



**Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge**  
**Advent II / Communion Sunday, December 7, 2023 – 10:00 am**  
**Worship at Home**

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

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

(Based on the Advent liturgy provided by Presbyterian World Service & Development)

**Voice 1:** The psalmist dreamed of a world where leaders govern with righteousness, and the poor are treated with dignity and justice.

**Voice 2:** In this new creation, the oppressed are set free, the vulnerable are protected and peace flows like a river.

**Voice 1:** Today, too many experience violence, poverty and persecution. Yet, they yearn to know peace.

**Voice 2:** We long to live in that new creation, where God's glory is revealed on earth, through justice and peace. Today, on this second Sunday of Advent, we light the candle of peace as a prayer of longing.

*The candle of peace is lit.*

**Let us pray together:**

Living God, help us to recognize your presence wherever people work for peace. Teach us to be instruments of your peace in the world. Come, Lord Jesus.

**Hymn 119**

**Hope is a star (verses 1 & 2)**

**PRAYERS OF APPROACH, CONFESSION and ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

Gracious God,  
 we come before You as Your children, open to Your grace and in need of Your mercy. We come seeking the abundance of Your peace, the hope of Your promises, the strength of faith, and the depth of love that only You can give.

We confess, O God, that even when we desire to do good, there is brokenness within us. As loving as we try to be, resentment, jealousy, or bitterness sometimes fill our hearts. As hopeful as we appear, moments of despair, doubt, and cynicism still cast shadows over us. As trusting as we long to be, fear and mistrust sometimes take hold, leaving us restless and without peace.

Hear us now as we silently open our hearts to You in confession. (pause)

And yet, O God, You know us fully—every flaw, every hidden thought—and still You love us completely. Your mercy is a gift, Your forgiveness a miracle, and Your peace a joy beyond understanding.

Renew our faith, rekindle our hope, and fill our hearts with Your transforming love, so that Your peace may take root in us and spill generously into the lives of others. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, the One who makes all things new. Amen.

## **Hymn 126**

## **On Jordan's bank**

### **Prayer for Understanding**

God of peace,  
open our hearts as we hear Your Word. Clear away our worries and soften what is closed within us. Speak Your forgiveness, plant Your peace, and lead us toward the new life You desire for us. Through Christ, our Light. Amen.

## **SCRIPTURE PASSAGES**

Psalm 85: 1-13; Isaiah 40: 1-11; Mark 1: 1-8

## **SERMON**

## **Preparing the Way of Peace**

Today we gather in this sacred season of Advent, a time when we open our hearts to the coming of Christ—our Light, our Hope, and today, especially, our Peace. On this White Gift Sunday, we also remember that God's peace is never meant to be kept for ourselves alone. It is meant to be shared generously, compassionately, and joyfully with others.

For us as Christians, Christmas is never just a holiday on the calendar. It is not simply a time for gatherings, decorations, and gifts. Christmas is the celebration of new birth—the birth of hope, new life, new purpose, and transformation. Christ comes into the world not as an idea, but as a child, reminding us that God chooses the most tender and humble way to reach us.

Yet we also know that not everyone feels excitement as Christmas approaches. Many among us carry quiet burdens. Some are grieving the loss of loved ones, and those losses can feel sharper in December. Some live with illness, or care for someone who is struggling. Others face anxiety about finances, family tensions, or loneliness. For many seniors, this season brings back deep memories—some joyful, some painful. We hold all of this honestly before God today.

So how do we prepare for Christmas in a year when our hearts might feel tired or heavy? How do we welcome the peace of Christ when our spirits feel unsettled?

Our Scriptures today offer a gentle answer. “Comfort, O comfort my people,” says your God. These words from Isaiah were spoken to people who had endured a long period of hardship, uncertainty, and exile. They had lost much. They wondered where God was and whether their future still held promise. Into that pain, God spoke a word of comfort strong enough to hold them: “I am coming to you. I will lead you home. I will give you peace.”

This is the same promise we hear today. God's peace does not ask us to deny our struggles or pretend that all is well. Instead, God's peace meets us right where we are. It settles into the places where we are anxious, wounded, or weary, and whispers gently: "You are not alone. I am with you. You are held."

