

HIGHWOOD HIGHLIGHTS

April 2024

The Newsletter of Highwood Lutheran Church



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PASTOR'S MESSAGE

Sifting Through the Deluge: Faith as a Compass in the Age of Cyberwar

In an age where the digital battlefield hums with the whirl of bots and the static of disinformation, navigating the truth has become an increasingly daunting task. A famous aphorism, likely written around 1710, during the upheaval in English governance near the end of Queen Anne's reign and most possibly penned by Johnathan Swift, reads, "A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes." Such times of upheaval lead to opportunities for disinformation and, by extension, manipulation.

The challenge of filtering falsehoods is nothing new. St. Augustine, who died in 430, was a pivotal figure in early Christian theology and grappled with similar anxieties in his era. He implored his followers not to be deceived by the empty philosophies and the spiritual enticements of the world and to turn to Christ alone as their salvation. In this, he is echoing Colossians 2:8, "Don't let anyone fool you by using senseless arguments. These arguments may sound wise, but they are only human teachings. They come from the powers of this world and not from Christ." (CEV) These words resonate deeply in our current climate. In the face of a cyberwar that seeks to sow discord and erode trust, the timeless wisdom of the Christian faith offers a grounding anchor. As we face the current Russian cyberwar, which bombards us with falsehoods, self-curating reliable information feels like attempting to dam a raging river with a sieve. Amidst this deluge, a beacon of truth persists—the one tested by time and experience, the Gospel of Christ and the expression of our faith as expressed by the Lutheran Confessions.

Cyberwar's primary weapon—the bot—thrives on manipulating emotions and exploiting pre-existing biases. It preys on our vulnerabilities, feeding us a steady diet of subversive messaging that is rife with manipulated information that confirms our existing beliefs, regardless of its veracity. Luther, keenly aware of the human propensity for self-deception, warned against mindlessly accepting the prevailing social and cultural norms that can cloud our judgment. Nothing has really changed except the rate at which we have to make those assessments. Discerning truth in the digital age necessitates a critical eye, which can be developed by applying timeless principles enshrined in the Lutheran Confessions.

Luther, ever the champion of individual conscience, emphasised the importance of "sola scriptura" – scripture alone – as the foundation of faith. He also stressed that discerning truth from scripture requires a discerning eye and is not something that is developed individually. A faith community can be instrumental in training and testing discernment of truth from scripture: A faithful congregation provides a foundation of knowledge about the Bible and Christian traditions. Through sermons, Bible studies, and discussions, individuals learn historical context, different interpretations, and theological frameworks, which enhance the understanding of scripture. People from various backgrounds and experiences bring varied viewpoints to the table, which challenge individual biases and foster a more well-rounded understanding of scripture's message. When someone misinterprets scripture, the community can gently point out inconsistencies or offer alternative interpretations based on established teachings. Such feedback helps correct errors and ensures responsible handling of scripture. Seasoned members of the faith often have a deeper understanding of scripture gained through years of study and reflection. They can mentor newer members, share insights, and guide them in navigating complex passages.

Continued Page 2

Continued from Page 1

Of course, such a faith community would be ideal. Our faith communities are full of sinful people and, by expression, are imperfect spaces. This is why confession and absolution are critical components of a healthy Christian community. In grace, our church can provide a supportive environment where individuals can learn, grow, and refine their ability to discern truth from scripture.

Today, particularly when weaponised disinformation floods our digital landscape, the Lutheran Confessions, meticulously crafted documents outlining core Lutheran beliefs, serve as a vital compass. They provide a framework for interpreting scripture and navigating the complexities of the modern world.

Understanding and remembering the great debates leading to the development of the Confessions were grounded in scripture. That work for our forefathers offers a bulwark against the tides of disinformation. The confessions provide a set of core tenets—justification by faith alone, the centrality of scripture, and the sacraments—which can act as a filter through which information can be evaluated. By anchoring ourselves in these core principles, we develop a critical lens to distinguish truth from falsehood and propaganda from fact.

Furthermore, the Lutheran emphasis on Sola Scriptura empowers individuals to engage actively with scripture. By studying the Bible within the framework of the Confessions, we cultivate the ability to discern truth for ourselves. Our call to active engagement fosters a deeper understanding of faith and equips us to challenge the manipulative narratives weaponised in the cyberwar.

The fight against disinformation is not a solitary endeavour. In the Lutheran emphasis on the “priesthood of all believers,” we see the importance of community underscored. Through open dialogue and fellowship with fellow believers, we can collectively discern truth and hold each other accountable for upholding Christian values in the digital sphere. Luther himself emphasised the importance of “the fellowship of the saints” – a community of believers who support and challenge each other in their pursuit of faith. In the face of the cyber war, this fellowship has become more crucial than ever.

