



**Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge**  
**Sunday, August 24, 2025**  
**Worship at Home**

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

**Call to Worship**

God comes into a world filled with uncertainties and darkness.

**God seeks out the voids of belief and conviction.**

God embraces the wounded and broken.

**God knocks down the walls of division and strife.**

God is the candle shining in the darkness of our days.

**God is the light of our lives.**

God is the one who makes all things new.

**Praise be to God, now and forevermore!**

Hymn 376 – **Lord, the light of your love is shining**

**PRAYERS OF APPROACH, CONFESSION**

Loving God, whose touch can heal the broken places of life, touch us today... God of peace, whose spirit of peace can quiet our spirits of confusion and despair, reassure us today... Forgiving God, whose call to repentance promises grace upon grace, place your mercy in our souls today... You who heal the sick and liberate the imprisoned, who bring justice in the midst of oppression and strength in the midst of weakness, pour out your spirit of love upon us today. Open our hearts to new faithfulness, redirect our waywardness, and hold us gently in your goodness. We confess our need to you, and we turn to you with hearts filled with hope, remembering the promises you have made to us. May your name be glorified in us and through us. We ask it through Christ Jesus, your only begotten son, he who is our Lord and our Saviour, our brother and our friend. Amen.

Hymn 377 – **Come children join to sing**

**Prayer for Understanding**

**SCRIPTURE PASSAGES**

**Responsive Psalm 103**

**Isaiah 58: 9b-14, Luke 13:10-17**

**SERMON**

**Your Kingdom Come**

Both paragraphs from our reading from Isaiah this morning begin with “if” clauses. If this, then that. Verse 10 states, “If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like

the noonday.” Verse 13 and 14 state “ 13 If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests or pursuing your own affairs; 14 then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob.” If, then.

In the reading from Luke, Jesus shows what that looks like, the lifting of the yoke, the removing of the pointing finger, the refraining from trampling the Sabbath. Three things: the lifting of the yoke, the removing of the pointing finger, the refraining from trampling the Sabbath. We’re going to look at these three things for today’s world. Let’s begin by the lifting of the yoke in the Gospel story:

There was a woman who came to the synagogue. It does not say why she appeared, just that she did. She had two strikes against her. She was female in a patriarchal society, and she was physically deformed. According to a New Testament commentator, “People with physical deformities were expected to remain socially invisible, especially if they were women. Women rarely if ever approached rabbis, nor did rabbis as a rule speak to women.” In my mind’s eye, I can see the finger pointing that had been going on for the past 18 years: oh, look at that woman! I wonder what she did wrong to deserve that! She’s a bad person, obviously!

In Jesus’ day, people believed that a physical imperfection was God’s judgement on that person. It boiled down to the thought that because you have sinned, God caused this issue – be it blindness, leprosy, or as in this situation, physical deformity. This woman

was allegedly living out a sentence imposed by God for something she might have done at least 18 years earlier, for that is the length of time of her affliction. Or so people thought. Unfortunately, there are people today who still believe this, despite what Jesus did next. Because Jesus didn’t think so. Jesus saw her, called her over, and set her free from oppression. He laid his hands on her and she immediately stood up straight and began praising God.

Let’s think this through. Jesus lifted the yoke that kept her bent over. That had been a long, heavy and painful load to carry. Poof. Gone. The scripture passage stated that “The entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things being done by him.” They were not pointing any fingers at the woman. Along with her, they rejoiced. Thirdly, the issue of trampling the Sabbath. I’m going to say a bit more about this one.

There were many written rules about keeping the Sabbath holy, rules that had been accepted and practiced for centuries. The religious leaders made sure that everyone knew and practiced those rules. Jesus knew those rules too. He likely practiced many of them himself. So did he break the Sabbath rules? I am no expert on Sabbath keeping, but I do know that the observances were intended to keep that one day of the week “holy.”

What does that mean, to keep the Sabbath holy? Consulting the Merriam-Webster dictionary, there are several meanings of the word ‘holy’: 1. exalted or worthy of complete devotion as one perfect in goodness and righteousness. Similarly, it also means divine. Such as in the phrase, “the Lord our God is holy.” Thirdly, “holy” means being “devoted entirely to the deity or the work of the deity” which is the meaning most

appropriate for our understanding of this passage.

