



Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge
Pentecost 15 Sunday, September 21, 2025
Worship at Home

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

Opening Hymn 422

Sing a new song unto the Lord

Welcome and announcements

Call to Worship

L: “Lord, you have searched me and you know me.” (Psalm 139:1)

P: **We come to open our hearts before God, to be fully known and deeply embraced.**

L: We come as people who are imperfect and flawed, yet gifted and blessed.

P: **We come to discover how beautiful and wondrous we are as God’s creations— with all our strengths and all our limitations.**

All: **Here, may God find us, and may we find God, in the fullness of our humanity.**

PRAYERS OF APPROACH, CONFESSION and The Lord’s Prayer

We come, O God, drawn by your Spirit, seeking to know ourselves as you know us.
 You search us and you see us—our gifts and our weaknesses, our hopes and our fears.
 And still, you call us your beloved.

Yet we confess, O God, that we often see ourselves through the world’s eyes. We measure our worth by success or failure, by what we own, or by how others see us. We compare ourselves, longing to be more than we are, forgetting that you made us as your wondrous creation.

We confess too that, like Philemon, we sometimes see others through labels—important or unimportant, strong or weak, one of us or not one of us. Forgive us when we fail to see others as brothers and sisters in Christ. Hear us now, O God, as in silence we bring before you our struggles, our failures, and our longing to be renewed. (Silent prayer)

You know us completely, O God. You see our flaws, and yet you love us. You embrace our limits, and yet you trust us. In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven, set free to live not by the world’s judgment, but by your vision of love and grace. Thanks be to God!

We pray in the name of Jesus, and together we pray as he taught us, 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 78

This is the day**Children of God Moment****Prayer for Understanding**

God of light and truth, you search us and you know us. As your Word is read and proclaimed, open our hearts to see ourselves as you see us—beloved, forgiven, and called to live in your love. Through Christ, the Living Word. Amen.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Responsive Psalm 139: 1-18
Philemon 1-21

SERMON**God's Vision of Who We Are**

We humans identify ourselves and are often identified by external and surface conditions. We live in a world where we are often judged and measured by the neighborhood we live in, how much money we have, our education, job, attractiveness, body size, reputation, or popularity. Even in the matter of faith, believers tend to identify how faithful they are according to the church they attend in comparison with other churches. Where a person fits in makes all the difference to their sense of worth and value, because a person's value and worth tend to be measured by the world around us. This is our world, just as it was the world of the people in the Bible.

Today's scripture readings are all about who we are, especially in relation to God. Psalm 139 is both frightening and transforming for those of us who have trouble accepting ourselves and loving ourselves as we are, with all our imperfections and inadequacies. "You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways." (vv. 1-3) The psalmist tells us that God knows us inside and out. This is frightening for anyone who wants to forget certain things about themselves, for anyone who wants to forget the pain inside, the shame or guilt or hate, or whatever. Imagine being so well known that there are no secrets and nowhere to hide, no way to pretend something isn't there when it is. The psalmist is frightened because he is afraid of what God will see if God can see everything. He seems to be afraid God is going to be disappointed that he just doesn't quite measure up to all that God dreams he will become.

At the same time, however, the psalmist feels assurance, comfort, and peace. This is because he feels completely known, entirely loved, fully embraced. He believes that God knows him best and thinks he is the most unique, precious, and wonderful gift. Imagine God knowing us so profoundly that there is nothing we can hide from God, even those feelings or memories for which we have no words. God knows them all inside us. Whatever thoughts, feelings, and memories are inside us, God still loves, embraces, and believes in us. The God who exists inside us wants us to be all that we can be, because God loves us infinitely and eternally already.

The change that comes in each of us, comes when we begin not only to see ourselves but also to believe in ourselves as God sees and believes in us. Inner change and growth come when we see ourselves as God sees us. It can come when we begin to love ourselves as God loves us. If we see ourselves as inadequate or flawed in such a way that we are stuck or overwhelmed, then we cannot change or flourish in any way. Amazing things can happen if we see ourselves beyond the judgements of others such that we envision the beauty, potential, and possibility in ourselves.

The psalmist inspires each of us to be a human being before God as we are, with strengths and beauty as well as weaknesses, limitations, and flaws, because God creates us as imperfect beings and loves us as we are, infinitely and eternally. In order to experience God's steadfast and compassionate love for us, we need a relationship with God that is personal. We need to believe in God enough to believe that God really knows us and loves us as we are inside and out.

Of course, God cannot enjoy those things we do that are selfish, hurtful, or narrow-minded because they come from dark places inside us. We human beings have a dark side and depending on the pressures and strains of life at any given time, that dark side can really take over. However, the darkness that is a part of life can be overcome with the help of God. If we discover and develop a relationship with God where we begin to believe this, it will lead to transformative change in our lives. Through this inner change, we can become more and more what God sees in us. That is God's vision and will. And that is what this psalmist has seen.

Paul's letter to Philemon is also a remarkable example of understanding oneself and living accordingly. The letter is addressed not to a church but to one person. To discover the message of the letter, we need to understand the context of the first century world. This is a world, like our own world, where there is vast social inequality. The world the apostle Paul lives in has slaves and free persons, those who are Romans or from the right culture, and those who are from races and cultures less noble or valued. Some belong to the right family and circle while others belong to the wrong one.

Philemon is a wealthy Christian who has a church in his house and ensures that there is a place for worship and fellowship. Like most rich people in that world, Philemon also has slaves. One of those slaves is called Onesimus. Onesimus has escaped and has found his way into the church and the company of the apostle Paul. Onesimus has become attached to Paul and is his physical and social attendant because Paul has permanent health problems from his years in prison.

