



Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge
Anniversary Sunday, June 8, 2025
Worship at Home

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

CALL TO WORSHIP (Psalm 95: 1-5)

L: Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

P: Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.

L: For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods.

P: In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him.

All: The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.

Hymn 65 **All people that on earth do dwell**

PRAYERS OF APPROACH, CONFESSION and The Lord's Prayer

Loving and faithful God,

We come before You today with grateful hearts, celebrating Your goodness over 216 years of worship and witness through the people of Rockway Presbyterian Church. From generation to generation, you have sustained this congregation, gathering us in grace and sending us out in love. You have given us a purpose: to be a community that reflects the light of Christ and shares Your kingdom blessings with our neighbours. For this holy calling, and for Your enduring presence among us, we give You thanks and praise.

On this special day, we also thank You for Rev. Clyde Ervine, whom You have brought to share Your Word with us. Bless him as he preaches and leads us in worship. May his message awaken our hearts and strengthen our purpose as Your people.

Holy and gracious God, we confess that we have not always lived as those who know our purpose. At times, we have grown tired, self-focused, or hesitant to act. We have let small things divide us and big needs overwhelm us. Forgive us, O Lord. Renew our hearts, refocus our mission, and restore to us the joy of serving You together as Your church.

Let us now take a moment in silence to offer our personal confessions to God. (pause)

Merciful God,

In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. By the power of Your Spirit, set us free from all that weighs us down, that we may rise again with hope and purpose, gathering to be formed in faith, and scattering to serve in love. And now, trusting in Your grace, we pray the prayer Jesus taught us:

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 466 **Praise the Lord with the sound of trumpet**

Prayer for Understanding

Loving God,

You call us with a purpose and plant us in this world to bless and serve in Jesus’ name. As we hear your Word, open our hearts and minds. Give us clarity to see our calling, courage to live it, and grace to be your church, gathered and scattered for your kingdom of love. Amen.

Anthem **Just a little talk with Jesus**

Responsive Psalm 105: 1-10

Ocarina Solo **"You Raise Me Up"**

Katharine Park

Scripture readings **Genesis 12:1-5a; Acts 1:3-8; 2:36-37**

SERMON

A Congregation with a Purpose

Rev. Dr. Clyde Ervine

To live well we need a purpose. Mind you, some mornings, I, dressed in a track suit, mindlessly watch *You tube*, thinking to myself, “I’m retired, and have no great purpose.” That’s not quite true, for like many retirees, I find that increasingly, one of my purposes is to attend multiple medical appointments just to keep going. The truth is that to live well, whatever our age, we need a purpose. So, it should not surprise us that in the first chapter of the Bible’s first book, God gives us a purpose. *Genesis* 1, after stating that humans are made in God’s image, says that “God blessed them and said . . . be fruitful and multiply...fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea...the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” *Genesis* 2 adds that God placed Adam “in the Garden of Eden to **till** it and **keep** it.” God’s purpose, it seems, is that we procreate and then either fish or farm. However, the Hebrew word for ‘till’ actually means to *serve* and the Hebrew word for ‘keep’ means to *protect*. If so, God’s purpose for us is a broad one - we’re to protect and care for the world God made. That can be done in all sorts of life-giving, life-enhancing ways besides fishing or farming – teaching, engineering, nursing, parenting, music-making, or delivering the mail!

But the thing is, some people lack purpose, as do some congregations. Now, a new congregation usually starts with a strong sense that it’s to be a community that worships and witnesses to Jesus, but over time, many a congregation loses its focus, uses its resources to simply survive, sets aside any greater purpose, and even forgets what that purpose was. So, why do congregations exist? What’s their purpose?

God's purpose for us, given in *Genesis* 1, is that we care for God's world. That purpose still stands, but to it the Bible adds another. To grasp it, recall the *Genesis* 3 story of how Adam and Eve defied God and rejected his purpose, convinced that they knew better than God how life is. They didn't, and nor do we. Yes, we humans are capable of creating joy, uncovering wisdom, and being kind; even so, we're afflicted by a self-centredness that harms all relationships - between nations, between families, between spouses, and between us and the God who loves us. Sin isn't just us being naughty; it's about the harm and hatred that divide, damage, and threaten to destroy us. The apostle Paul puts it like this in *Romans* 7: because sin "dwells within me . . . I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." There you have the dilemma; though we know what's right, we keep doing what's wrong.