To keep the Sabbath holy, therefore, means to be devoted to God or the work of God that day. Of course, Christians don't keep Sabbath, but we do claim Sundays as the Lord's Day. So that third definition asserts that on Sundays, we are to be devoted to God or the work of God. The Isaiah passage says, "If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath, from pursuing your own interests ... if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests or pursuing your own affairs..." – those are the things God is against. It speaks against going golfing or binge watching TV, or exclusively focusing on your own well-being. It asks that you honor the Sabbath, and call it a delight.

Back to Jesus, if Jesus healed a woman on the Sabbath, he was most certainly devoted to God and the work of God in his actions. The work of God is always compassion and love. To heal is to be compassionate. To unbind the oppressed is to be compassionate. To ignore or do away with rules that would encourage anything else is also holy work. Jesus certainly acted within the rules of keeping the Sabbath holy, even if the religious leaders were not pleased. They were shamed by his actions, for they emphasised the rules over compassion. They were clearly in the wrong. Compassion supersedes rules, especially constructed rules that impede compassion. These many Sabbath rules, about how many steps can be taken on the Sabbath, what work can be done and not done,

were constructed by the religious leadership, interpreting what they thought was right. God's rule was simply to keep the Sabbath holy. The rest is interpretation. (pun intended here: That we rest on Sundays is interpretation, not on a direct biblical commandment.) The first mention of Sabbath is in Genesis 2: "On the sixth day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it, God rested from all the work that he had done in creation." God hallowed the seventh day, meaning God declared it holy. Mention of the Sabbath is repeated in the Ten Commandments: "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy." The specific rules and interpretations of Sabbath observance have varied across different religious groups and over time. Jesus reinterprets them through his own actions by healing this woman. He points out that it is considered lawful to be compassionate to animals, to take them to water. How much more appropriate it is to be compassionate towards one's neighbour who is suffering! Jesus sees past the customs and systems to a person in need. For all people who know what it is like to feel invisible or unnoticed, or who have been silenced, or who have fingers pointed at them, remember this: When others do not see you, Jesus sees you. Those whom Jesus sees, Jesus frees with all the compassion of God.

Today, our world needs a whole lot of Jesus style compassion. For the purpose of conveying this learning to our world today, I am going to focus on one specific oppressed people group. The learning applies to all oppressed people groups, be they women, people of colour, or the physically handicapped. But the people group that I will be focusing on are known by the ever-expanding acronym 2Slgbtqi+. I prefer the term gender-diversity, and will be using it going forward. I readily acknowledge that our denomination accepts two contrasting definitions of marriage as legitimate. I land on one side, as you will see shortly, and I will tell you a few of my reasons. Since we do not have all day, so I must limit my line of reasoning.

To begin, human beings like to categorize. We especially like having everything in two boxes, like black and white, good and bad, day and night, straight and gay, success and failure, for and against, love and hate. While we hopefully know that these are all false dichotomies, that the world does not fit into two tidy boxes, our brains still like them. Doing so makes things simple, but to the point of oversimplifying complex situations, forcing a choice between extremes and ignoring all other possibilities. Everything God has created is far more complex than black and white. We know that in between, there are many shades of gray, even more than 50, and on top of that, there are colours!!! Where do they fit between black and white? Ever notice that God has and continues to create outside of the boxes that we like to put everything into?

So it is with gender as well. The male/female binary is a false dichotomy. Let's begin with the fact that some people are born intersex. Intersex is an umbrella term for people born with reproductive anatomy that doesn't fit the typical definitions of male or female. Intersex is a natural variation in human biology, not a disorder or a disease. Some

intersex traits are noticeable at birth, while others may not be apparent until puberty or even later in life.

Every person is born as a unique creation, meaning there is no one else quite like you. Your specific hormone makeup is unique. And there is so much more to life than our physicality. Is it any wonder that gender diversity is a God-created reality? Yes, the Bible says that God created humans as male and female. That is a common contention against gender diversity. The Bible also says that God created night and day, sea and land, and so on. What about dawn and dusk? What about wetlands and tidal zones? These creation passages are more poetic than literal, and so, they do not address all of God's created diversity, including gender diversity.