The cyber war may rage on, bombarding us with fabricated narratives and weaponised information. Yet, we are not without recourse. By anchoring ourselves in the timeless truths of the Gospel and employing a hermeneutic presented by the Lutheran Confessions, we cultivate a discerning eye and a resilient spirit. Through active engagement with scripture and the support of our Christian community, we can navigate the turbulent waters of the digital age and emerge stronger, our faith a beacon in the storm.

It is important to remember that faith is not a passive acceptance of dogma; it is a dynamic process of engagement with the divine. As we grapple with the challenges of the cyberwar, our faith must evolve to meet the demands of the times. The Lutheran Confessions, while grounded in scripture, are not static documents. They are a living tradition, open to interpretation and reapplication in new contexts.

In conclusion, the cyber war may threaten to drown us in a sea of misinformation, but faith provides a life raft. By upholding the love of God and compassion for our neighbour, drawing on the wisdom of scripture, interpreted through the lens of the Lutheran Confessions, and fostered in a supportive Christian community, we can navigate the treacherous digital landscape with discernment and resilience. Our faith, a time-tested compass, will guide us towards truth and allow us to emerge from the cyber war stronger, our resolve and convictions and our love unshaken.

Pastor Mike



2 Months Ended Feb. 29, 2024

Financial Summary

February current offerings were \$10,741 and Lent offerings were \$220. Church rental receipts were \$2,725. Synod benevolence receipts were \$570 and non-budget benevolence receipts consisted of \$100 for the Calgary Foodbank. Total February 2024 offerings and church rentals of \$13,686 were \$194 more than last year.

February expenses of \$15,371 were \$367 over budget mainly because of higher utility costs.

Highwood had a shortfall of \$1,685 for February 2024 compared to a shortfall of \$2,398 last year. Year to date, Highwood has a shortfall of \$6,571 compared to a shortfall of \$3,495 last year. Church receipts for 2024 were \$602 lower than last year (\$2,959 lower on Offerings partially offset by higher church rentals of \$2,357) and church expenses were \$2,474 higher than last year because of higher Synod convention fees, Synod study conference and subscription expenses (Eternity for Today).

Capital fund – \$94 was donated to the Highwood Lutheran Women fund and \$65 was donated to the building fund. Organ maintenance of \$410 was taken from the Organ fund for work done on a broken pallet. The balance in the capital account at the end of February was \$50,966.

Memorial fund – No changes. The balance at the end of February was \$11,375.

Bishop's Message for April

The message can be found online by clicking [here](#).

ON THE WEB BEYOND OUR WEBSITE

Here are some links that may be of interest to you:

The Easter Message from the World Council of Churches can be found at <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-easter-message-the-empty-tomb-is-a-sign-of-life-hope-and-love>.

THE EMPTY CHAIR

A man's daughter had asked the local minister to come and pray with her father. When the minister arrived, he found the man lying in bed with his head propped up on two pillows. An empty chair sat beside his bed. The minister assumed that the old fellow had been informed of his visit. "I guess you were expecting me," he said. "No, who are you?" said the father.

The minister told him his name and then remarked, "I see the empty chair; I figured you knew I was going to show up."

"Oh yeah, the chair," said the bedridden man. "Would you mind closing the door?"

Puzzled, the minister shut the door. "I have never told anyone this, not even my daughter," said the man. But all my life I have never known how to pray. At church I used to hear the pastor talk about prayer, but it went right over my head."

"I abandoned any attempt at prayer," the old man continued, "until one day about four years ago my best friend said to me, "Johnny, prayer is just a simple matter of having a conversation with Jesus. Here is what I suggest."

"Sit down in a chair; place an empty chair in front of you, and in faith see Jesus on the chair. It's not spooky because he promised, "I'll be with you always."

"Then just speak to him in the same way you're doing with me right now."

"So, I tried it and I've liked it so much that I do it a couple of hours every day. I'm careful though. If my daughter saw me talking to an empty chair, she'd either have a nervous breakdown or send me off to the funny farm."

The minister was deeply moved by the story and encouraged the old man to continue the journey. Then he prayed with him, anointed him with oil, and returned to the church.

Two nights later the daughter called to tell the minister that her dad had died that afternoon. "Did he die in peace?" he asked.

"Yes, when I left the house about two o'clock, he called me over to his bedside, told me he loved me and kissed me on the cheek. When I got back from the store an hour later, I found him dead.

But there was something strange about his death. Apparently, just before Dad died, he leaned over and rested his head on the chair beside the bed. What do you make of that?"