But rather than letting us destroy ourselves, God wants to save the world he loves. This great purpose is the story that the Bible tells, and first appears in *Genesis* 12, where we read how God promised Abram that through his family all the nations of the earth will be blessed. God's purpose is to free us from sin's power and restore us under his rule. In pursuit of that purpose. God sent his Son, say the *Gospels*, to establish on earth as it is in heaven what Jesus called the kingdom of God.

This sounds fine; but you may ask how the story of your congregation connects to the big story of God sending Jesus to establish his kingdom. As to your story, I'm delighted to join you in celebrating your congregation's 216th anniversary. Imagine, for 216 years this congregation has stood in this lovely corner of Niagara! When you began, Napoleon ruled the world; but while he and all such rulers have their short little day, you're still standing! No doubt you want your congregation to continue to stand and do good in your community; yet your congregation's purpose is bigger than that. Throughout the Bible and ever since, God's way of restoring his kingdom is to have ordinary folk like Abram, a tiny nation like Israel, flawed disciples like Peter, and countless congregations like yours, share God's kingdom blessings with others. As a people pardoned, taught, and led by Jesus, you are, even if imperfectly, to give your Niagara neighbours glimpses of what life can be when Jesus rules as king. Your congregation has everything to do with God's great purpose.

To illustrate, I return to *Acts* 1, where we find the risen Jesus instructing his disciples about the restoration of "the kingdom of God" [v.3]. Key to that restoration was this: on the cross, Jesus carried our guilt and broke its power, and in rising from the grave, Jesus inaugurated what the New Testament calls a new creation. Yet God's kingdom didn't then fully come. Rather, in *Acts* 1, Jesus told his disciples that though he'd return in full and final glory, for now they were to wait for the Holy Spirit to empower their witness to him "in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." In the meantime, prior to Jesus' final victory, Jesus' disciples had a job.

Accordingly, *Acts* 2 reports that what followed the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit, was that in Jerusalem the apostle Peter preached Jesus, risen from

the dead, as the Lord of life. In response, says *Acts* 2:41, “about three thousand persons” believed and were baptized. What emerged in Jerusalem was a congregation! Everywhere they went, Peter and the other apostles preached Jesus and started congregations, whether large or small, Jewish or Gentile, urban or rural, rich or poor. For what reason? So that each congregation each embody in its life and exhibit to its neighbours the new life of the kingdom that Jesus brings to the world. That’s what congregations are for; it’s why you exist right here! You have a job!

Sadly, some congregations have lost the plot. I say that, for, on going online, I found the following stories: one congregation argued over the length of its minister’s beard, in another, an elder who accused another elder of sending an anonymous letter, fought him in the church parking, in another, some folk left the congregation because it substituted *Starbucks* coffee for *Folgers*, and in yet another, some members left another because one member hid the vacuum cleaner from them!

To find the plot, to rediscover their purpose, congregations ought to read *Acts* 2: 42-47, which describes the earliest Christian congregation as having two purposes. The first was to *gather*, in order to be a Christian community. As new believers, they “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” [v.42]. The congregation *gathered* to learn about God and learn who they were of God’s people, and also *gathered* for “fellowship,” says v.42. To us, fellowship means coffee after church. But the Greek word for fellowship really means sharing a common life; as v.44 says, members “had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all.” The congregation also gathered for worship, named as “the breaking of bread and the prayers” in v.42.

While some who claim to be Christians now gather only occasionally or not at all, New Testament congregations gathered regularly to share their faith and life, aware that to offer effective witness to Jesus, they needed community formation. But if congregations *gather*, they must also *scatter*. Though implicit rather than explicit in how *Acts* 2 describes Jerusalem’s congregation, its scattering was real, for v.47 notes that it had “the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” Clearly, the congregation scattered into local neighbourhoods and created such a positive impression that many who listened to them or who saw their common life, turned to Jesus and joined the congregation.