The balance of today's sermon relies significantly on work done by the late Walter Brueggemann, an exceptional Old Testament scholar who died at the age of 92 in June of this year. I have read many of his books with great admiration of the depth of his knowledge, understanding, and his clear, deep love of God and people.

Let's start with the understanding that the Bible does not speak with a single voice on any topic. We are all aware that the Bible was written by many different authors with many different life experiences and at various times in history. Inspired by God as it is, all sorts of people have a say in Scripture, and we are under mandate to listen, as best we can, to all of its voices.

On the one hand, there are a few Bible passages interpreted so as to define homosexual behaviour as sin. Be aware that the word "homosexual" did not appear in Bibles prior to 1946, even though the Bible was written thousands of years earlier. For most of Christian history, most European Bibles taught the tradition that these verses were dealing with pederasty, and not homosexuality. One was not to have sex with minors. I am sure we can all agree on the harm that such abuse causes. No one understood it to mean that consenting adults were barred from being intimate.

On the other hand, we may notice other texts that are tilted toward the inclusion of all people. We all know that God so loved the WORLD – you can't get more inclusive than that! – that he sent his son... Also, Jesus welcomes all who are weary and heavy laden, exclaiming: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I

will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” No qualification, no exclusion. Jesus is on the side of those who are “worn out.” They may be “worn out” by being lower-class people who do all the heavy lifting, or it may be those who are “worn out” by the heavy demands of Torah interpretation, filled with judgment and exclusion.

As we listen to all the voices of the Bible, let us also be aware that every reading of the Bible—no exceptions—is an act of interpretation. And all interpretation filters the text through the life experience of the interpreter. The matter is inescapable and cannot be avoided. There is no such thing as unbiased reading. Additionally, there are no texts

without contexts and there are no interpreters without context that causes the reader to read in a distinct way. The result, of course, is that with a little effort, one can prove nearly anything in the Bible.

So then, why bother with it, if it can mean anything we want it to mean? This is where it becomes vitally important that you hear this: The Bible is not the same as the Gospel. The Bible is not to be equated with the Gospel. That is because the Gospel, unlike the Bible, is unambiguous about God’s deep love for all people, as I illustrated a moment ago. And where the Bible contradicts the good news of God’s love for the world, those texts are to be seen as no longer fitting or okay in the light of gospel consideration and understanding. Through the teaching and example of Jesus Christ, we have come to new learning. Jesus is making all things new, one thing at a time.

Another point which Walter Brueggemann raised is the struggle of the holy people of God to maintain their identity and “purity”. In the New Testament, the long, hard process of coming to terms with “Gentiles” was a major preoccupation of the early church, and a defining issue among the Apostles. We are able to see in the Book of Acts that over time, the early church eventually reached a readiness to allow non-Jews into the community of faith. Peter’s experience in the house of Cornelius, a Roman gentile, was a pivotal example of God supporting their inclusion.

In our time, the Spirit is stirring something new—a multiethnic, multicultural, multiracial, multi-gendered community where the old privileges and powers tremble. The rising visibility of many peoples is not a threat but a holy summons to the church. Scripture itself bears witness to this tension, with some voices clinging to rigor while others fling the doors wide in welcome. In this moment, gender-diverse people—so often pressed into the margins—stand as living testimony. Their very lives resist the false gods of conformity and sameness, and at the same time reveal the life-giving beauty of God’s wide and wondrous diversity. Too quickly labeled “other,” they are, in truth, kin among us—no more and no less a challenge, and no more and no less a gift, than all the people whom God created and loves.

And so the church is always re-deciding about “others,” for we know that those who are “other” than “us” are not going to go away. Thus, we are required to come to terms with them. The trajectory of the texts of welcome is that they are to be seen as neighbors who are welcomed to the resources of the community and invited to make contributions to the common wellbeing of the community. By no stretch of any imagination can it be the truth of the Gospel that such “others” as gender-diverse people are unwelcome in

the church community.

