



Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge
Reformation Sunday
October 26, 2025
Worship at Home

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

CALL TO WORSHIP

L: “Jesus also told this parable to people who were sure of their own goodness and despised everybody else.” (Luke 18:9)

P: **We are here, O God, as people who sometimes feel superior — self-righteous, judgmental, and critical of others.**

L: We are here, O God, as people who sometimes feel unworthy — inadequate, ashamed, or less than those around us.

P: **We are here, O God, carrying pride and fear, resentment and jealousy, anxiety and doubt.**

All: **Speak to our hearts what they most need to hear, O God — words of mercy, love, and peace.**

Hymn 350

To God be the glory

Prayers of Approach and Confession

Find us in this hour of worship, O God — wherever we are.

Are we restless, running from something — or running because we’re afraid to stop? Are we stuck, unsure where to go, unsure how to move —worried about what may come? Are we empty inside, disconnected, or lost? Are we angry or frustrated by all that we cannot control? Are we disappointed or hurt in relationships that matter deeply to us? Or are we a little too sure of ourselves — too full, too certain, too quick to judge or dismiss others, forgetting how to be gentle, kind, and compassionate?

Hear us now, O God, in the silence of our hearts as we make our confession before you. (pause)

Merciful God, you know us better than we know ourselves, and still you love us. You promise to meet us as we worship you —not in perfection, but in truth. Forgive us, O God. Heal us where we are broken. Renew us by your Spirit, which brings newness of life. Shape us again by your compassion, and make us into the people you call us to be.

Give us courage to choose what is right and to walk faithfully in your ways. Grant us grace to accept what we cannot change, and wisdom to learn and grow through every trial. May what we go through, O God, sow seeds of wisdom, compassion, and grace, so that others may feel your love through us and never suffer alone. Open our hearts, O God, to receive your Word as the

source of our life, our way, and our truth. With confidence in your compassionate love, we pray these things through Jesus Christ, who taught us, when we pray, to say together:

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.

Sharing the Peace of Christ

L: May the Peace of Christ be with you all.

P: And also with you. (*congregational response*)

Hymn 682

Just as I am, without one plea

Prayer of Understanding

Merciful God,

open our hearts to your Word. Teach us humility, fill us with grace, and renew us by your forgiving love, that your Spirit may transform our lives through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Passages

Responsive Psalm 65;

Luke 18: 9-14; Luke 19: 1-10

Sermon

Grace for the Imperfect

Does everyone who walks into this church feel comfortable being here? Are all of us welcomed, and treated with kindness and consideration? Is our worship service easily followed by those who have little or no background in our Presbyterian style of worship? Do we take the time to reach out to those we have not met yet or those we have not seen here before?

I know part of the answer relates to our personalities. We need outgoing extroverts in the church who love to meet people, welcoming them at the door and in our time of fellowship after worship. We are very fortunate here at Rockway and North Pelham that we have a wonderful Christian spirit of hospitality and welcome. Many people have modelled this.

What then is the purpose of church? Why do we come to church? Long ago, Augustine, a significant fourth-century Christian thinker and philosopher, had an argument with a group of people called the Donatists. Donatists believed that if you called yourself a Christian and belonged to the church, you had to live it. If someone criticized you for being a Christian, you had to stand up for your faith. You should not have doubts and questions, moral failures, or even fear in your Christian life and faith. The church was to be a place for people who were righteous and stood apart from the rest of society in their morality, holiness, and certainty of faith.

Augustine had a big problem with this way of thinking. He argued for a very different understanding of what makes a Christian. The Christian, he said, is distinguished by being more

aware, humbler, and more honest about human imperfection, and not because of moral superiority over anyone else. Christians go to church to receive the beautiful, rich, infinite forgiving, renewing and empowering love of God each and every week. Christians go to church because they know they need something they cannot give themselves.

Today's gospel readings provide us with guidance and inspiration about why we come to church.