Peace in the Bible is not simply the absence of conflict. It is shalom—a deep, steady, life-giving wholeness that comes from God. It is the peace that keeps our hearts steady even when life is uncertain. It is a peace that comforts us when we grieve, strengthens us when we are weak, and guides us when we do not know what comes next.

In Mark's Gospel, the story begins not with angels or shepherds, but with John the Baptist—the voice calling out in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord." John calls us to prepare our hearts for the One who brings peace. And the way we prepare is through repentance—turning our lives toward God so that God's peace can enter and renew us.

Repentance simply means making room. Making room for healing. Making room for new beginnings. Making room for the peace we long for but cannot create on our own. John's message is not harsh; it is hopeful. He knows that when we hold on tightly to old hurts, regrets, resentments, or guilt, our hearts become crowded and restless. But when we let those things go—when we forgive others, and when we forgive ourselves—new space opens within us for God to breathe peace into our lives.

Forgiveness is one of the deepest gifts of Christmas. It is not always easy, especially as the years go by and memories settle deep. Many seniors carry long histories—some beautiful, some difficult. There may be things we wish we had done differently, words we regret, or wounds we still carry.

Forgiveness does not mean that the past did not matter; it means that the past no longer has the power to steal our peace. To forgive is to say: "I will not let this hurt shape my heart anymore." "I will not let bitterness guide my steps." "I will walk forward with God in peace."

When we forgive others, we loosen the grip of old pain. When we forgive ourselves, we loosen the grip of shame. And when those burdens fall away, God's peace has room to grow.

Seniors understand deeply that life is too short to carry resentment. There comes a time when we need gentleness with ourselves and with others—a time when peace is more precious than being right, and love is more important than winning an argument.

The Messiah comes offering this peace freely. Our task is simply to receive it. Unforgiven wounds—whether our own or others'—tie our hearts in knots. They keep us focused on the past and make it difficult to live fully in the present. But forgiveness, like peace, is freedom.

Forgiveness is like a door opening to a warm, bright room. It allows God's love to enter the places we keep hidden. It allows our spirits to breathe again. And it reminds us that we are God's beloved children, known completely and loved completely.

The child in the manger comes not only with tenderness but with strength—the strength to break the chains of fear, guilt, and regret. He comes offering peace deeper than the circumstances around us. A peace that no illness, no loss, no hardship can take away. A peace that stays with us even as our bodies age and our lives change. This is the peace we seek in Advent. This is the peace Christ still brings.

White Gift Sunday is a beautiful reminder that peace grows when it is shared. Our gifts today—large or small—become signs of Christ's love reaching beyond our walls. They lift someone's burden, brighten someone's day, and remind someone in need that God has not forgotten them.

When we offer gifts with open hands, we become peacemakers. When we give with gratitude, we join God in healing the world. When we bless others, our own hearts are blessed in return. This is how peace becomes visible. This is how the light of Christ shines in the darkness.

As we continue in this season of waiting, each of us might hold these gentle questions: What in my life needs to be released so that I may know peace again? Whom do I need to forgive? What part of myself needs forgiving? Where is God inviting me to experience newness, healing, or calm?

Our human lives are full of things we cannot change. But they are also full of things we can change—with God's help. And God's peace gives us the courage to take even small steps toward a new beginning. Love has no limit. Peace has no limit. God's compassion has no limit. These are gifts that do not run out with age or time. They deepen, expand, and grow, often in the very places where we have been wounded.

May the peace of Christ—steady, tender, and enduring—enter every corner of our hearts this Advent. May we have the courage to release what burdens us, the grace to forgive, and the faith to welcome the Messiah who comes to guide us into wholeness. And may the gifts we share today become seeds of peace in someone else's life, shining with the love of God. Amen.

## **Hymn 128**

## **There's a voice in the wilderness crying**

### **Invitation to the Offering**

### **Doxology**

### **Prayer of Dedication**

God of peace,

receive these gifts and receive our lives. As You have forgiven and renewed us, use what we offer today to bring comfort, healing, and Your peace to others. In Christ's name. Amen.

