



**Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge**  
**Sunday, August 17, 2025**  
**Worship at Home**

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

**Call to Worship**

One: God, our Shepherd,

**All: Gather us together and lead us to green pastures.**

One: God, our Gardener,

**All: Tend to us as to a vineyard, watering and pruning so that we produce good fruit.**

One: God, our Merciful Judge,

**All: We turn to you and call upon your name in prayer and praise.**

One: We bow before you, O God,

**All: And offer all that we have and all that we are with willing and humble hearts.**

Hymn 314      God is love: come heaven, adoring

**PRAYERS OF APPROACH, CONFESSION**

God of majesty and mystery, you call us together in your presence with that great cloud of witnesses who have worshiped you in song and service for centuries. Our praise joins theirs as we fix our eyes on Jesus and wait for your Spirit to guide us. We praise you for your great love and mercy, revealed in Jesus Christ, at work in us through the Spirit.

Holy One, Three in One, we offer you all glory and honour in our worship, seeking to renew our faith and commitment to serve you in the world that belongs to you. Amen.

Attentive God, you care for us like a gardener tending a beautiful vineyard, blessing us with what we need to be fruitful. Yet we confess that, all too often, we fail to live up to your hopes for us. Instead of love and kindness, we produce anger and resentment. Instead of generosity, we produce greed and jealousy. Forgive us, O God. In your mercy, renew in us the fruit of the Spirit through the grace of Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Hymn 339      **Who made the earth and the heaven**

**Children of God Moment**

**SCRIPTURE PASSAGES**

**Responsive Psalm 82**

**Jeremiah 23: 23-29; Hebrews 11: 29-12:2, Luke 12:49-56**

**SERMON**

**What Time Is It?**

You may know that I don't preach every Sunday. After today, you may think that's a good thing, but I will be back next week and do hope that you will think about what I am about to say, and maybe even challenge me, or add to what I have said. On the occasions that I do preach, I begin

my preparation with prayer, asking God what word I ought to share with the people I have been called to. I had some ideas forming in my mind, inspired thoughts, I believe. And then I looked at the lectionary readings for today, something I seldom do, and BAM! They aligned precisely with what I had been inspired to preach on. So fasten your seatbelts, you're in for a bit of turbulence. I could not say no to that God-incidence and I pray that the following is God's word for us today.

The scripture readings for today are not easy to hear and not necessarily easy to understand. They are unsettling and challenging. So I will begin with providing some background information on each of them and then proceed to share what I perceive to be guidance for our times, and for our collective lives today. I promise I'll get to that a little later, but first, we need to go through some turbulence. After the commentary, I will pause for questions of clarification, so please make some mental notes along the way.

Beginning with the reading from Jeremiah, the prophet speaks for God, just as a true prophet does. Jeremiah asks rhetorical questions, to which the answer ought to be obvious. Yes, God is a close God who knows how many hairs are on your head, and yes, God is also far away, understanding the struggles of humanity on the planet from a big-picture perspective. God is both and everywhere in-between. Jeremiah next distinguishes between false prophets, who dream and say what people want to hear, and true prophets who speak God's word, words like fire, and words like a hammer that breaks rock into pieces. Sometimes, maybe more often than we would like, God's word is difficult. It goes against what we would *like* to hear, and so the false prophets, the dreamers, are more well-liked.

Then, the psalm: it uses sarcasm, which I always find difficult to perceive in scripture. The psalmist changes the speaker without notice, alternating between God and humans who think of themselves too highly. Wiser people than I have concluded that the lowercase gods in whose company the true God finds themselves, are the judges of the earth; specifically, corrupt judges who are incapable of rendering impartial judgment. Because of their inability to do the work they have been given, the one true God is called upon to rise up and judge the world.

The reading from the Book of Hebrews is from chapter 11, which has been named the Bible's "heroes hall of fame." It lists many of the greats of the faith from Old Testament times, the ones who were good and faithful servants, a lineage of faith. We may not see or understand their greatness in God's sense, just as his contemporaries did not see the greatness of Jesus as he suffered and died on the cross. What is so great about a horrible death that was reserved for the lowest of the low? What is so great about the misfits and their frequent foibles that are praised in this "heroes hall of fame?" And yet, their faith and their obedience is what made them great in God's eyes. Jesus continued this lineage of faith, and now it is our turn to continue it until Jesus returns. Along with God, these ancients are our witnesses.