The minister wiped a tear from his eye and said, "I wish we could all go like that."



APRIL BIRTHDAYS

Melissa Anderson
Bruce Beamer
Ivy Cress
Serena Crisanti
Al Fedkenheuer
Gladys Grabinsky
Nevin McTavish
Michael Patychuk
Jacob Rath
David Richardson
Rose Sinclair
Edward Smith
William Strand
Riley Woycenko

EASTER LOVE

On Easter we celebrate love,
love coming down from heaven,
love blanketing the earth
in a transforming embrace;
unique and infinite love,
giving more than we can imagine
for us, to cleanse our sin,
a perfect sacrifice, Lamb of God,
the walking, talking Word.
He is teacher, role model, friend,
this God in human form,
dying, then rising from the dead,
proving all who believe
will also rise
to have eternal life, with Him,
Lord of all.

Oh, Happy, Happy Easter!
By Joanna Fuchs

OUR HIGHWOOD FAMILY

VERONIQUE (NICKY) MUTSCHLECHNER



Born in Strasbourg, Alsace Province, France, in 1936, I grew up in a bilingual environment, speaking mainly French and Russian to Grandma. Father was an engineer/geologist, specialized in hydrology. Mother was a lab tech and later a language teacher.

Dad's work took him to Tunisia where I spent my early years. When we returned to Strasbourg in 1942, the Germans were occupying France. My sister was born that year. In 1943 Dad was deported to Celle, Germany to work. My parents left me and my baby sister with a family in Lautenbach, in the Black Forest. Mum came to pick us up in 1944 to go back with her to Celle. We lived through the bombardments, food shortages etc. My parents were worried the Russians would come to Celle, but it was the Brits and Canadians. The Brits provided three large army trucks to take the French families back to France. I remember the devastation we saw as we travelled, pontoon bridges, throngs of people walking.

Back in Strasbourg, my little sister was born.

In 1946, I was one of a train full of children sent six months to Sweden to recuperate from the war. I ended up in Lannersta. I stayed at a beautiful country home of a retired judge, having a glorious summer with his grandchildren about my age. We returned to France before Christmas, and I had a suitcase full of toys, coffee, and chocolate.

In 1948, my parents bought a country home in Burgundy where Granny stayed with my sisters. I went to boarding school in Dijon for two years, visiting Granny on some weekends and holidays. Mom and Dad would come from Strasbourg. Dad looked after the garden, we had a huge variety of vegetables and the most delicious strawberries. We also went mushroom picking in the fields.

In 1949, some engineers from Venezuela enticed Dad to work in Venezuela. Off to Venezuela in 1950, parents leaving first, Granny, sisters, dog, and I following in 1950 in a Swiss cargo ship with 20 beautiful cabins for passengers. We lived in Barquisimeto where my sisters and I attended a nun's school. My parents had heard of the Codrington High School in Barbados and decided that would be a better choice for me, so off to boarding school in

Barbados, graduating with Oxford and Cambridge School Certificate. These were the happiest and most carefree years of my life.

In 1954 I went to New York City to study at the Katherine Gibbs Secretarial School, which has served me well later in life. When looking for work in Calgary, I had a job after the first interview I went to. In Venezuela, I worked for nine years at Shell, the last job being bilingual executive secretary to the General Manager of Marketing Division.

While in New York, I corresponded with Helmut whom I had met at a birthday party. When I returned to Venezuela, we married in 1956. Helmut was 22 and I was 19. We both matured together and were married for 58 years when Helmut died in 2014. Amy and Mark were born in Venezuela.

We attended Expo 1967 in Montreal, visited Ottawa with the tulips in bloom and upon returning to Venezuela applied for immigration to Canada, coming to Canada in 1968. Helmut got a job with Shell, and I started work downtown a year later. We bought our first and last house in North Haven. Lovely to live a quiet life in one spot.

Our four grandchildren always came during the summer. We kept them busy playing tennis every morning at the 19th Street Park which was totally free. They are between 40 and 32 years old now, and I am currently writing short stories for them of the different places we have lived in. The best one is probably the one about the Caracas earthquake in July of 1967.

On a very cold 1974 January day, we became Canadian citizens. Judge Sinclair was presiding, two Mounties standing guard on either side. The Swiss ladies served us tea and coffee with delicious cookies, a day I will never forget. It was also the year our youngest daughter, Laura was born.

We were attending Prince of Peace Lutheran Church when we first came, but when Mark became of confirmation age, around 1974, we looked for a church closer to us—Highwood Lutheran Church, and we have been members ever since. Laura was also confirmed at Highwood.

Now that I am retired, I can participate in church activities. There was no time when we were working.

