let's celebrate by blessing others. Your support will help The RAFT move closer to its vision of ending youth homelessness. Come celebrate, worship, and make a difference!

**\*Joint Session Meeting on June 11:** Rockway and North Pelham's joint session will be held on June 11 at 7:00 p.m. at Rockway.

**\*Communion at Rockway – Sunday, June 22:** Join us for Communion at Rockway as we share in Jesus' love and grace.

**\*Wednesday Bible study:** Diane McMillan will lead Wednesday Bible study at 10:00 AM at First Church.

**\*Outreach - Thursday Walking:** Join us for the Wellness Walk and Coffee Chat! We gather at 9:30 a.m. at Canada Games Park to start our walk together. After the walk, we meet at Rockway for a joyful chat over hot and fresh coffee at 10:45 am.

**\*Connect with your Minister Jacob for pastoral visits.** Reach Jacob at [jacoblee0501@gmail.com](mailto:jacoblee0501@gmail.com) or 289-213-2797.