And lastly, perhaps the most challenging text for today. Jesus is not a namby-pamby, only doing things to please people, like turning water into wine and feeding 5000. He did not come to speak what we want to hear, like those dreamer prophets in Jeremiah's day. Jesus came furthermore to cast fire onto the earth, to create division, to rock the proverbial boat! Then, he speaks of his baptism, which in this case is not a reference to his baptism in the Jordan river, but rather a reference to his own death. In our baptismal vows, we speak of a symbolic death and resurrection

as we go beneath the water and rise again, about dying to our old selves and being reborn as a member in the family of God. Baptism symbolizes cleansing, or purification. Jesus' baptism, his death on the cross, is another kind of baptism entirely. It delivered this cleansing or purification not to himself, but to all who believe.

The decision to believe, to follow Jesus, requires making a choice. And so, Jesus brings division, setting family members against each other because not everyone will make that choice. Not everyone will approve of those who make the choice to follow Jesus. Hence, division.

Then, the audience shifts to the crowds, and Jesus calls on them to reflect on their discernment skills. He says that they can read and anticipate the weather by paying attention to the wind and clouds, and yet, they are clueless regarding the current events that surround Jesus. And thus, he calls them hypocrites. They claim to follow the God of Abraham, and yet cannot see that Jesus, who is standing in front of them, is God's son.

These are the briefest of commentary of these scripture texts. I could have lecture on them for hours, or days. So I would understand if you have any questions. What has left you confused or wondering at this point?

What do we do with all of these scriptural words of adversity today? What are we to know and allow to transform us?

Let us begin with the realization that history is written looking backwards. That includes the gospel accounts of Jesus. The authors of the gospels write from their then-current location in history, telling of events and people from the past. What Luke writes about Jesus, the words he spoke, who he spoke them to, have already happened. Sermons, on the other hand, are written forwards. My job as preacher is to look ahead, to events not happened yet, to where these passages of scriptures point, to how we are to understand, challenge, and internalize these ancient words in our context, and ultimately, how we are to live as Christians.

If we dig *deep* into why we come to church, I would hope it's not about the coffee after the service, as important as fellowship is. I would hope that we want to hear God's word, have it interpreted for our time, and allow God's word to change us, transform us, and grow our relationship with our maker and fellow humans. Now that's a tall order for a preacher, but I am not alone up here. The Holy Spirit is active among us and within us all, breathing wisdom, life and hope into our souls.

However, I am not quite ready yet to speak of hope. I need to speak of more difficult things first. We need to process these difficult scripture passages before we can rejoice. I assure you that we will get there. But first:

Look at our times. It seems that our world is coming apart at the seams. People are starving to death in Gaza and the Sudan. Soldiers are dying on the battlefields in the Ukraine. Wildfires are burning out of control in many parts of North America and Europe, consuming vast areas of nature and communities alike. There are scandals and stories of immense greed and corruption filling our newsfeeds. The world does not appear to be in a good place.

Neither, as a matter of fact, does the church in North America appear to be headed in the right direction. Our pews are emptier, many young people are finding meaning elsewhere, congregations are dissolving, nobody outside these walls seems to care. As much as “Christian Nationalism” seems to be gaining strength south of the Canadian border, Christianity cannot be forced from the top down. It cannot be legislated. It cannot be imposed on a population. It simply is not what Jesus taught and is therefore not Christianity.

As I stated earlier, to become a follower of Jesus, each individual person must choose to follow Jesus, to be baptised into Christ, to repent, and be transformed. Baptism is not for the faint of heart. Living into a Christian faith takes courage, the kind of courage that got many of the heroes of faith into big trouble. They were tortured, suffered mocking, flogging, chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, sawn in two, or killed by the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute and persecuted. How many of us can claim consequences such as these for living out our faith?

And yet, some of us have been told to shut up about Jesus. That’s a slap across the face. Some of us have been told that believing in God is infantile, or stupid. That stings. And yet, I contend that many of us are more like the culture we live in, and less like Jesus than we ought to be. And so, here’s the thing. Could our present, declining situation in the institutional church be God’s word to us that not all is well in church, mostly in the institution of church?