In our first reading, there are two figures: one is a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. It is important to understand the context of the story: in Jesus' time, everyone was religious. Everyone believed in God, based on the law of Moses. The Pharisee was someone who had great influence in society. A bit like the Donatists, he believed that, in order to be accepted in society and praised as a good person, one had to practice one's faith. This faith had a lot of dos and don'ts. People had to live clean. They had to follow the rules and give money for the maintenance of the temple. They had to fast and say their prayers every day. There was very little tolerance for questions and doubts, mistakes, inner struggles, and the unfairness of life. They had no excuse for messing up. There was no mercy or forgiveness.

The other figure is a tax collector. While the Pharisee represents the moral best of society, the tax collector stands for the moral worst. Tax collectors tended to extort money from their own people on behalf of the Romans, and they took as much money as they could squeeze out of people by any means they could. So tax collectors were regarded not only as thieves who took money until people had no more money to give, but also as enemies who worked for the Romans.

What is surprising about the parable has to do with which of the two is acceptable to God: the Pharisee or the tax collector. The Pharisee goes to the temple to pat himself on the back, believing that God is very happy with him. He does everything right and so. He has earned all the blessings God can offer. He is praying in the temple, unlike the offensive tax collector. By contrast, the tax collector is feeling hopeless, guilty and ashamed and is pleading for forgiveness. He is humble and ready to give up his awful life, but he questions whether it is even possible, given all the bad he has done.

Against the Pharisee's expectations, God welcomes the attitude, approach, and spirit of the tax collector, and not that of the Pharisee. We don't come to church to assure ourselves that we are wonderful and successful compared to others. Instead, we come to church to confess our human limitations and flaws, which are called "sins" in the bible, so that we may experience forgiveness and renewal. That's why our worship service begins with a call to worship and prayers of approach and confession. And then we share the peace of Christ, who provides forgiveness unconditionally to all who betray, hurt, and even kill him. If we don't feel we are imperfect beings who need any forgiveness, the peace of forgiveness Christ offers is meaningless. We don't have to come to church if we feel we are perfect.

There is another tax collector in our second reading, whose name is Zacchaeus. People see him as a thief and a collaborator with the enemy. But Jesus' approach is very different from that of other people. Jesus goes to Zacchaeus' home and treats him as an ordinary person with flaws and limitations. These challenges and inspirations challenge and inspire Zacchaeus to confess his

faults to gain forgiveness and to be liberated. He is then so excited with the generous love Jesus offers that he makes a commitment to pay back all the money he has taken from people. Moreover, he promises to pay back four times as much if he cheats anyone in the future.

So why do we come to church?

We come here to experience God's love repeatedly. If we welcome and embrace each other as best we can, we become one in the body of Christ, the hands and feet of Christ, doing as Jesus did for Zacchaeus. And then we are empowered to go back out into the world and give four times all the love and goodness we feel inside that God so richly gives to us.

As imperfect, broken, and flawed human beings, we come to church as sinners. At church, we can be honest, humble, and genuine about who we are. And we can experience the deepest kind of spiritual love here from God, a love that goes to that deep place inside us where guilt, pain, fear, and emptiness imprison us and destroy our minds and souls.

God dwells in us, whatever we do: both good and evil. This is the reason that, as imperfect beings, we are sinners, but also lovable. When we love each other in all our limitations and brokenness, we are loving each other into healing. As our hearts begin to heal with the experience of love and acceptance, we begin to see ourselves differently. We don't have to be perfect so that others might love us. And as we understand our identity and become more of who we actually are, our true self rather than a false self, we discover that we are naturally beautiful and lovely, even though we are also defective, broken, and imperfect. Only when we discover we are delightful, adorable, and lovable for all our imperfections, we are set free and empowered to love and forgive others as we are loved and forgiven.