## **Invitation to the Lord's Supper**

**The Apostles' Creed (p.539)**

**Hymn 548**

**Let us break bread together (vv. 1-2)**

**Great Prayer of Thanksgiving & The Lord's Prayer**

One: The Lord be with you.

**All: And also with you.**

One: Lift up your hearts.

**All: We lift them up to the Lord.**

One: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**All: It is right to give God thanks and praise.**

**All: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.**

**All: Christ has died!**

**Christ is risen!**

**Christ comes again and again! Hallelujah!**

**All: "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.**

**Words of Institution**

**Sharing of the Elements**

**Prayer after Communion (in unison)**

Gracious God, we thank You for nourishing us with the bread of life and the cup of peace. In this holy meal, You have met us with mercy, offered us forgiveness, and filled us with the quiet strength of Christ's presence. As we leave this table, soften our hearts. Help us release the burdens we carry, let go of past hurts, and turn toward the new paths You open before us. Teach us to walk in Your peace—peace that calms our worries, heals our wounds, and grows as we share kindness with others. May the forgiveness we have received flow through our lives with gentleness and hope. Send us out as bearers of peace in our homes, our congregation, and the world You love. We thank You for Christ, our Peace and Redeemer. Amen.

**Hymn 548**

**Let us break bread together (v. 3)**

**Benediction:**

May the peace of God steady your heart, the grace of Christ forgive and renew you, and the Spirit's gentle presence guide your steps in love. And all God's people said, "Amen."

**Sung Response: "Go Now In Peace"****Postlude**

**The Life and Ministry of our Congregations, led by Rev. Jacob Lee:**  
**Pastoral Charge of Rockway and First, North Pelham**

<p><b>We acknowledge that we meet on the traditional          Territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe</b></p>
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**Announcements:****\*Worship on Sunday, December 14, at North Pelham**

**\*Mitten Tree at Rockway:** The Mitten Tree is up and ready to receive mittens, scarves, toques, and socks to help keep people warm. Donations may also be brought to North Pelham and will be added to the tree at Rockway. All items will be dedicated on Sunday, December 7 and delivered to the donor organization in Beamsville for their Christmas baskets.

**\*Join the Pop-Up Choir!** Everyone is invited to be part of our Christmas Benefit Pop-Up Choir! There will be a last practice: 7:00 p.m. on December 11.

**\*Christmas Benefit Concert, Saturday, December 13 at 2:00 pm!** Join us at North Pelham for a joyful afternoon of Christmas music and celebration! A freewill offering will support the compassionate work of Open Arms Mission, and refreshments and fellowship will follow the concert. Please warmly invite your family members, friends, and neighbours to share in this festive and meaningful event!

**\*Christmas Solace Service – Friday, Dec. 19 at 2:00 PM**

You are warmly invited to a gentle and reflective "Blue Christmas" service at North Pelham. This time of prayer, scripture, and healing anointing offers comfort to anyone who is finding the season difficult or carrying sorrow or loss. Come and rest in God's light, peace, and renewing presence. All are welcome.

**\*Monday Tai Chi & Qigong Exercise**

Our Monday Tai Chi & Qigong classes continue each week, offering two options to support everyone's comfort and ability:

- **1:30–2:20 PM:** Mostly standing exercises
- **2:40–3:30 PM:** Mostly seated movements

Choose the group that suits you best. **All are welcome!**

If you have any questions, please speak with Joy or Rev. Jacob.

**\*Tree of Lights at North Pelham:** Our Tree of Lights helps us honour and remember loved ones during the Christmas season. White lights represent in memory, and red lights represent in honour. Monetary donations of any amount may be placed on the offering plate along with the names you wish included. A complete list will be shared at the Christmas Eve service. The tree will be lit on November 30, and proceeds support Pelham Cares.

**\*Wednesday Bible Study:** Join us every Wednesday at 10:00 AM at North Pelham, led by our spiritual leader, 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](mailto:jacoble0501@gmail.com) or 289-213-2797.**