Over the past 7 or so decades, when church decline began in seriousness, the church in North America has tried various things in order to prosper. Many churches built Sunday School additions and gyms in the sixties and seventies. Others have introduced contemporary worship, or added an in-house coffee shop. Small Bible study groups formed. None of these in themselves are bad things. What is lacking, however, is discernment. Many of these initiatives looked to the world, saw what others were doing, and followed suit. If it works for them, maybe it’ll work for us, trying to fix what’s broken.

And yet, here we find ourselves with emptying churches. We must ask ourselves, where is God in the world today? Where is God at work? How do we join God in the work of making all things new? Do we just try something new and hope that God shows up? Or do we wait in anticipation, in prayer, and in utmost humility, and pray for that which St. Paul suggests? Do we pray to lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and do we run with perseverance the race that is set before us? Because not only is that cloud of witnesses watching us, but so is the world. And I believe that the world has found our striving lacking, insincere, perhaps hypocritical. We claim to love God but struggle to love the least among us. We frown on the single mom with tattoos and noisy kids sitting in the front pew because we’re all taking up the back ones. Is it any wonder they stop coming?

I believe that church today, here, serves us who come somewhat decently. We sing the hymns we love; we hear the word preached and tend to enjoy each other’s company. We are encouraged to give of our time and money, keeping our lights on and making the world a little better for others if there is anything left over. I might sound a little jaded. I am. I don’t believe that is what church is all about. And as much as I don’t have all the answers, I do believe that our current church situation is a wakeup call, like fire, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces, from God for

us. Where are our discernment skills? How do we interpret the signs of our times? As a pastor poet friend of mine penned this week regarding this passage in Luke, writing:

Oh, we see the orange blades of fascism knifing out through the leaves. We feel that autumn edge to our easy days, the coming frost of fear. We know what we're seeing, the erasure of truth, the hoarding of power, soldiers in the streets and neighbors disappearing. We know how to interpret these.

But there are other signs hidden in the present moment: the great tidal movement of compassion, strangers holding hands, the tilting of the earth toward light, the buds of God swelling, the hands of Love on the clay as it turns on the wheel. The present moment is not just these minutes. It's not just these days, or even years. The present moment belongs to the eternity of grace; this moment, this year and this eon are enfolded. The final resurrection is also today. The Suffering One is already present, who inhabits every tragedy with mercy. The end, in which all is made well and whole, is also in this moment. The present time isn't just one phrase, but the whole story. Eyes open, friends. Even now the Mystery expands.

Everything belongs to this present moment. The good and the bad. God is in it. God makes order out of chaos. Humans tend to create chaos. Do I mention climate change right about now?

On a less poetic note, how *do* we discern what God saying to us? Great question. It seems that our methods of the past several decades is one of poke and hope – you poke the church by doing something, and hope for a better outcome, as in, more bums in the pews. But here we are today, and nothing has worked convincingly. There are some theologians who suggest that our present-day unraveling of so many things, the institutional church included, are a sign from God that all is not well with how we live as God's people. I have been reading books and listening to podcasts from learned colleagues in ministry, people I greatly respect. They suggest that we need to listen first, then act. We need to slow down long enough and stop trying to fix the church, to see and hear where God is at work in our world. This is not easy and often goes against the grain of how our culture has shaped us. We need to undo years of habit and once again allow God to shape us. The catechisms of the church contain profound words, and we don't hear them often enough. I am going to share some words from Living Faith – the Presbyterian's statement of Christian belief from 1984. In chapter 2, on what our calling as Christians is, please listen closely:

We are called to work out the meaning of our own lives and to find our true vocation in the love and service of God. We serve and love God by the service and love of creation especially the care of the needy. Every kind of work that is honest and serves others is a vocation from the Lord. Calling means the necessity to deny selfish ambition and desire in order to minister to others. In God's service true freedom is to be found.

Further on, in chapter 4, which is about the Holy Spirit, we read:

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the triune God and is One with the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of Life, the Renewer and Helper of God's people. By the Spirit, God is present in the world, the source of all goodness and justice. By the

Spirit, God convinces the world of sin and testifies to the truth of Christ. By the Spirit, Christ is with his church. By the Spirit, Christ calls the church into being and unites us to himself and to each other. The Holy Spirit is in all who know Christ. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. We pray as a church to be guided into truth knowing that such truth may disturb and judge us.