In that community, there are no second-class citizens. The church had to learn that concerning people of color and also concerning women. There was a time not that long ago when I would not have been allowed to stand here and preach. And now, the time has come for us to face the same gospel reality about gender diverse people, welcoming everyone as first-class citizens in the community of faithfulness and justice.

We learn that the other is not an unacceptable danger and that the other is not required to give up their “otherness” in order to fully belong to the community.

Some lives break the boundaries of what is familiar, revealing that life cannot be neatly contained or ordered to our comfort. These neighbors, these companions on the journey, call us to respond not with fear or control, but with open hearts, generous spirits, and steadfast compassion that reflects the breadth and beauty of God’s creation. While the matter is urgent in our time, this is not a new challenge to us. The Bible provides ongoing evidence about the difficulty of coming to terms with the other. We in the community of faith, as in the Old and New Testaments, are always called to respond to the other as a neighbor who belongs with “us,” even as “we” belong with and for the “other.”

Our faith, informed by justice and mercy, calls us to embrace all who are “other”—all minorities, all oppressed communities. Recall that gospel means good news, and so, grounded in the God of the gospel, this good news of love, dignity, and belonging must touch every life, leaving no one outside of its promise. From that truth rises a clear and urgent mandate: the full acceptance and welcome of gender-diverse people is not optional, but a living expression of God’s good news in our time.

In review, these several learnings about the interpretive process help us grow in faith: we are warned about the subjectivity of our interpretive inclinations; we are invited in our context to receive and welcome God’s newness; we can identify our interpretive trajectory as one bent toward justice, mercy and compassion; we acknowledge the “other” as a neighbor; we can trust the Gospel in its convicting stance concerning the balance of the Bible. God in Jesus has come to do a new thing. Let us not stand in God’s way, but join God in loving “the world.”

All of these things taken together authorize a sign for all who have been marginalized: Welcome! Welcome to the neighborhood! Welcome to the gifts of the community! Welcome to the work of the community! Welcome to the continuing liberating work of interpretation! Amen.

**Hymn 740 – Make me a channel of your peace**

**Invitation to the Offering**

**Prayer of Dedication**

**Prayers of Thanksgiving and for the People**

Lord God, loving God, hear us as we pray. Silence our hearts and minds in these moments so that we may listen for the movement of your Holy Spirit who prays within us through our sighs too deep for words.

God of healing and wholeness, we come with thanksgiving in our hearts for all the

evidence of your goodness and mercy - found not only in stories of old, but in lives today. Healing God, when dismay is our daily companion, you come to touch us with your healing hope. When grief falls on us like a wall of bricks, you rebuild our joy with your comfort and love.

Lives scarred with suffering and rejection have hope renewed through the power of the living Christ. Jesus Christ, when bullies pick on us, you stand by our side. When neighbors taunt us for choosing to be faithful, you commend us for our wisdom. Teaching Spirit, when we are heart-sick over the brokenness of our lives, your compassion races to bring your gentle balm. When our joy is gone and we are stained by the world's cruelty, you bathe us in the tears flowing from God's broken heart.

Lives

bruised with tragedy find consolation when touched by your gracious Spirit; We praise and adore you for hearts and lives transformed by your grace and mercy and we pray that our lives will reflect your great acts of kindness. Arouse in us we pray, a love like yours so that we reach out to this wounded and troubled world with the compassion of Christ, proclaiming the gospel with integrity to friends and strangers alike.

We remember all those whose situations are very close to our hearts today, those facing stress or sorrow, those challenged by pain or illness, those facing a new beginning or searching for a new path. We lift up the things in the news that concern us deeply: the stress on the environment and uncertainties about its future, the pressures on those who have lost jobs or cannot find work, and especially today, we pray for the pain of everyone who encounters discrimination or hatred in daily life.

We lift up one another in this community, with all our known and unknown needs. Bless us as we make a new beginning together as summer turns to autumn. Show us the paths of ministry you are opening before us. We believe you hear our prayers and will be faithful to answer according to your will, and so we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Together, we offer the prayer Jesus has given his followers:

"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 641– **One more step**

## **BENEDICTION**

**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 31, at 10:00 am at Rockway**

**\*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.