May we trust God enough to let God in and into all of us. May we depend on Jesus enough to open the door to our home as Zacchaeus did. And may we as a community of faith welcome sinners into our spiritual community. May we gladly realize and embrace the truth that we are imperfect beings, sinners, but that God loves us candidly, unconditionally and compassionately, because God imparts part of God's life to each of us. Thanks be to Emmanuel God, God-with-us. Amen.

Hymn 474 **The love of God comes close**

Invitation to the Offering

Doxology

Prayer of Dedication

Loving God,

we offer these gifts with humble hearts, thankful for your grace that renews and transforms us. Use what we give — and who we are — to share your love and mercy in the world. Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

God of grace and God of glory,

on this Reformation Sunday, we give you thanks for the saints who have gone before us —

for those who faced trouble, trial, and even death for the sake of your truth, your mercy, and your grace, and for the gift of hearing and reading the Scriptures in our own languages.

We pray for those today who face trouble and persecution for their faith—for all your beloved children, regardless of tradition, who live under the threat of violence or oppression. We remember the many countries where religious persecution is high—including North Korea, China, Israel, and the Palestinian territories. Grant your people courage, protection, and hope.

Help us, O God, not only to walk in the footsteps of our forebears, but to fill them—to live with the same conviction and compassion that others may know the freedom of your love in Christ.

When hope feels lost and worries weigh us down, when rest does not come and the morning feels far away, when friends are distant and life feels empty or lonely—speak to us, O God, as Jesus spoke to Zacchaeus. Touch our bodies, minds, and spirits with your tender love, and reassure us of your presence that never leaves us.

Holy One, we lift our eyes to you in hope and awe. Deliver us from apathy, impatience, anxiety, or arrogance. With the humility of the tax collector, teach us to seek your justice and to rest in your mercy.

We pray for justice for your creation: for the creatures of the earth and the homes you have given them. Protect them when necessary, leave them in peace when possible, and teach us to respect their dignity and your design.

We pray for all Presbyterian churches in Canada and for our Niagara Presbytery. Grant us humility to walk in your way and courage to serve faithfully.

We pray for our leaders—in the Niagara Region, in our nation, and throughout the world. Grant them wisdom, humility, and courage to lead with compassion, justice, and peace.

We pray for those who are in need. Give us ears to hear their cries and hearts willing to respond with mercy and grace.

We pray for the world you love, O God—that your church, renewed by your Spirit, may carry the light of Jesus' compassionate way and be a beacon of love and hope to all.

Finally, we lift before you the members and friends of our Rockway and North Pelham church family. Bless each one with the assurance of your steadfast presence and the peace that passes understanding. Through Jesus Christ, who calls us out of our pride and into your mercy, we pray. Amen.

BENEDICTION

May God fill you with grace and mercy, Christ lead you in humility and love, and the Holy Spirit transform your heart to live with compassion and joy. And all God's people said, Amen.

Sung Response- Go Now In Peace
Postlude

**We acknowledge that we meet on the traditional
 Territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

***Next Sunday Service, November 2, 10:00 am at North Pelham**

***Invitation to Church Membership:** Our churches, Rockway and North Pelham, have been home to faithful people for generations. Recently, two families have decided to become members, and we give thanks for this joyful step of faith! If you feel that this is your spiritual home, you're warmly invited to consider church membership. Whether by baptism or profession of faith, we'll welcome new members on Sunday, November 30. Please speak with Rev. Jacob to learn more. Together, we continue to grow as one family in Christ.

Tai Chi & Qigong Class – Free 4-Week Program!

We had a fantastic start to our **Tai Chi & Qigong class** last Monday—thank you to everyone who joined us! The next class is **tomorrow at 1:30 PM at North Pelham**, and you're warmly invited! These gentle movements, led by **Joy Joung**, are great for the body and mind—and yes, there are chair-based options for those who prefer to stay seated. No need to register—just come, move, and be refreshed! If you have questions, speak to Joy or to Rev. Jacob after worship.

***Wednesday Bible Study:** Join us every Wednesday at 10:00 AM at North Pelham, led by Diane McMillan.

***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.**