From chapter 8 on discipleship:

Disciples of Christ are called to obedience. Jesus said: "If you love me, keep my commandments." Obedience involves us totally. Yet as we give ourselves to him, we discover that his service alone brings true freedom. Life in Christ is formed in a believing community and expressed in daily living. We are to bring Christ's healing presence to the world for which he died, his peace to its pain and anguish. Life in Christ involves prayer, the seeking of God's will and blessing on all of life. Prayer is openness to the presence of God. In words, or the absence of words, prayer is the focusing of our lives towards God. As we commune with God through Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit enables us to express our deepest longings, and we experience the sustaining power of God's presence.

From chapter 9 on mission:

The Bible witnesses to God in Christ entering deeply into human suffering. As we behold our Saviour on the cross, we are convinced of God's love for us. Faced with the pain and agony of the world, only a suffering God can help. God is with us in our anguish.

And finally, from chapter 10, a word of hope:

May the God of hope fill us with joy and peace in believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit we abound in hope!

The sermon title today is "What time is it?" This is the time. We need not scratch our heads and wonder about what we are to do in our day and age. It is time to pray. It is time to listen to God, and then, It is time to act as the hands and feet of Jesus in the world for which he died. Therein lies our hope as the church. Amen.

Hymn 767

**Lord, speak to me, that I may speak**

**Invitation to the Offering**

**Doxology**

**Prayer of Dedication**

**Prayers of Thanksgiving and for the People**

God in whom we live and move and have our being: As we gather in your presence today, we give you thanks for your faithfulness to your people across many generations and in so many situations. Thank you for the faithfulness we meet in the world around us, in friendships that endure, in communities that pitch in when someone is in trouble, in workers who go that extra

mile, in countries who offer safety or sustenance when disaster strikes and strangers are in desperate need.

Compassionate God, we are aware of many challenges in our lives, in the lives of those we care about, and in the world around us. Show us how we can respond to the prayers of those in need. We pray for those who have been in the headlines lately, whose situations concern us deeply, those whose very lives cry out for help.

We pray for those who are suffering behind the scenes in our community: those who are ill or waiting on treatment; those who are grieving; those struggling to make ends meet or find the right job; those who are lonely, those who are moving this summer & will need new friends.

We pray for those looking forward to a new beginning this coming fall: those starting at a new school or in a new post-secondary program; those beginning new work or new activities; those settling into a new home and neighbourhood; those welcoming new members into the family through birth, adoption or marriage.

We pray for our congregations. Gather us into new and renewed friendships. Speak to us when we turn to you in prayer. Show us how to live out our Christian faith, reaching out with your love and generosity. Equip us to meet every challenge we face with faithfulness and commitment. For we dare to pray as Christ taught us as his followers:

### **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 712                      **Arise, your light is come**

### **BENEDICTION**

Now may the love of God, the grace of Christ, and the peace of the Holy Spirit remind you that you are priceless in God's sight – today, tomorrow 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**

**Thank you to Rev. Nicole Reid for leading us in worship**

**Nicole Reid began life's journey in Germany, immigrating at age 9. She has a bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering and a Master of Divinity with 20 years of mothering 6 wonderful children in between. In 2016, she planted a mission called Cornerstone in Dunnville, introducing mostly marginalized women and their families to the joys of**

**following Jesus. Nicole was ordained to this mission in January of 2020. At the conclusion of this ministry in 2023, Nicole felt called to the ongoing work of writing a book for all Christians hoping to share the good news, based on her missional experiences. Nicole lives on a hobby farm near Dunnville with her husband Jeff, where she likes baling hay and bottle-feeding lambs. In her spare time, she likes to have fun with her grandchildren, read, bake, garden, and create stained glass.**

**\*Next Sunday Service, August 24, at 10:00 am at North Pelham with Rev. Nicole Reid**

**\*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.

**\*While Jacob is on vacation, he is still available for pastoral care matters.** Reach Jacob at [jacoble0501@gmail.com](mailto:jacoble0501@gmail.com) or 289-213-2797 or contact your Elder.