Well, there you have it; purposeful congregations that gather and scatter are vital to the coming of God’s kingdom. You being here in Rockway is vital to God’s work. I trust that on your 216th anniversary, God will strengthen you to stand up for Jesus for the next 216 years as you gather to deepen your faith and scatter to share it!

Hymn 757

Come sing, O church, in joy!

Invitation to the Offering

Ocarina Solo

“Amazing Grace”

Katharine Park

Doxology

Prayer of Dedication

Gracious and Faithful God,

As we mark 216 years of your steadfast love in this congregation, we give thanks for every blessing and every life shaped by your grace. Today, we offer both our regular Sunday gifts and our special Anniversary offerings—given in gratitude and hope. Bless especially our gifts for The RAFT, that they may bring comfort, shelter, and renewed purpose to youth in need in St. Catharines. May these offerings, given in love, be a reflection of your heart and your kingdom. Use them, O Lord, to shine your light, to lift the weary, and to bless others as we ourselves have been blessed. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and for the People

Gracious and faithful God,

On this day of celebration, we lift our hearts in gratitude for Your steadfast love and guidance. For 216 years, You have nurtured Rockway Presbyterian Church, calling us to be a community that gathers in faith and scatters in service. We thank You for the generations who have worshipped, served, and witnessed here, and for the presence of Rev. Clyde Ervine, who brings Your Word to inspire and challenge us anew.

Lord, as we reflect on our purpose, we are mindful of the world's deep needs:

We pray for the people of Gaza, where recent airstrikes have led to the loss of many lives, including children. Comfort those who mourn, and guide leaders toward peace and reconciliation.

We remember Ukraine, enduring ongoing conflict and the devastation of drone attacks. Grant strength to those defending their homeland and wisdom to those seeking a path to peace.

We lift up the victims of natural disasters, including wildfires in Canada, earthquakes in Greece, and a chemical plant explosion in China. Provide healing for the injured, shelter for the displaced, and resilience for communities rebuilding their lives.

Loving God, within our own congregation, we pray for those who are ill in body, mind, or spirit. Surround them with Your healing presence, and grant them comfort and peace. May we, as a community, offer support and love to one another, reflecting Your grace in our care.

In silence, we bring before you specific persons and situations that weigh heavy on our hearts.
(Pause)

Empower us, Lord, to live out our purpose with renewed commitment. As we gather to be nourished by Your Word, may we scatter to serve our neighbors in need, embodying the hope and love of Christ in all we do. We offer this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Hymn 376

Lord, the light of your love is shining

BENEDICTION

Go now with purpose, blessed by God our Creator, led by Christ our Redeemer, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. May your life and our life together bless the world God so loves. 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

***Next Sunday Service, June 15, at 10:00 am at North Pelham**

***Welcome to Our Guest Preacher, Rev. Dr Clyde Ervine:**

This morning, we joyfully celebrate Rockway's 216th Anniversary—a testimony to God's faithfulness across generations. We are especially blessed to welcome Rev. Dr. Clyde Ervine as our guest preacher today. Thank you, Clyde, for being with us and for sharing God's Word as we give thanks and look ahead with purpose.

Let us worship with grateful hearts and open hands, as we also remember our Anniversary Mission Project supporting **The RAFT**, helping homeless youth in St. Catharines. Special envelopes are available for those who wish to contribute.

***A Prayerful Note for Mieke Mander:** We share with love that our dear Mieke Mander, a long-time and cherished member of our church family, has recently moved into her new home at Shorthill's Retirement Villa Community (1532 Pelham Street, Room 309). As she settles into this new chapter, let us hold her in our hearts and lift her in prayer — that her new home may be filled with peace, comfort, and friendship. "The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore." (Psalm 121:8)

***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 jacoble0501@gmail.com or 289-213-2797.