The purpose of this letter is to request Philemon to let go his claims on Onesimus. Paul is asking him not only to forgive his slave but also to give him his freedom. The main reason Paul gives is that Onesimus is Christian and he and Philemon are brothers in Christ. They are both now servants of Christ. In other words, they are mutual servants to each other. Paul wants Philemon to make this decision to give Onesimus his freedom, freely and in love.

Beneath the surface this letter tells us we can be free of a human culture where we need to feel we are better than others in order to feel our worth and value. Let us remember that we are all precious to God, even though we have different gifts and talents. Each of us is important and beloved, even though some of us are more successful than others in the world. This spiritual truth

gives us the freedom to live out all our gifts, talents, and successes, but also to embrace who we are with all our limitations and failings. God has imparted God's life to us all. God loves us boundlessly and eternally as we are. How we do in this world and where we fit socially makes no difference to God. And it should make no difference to how we see ourselves also.

May we discover and experience our real selves as human beings, not on the surface, but as God sees us in our inner lives and hearts. We are all unique and different. We are all on a journey of discovery to find who we are.

May we connect with God and see ourselves through God's eyes and heart, that we may encounter and enjoy the beauty and abundance within us, just as God does. Amen.

Hymn 682

Just as I am, without one plea

Invitation to the Offering

Doxology

Prayer of Dedication

Loving God, you see us as we truly are—your beloved, gifted, and precious. Receive these offerings, and use them so that your vision of love and freedom may flourish in the world.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and for the People

You give us life and love, O God.

You give us minds and hearts, bodies and spirits. You want us to flower and flourish, to live creatively. Because we trust the good you accomplish through us, we thank you!

We thank you for all this, O God, even when we sometimes see only ugliness, shame, regret, or failure. Much happens in our world and in our lives that makes us question whether love and goodness are truly the ground of the universe. There is so much pain and suffering, so much evil and hatred.

Fill us with your grace, O God. Give us new confidence in the beauty you see in us. Give us faith in our value and worth—not because of what we do, but because you have created us: broken yet precious, flawed yet wondrous in your eyes, full of potential until we breathe our last, always on the journey of becoming.

And now, let us take a quiet moment in silence, each of us naming in our hearts those particular blessings for which we are thankful today. (Silent prayer)

God of mercy, we lift before you your world that groans in sorrow and longing. Where disaster strikes and lives are broken, bring comfort, courage, and rebuilding. Where hatred and violence tear communities apart, sow seeds of peace, justice, and healing. Where people are hungry,

weary, and forgotten, make your presence known in compassion and care. Where leaders grasp for power instead of serving, turn hearts toward wisdom, humility, and service.

Help us, O God, not to be passive in the face of suffering, but to take our place as your beloved children—instruments of your peace, bearers of your vision, living signs of your steadfast love.

We pray for those more personally who are facing major transitions in their health needs, both physical and mental, for those burdened by grief or uncertainty; for those who feel lonely, unseen, or unloved. Surround them with your presence, and give them strength, comfort, and peace.

We pray also for the quiet joys and small victories in our lives—for moments of laughter, for gifts of friendship, for family and for this church community. Keep us mindful that each person here is your beloved creation, fully known, fully loved, called to live not by the world's judgment, but by your vision of grace.

And now, in a moment of silence, let us name before God those people and situations close to our own hearts today. (Silent prayer)

In all things, O God, make us open to your Spirit, trusting that you are at work within us, making us new, day by day, until we see ourselves and one another through your eyes of infinite love. We pray in the strong and gentle name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hymn 324

Great is thy faithfulness

BENEDICTION

May the God who knows you bless you, the Christ who loves you call you beloved, and the Spirit who guides you lead you into God's vision of who you are. 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, September 28, at 10:00 am at Rockway**

*** Wednesday Bible study led by Diane McMillan at North Pelham at 10:00 am**

***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.

***Fall Fellowship at Rockway:** Join us on Sunday, September 28 at Rockway for a special day of worship followed by a joyful lunch together! The church will provide a delicious meal free of charge. We invite everyone to bring along a salad or dessert to share. Bring your family, friends, and a thankful heart—it will be a wonderful time of fellowship and celebration!

***North Pelham Church Building Use on Sunday, September 28:** Please note that our church building will be used by Living Hope Presbyterian Church of Beamsville for their morning and afternoon worship services on September 28th.

***World Communion Sunday:** Join us this **Sunday, October 5**, as we unite with Christians around the world to celebrate World Communion Sunday.

***Thanksgiving Food Donations:** This year, we will be collecting non-perishable food items and fresh produce for **Pelham Cares** on **both Sunday, October 5, and Thanksgiving Sunday, October 12**. Your generous donations will build a beautiful Harvest Table, symbolizing our gratitude and commitment to caring for those in need in our community. Monetary gifts are also welcome and greatly appreciated. Thank you for helping us share the joy of Thanksgiving with everyone.

***Mark your calendars** - Sunday October 19, 2025 is First Presbyterian Church North Pelham's 197th Anniversary service with guest minister, Rev. Mark Lewis.

***Custom Sewing Services by Belqis** – call 905-325-8927 or email belquisebrahimi9@gmail.com Belqis' arrival to Canada was sponsored by the Niagara Presbytery - please consider her custom sewing service should you need anything, hemmed or made.

***Update on Rev. Jacob Lee's Wider Ministry:** While Jacob has completed his term as Moderator of the Presbytery, he has been appointed as the Interim Moderator for Kirk on the Hill Presbyterian Church in Fonthill as of October 1st, 2025. He will also continue to serve as the Interim Moderator for Stamford Presbyterian Church. Please continue to keep him in your prayers as he takes on these responsibilities.

***Connect with your Minister Jacob for pastoral visits.** Reach Jacob at jacoble0501@gmail.com or 289-213-2797.