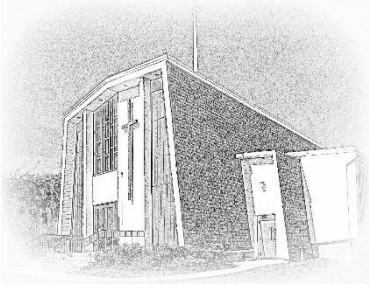


HIGHWOOD HIGHLIGHTS

February 2024

The Newsletter of Highwood Lutheran Church



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PASTOR'S MESSAGE

BEING LIGHTS ON THE PATH

While Lutheranism and Pelagianism are both Christian theological positions, they propose intensely different views on human nature, sin, grace, and salvation. The more I hear in the news, the more I see Lutheranism as profoundly counter-cultural. We are opposed to a selfish world that expresses this dangerous hierarchy, best described as the Heresy of Pelagianism.

Indeed, Lutheranism affirms the doctrine of original sin, which means that all humans are born with a sinful nature inherited from Adam and Eve, the first human beings who disobeyed God. Lutheranism also teaches that humans cannot save themselves from sin and its consequences by their own efforts or merits. Lutheranism emphasises the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, which means that God freely forgives sinners and declares them righteous for the sake of Christ, who died on the cross and rose again to pay for their sins. Lutheranism also holds that good works are the fruits of faith, not the cause of salvation.

Pelagianism is a 5th-century Christian heresy taught by Pelagius and his followers that stressed the essential goodness of human nature and the freedom of the human will. Pelagianism denies the doctrine of original sin and holds that sin is a voluntary act against God's law and that human beings are free to choose between good and evil. Pelagianism also teaches that humans can achieve perfection through divine grace and their own efforts and that they do not need Christ's atonement to be saved. Pelagianism was condemned by several church councils and by influential theologians such as Augustine and Jerome.

One of the most influential concepts in the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer is the idea of "costly grace", which he contrasts with "cheap grace" (this is the topic of his book "The Cost of Discipleship"). Cheap grace is the grace we receive without repentance, obedience, or discipleship. It is the grace we take for granted that we abuse and use to justify our sins. Costly grace, on the other hand, is the grace that demands our whole life, that calls us to follow Christ, and that enables us to do so. It is the grace that we receive through the cross, through suffering, and sacrifice.

Some critics have accused Bonhoeffer of Pelagianism, which is the heresy that denies the necessity of God's grace for salvation and asserts that human beings can achieve righteousness by their own efforts. They argue that Bonhoeffer's emphasis on costly grace implies that we must earn God's favour by our works and that he neglects the role of faith and justification in salvation. However, this accusation is based on a misunderstanding of Bonhoeffer's theology and context. Bonhoeffer was not trying to undermine the doctrine of grace but to restore its true meaning and value. He was reacting against the cheapening of grace in his own time when many Christians in Germany had compromised with Nazism and had lost their sense of discipleship. He was also influenced by his encounter with the church in Harlem, where he witnessed the struggle and faithfulness of black Christians under oppression. He saw that grace was not a cheap commodity but a costly treasure.

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Bonhoeffer did not deny the necessity of faith or justification, but he insisted they had to be accompanied by obedience and discipleship. He did not teach us that we can save ourselves by our works, but he taught us that we must respond to God's grace by our works. He accepted God's grace and embraced it in its fullness and costliness, not as an advocate of Pelagianism but as an advocate of a radical Christianity that follows Christ in every aspect of life.

In a world where Christ has been pushed to the side, cultural identity messages are dominated by the heretical ideals of self-reliance and denial of personal accountability. Indeed, Lutheranism faces criticism for challenging human pride and independence as it exposes humanity's inherent sinfulness and helplessness by advocating repentance and faith in God's mercy. Lutherans reject the notion of earning God's favour through personal works or rituals and emphasise salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. Their belief asserts that humans are born in a state of sin, incapable of doing good without God's grace, which is freely given based on God's sovereign will and love. Faith, considered a gift from God, enables individuals to trust in Christ's righteousness, with Christ being the sole mediator and source of salvation. Though not a means of earning salvation, good works are seen as a response to God's love, expressing our gratitude and obedience. By asserting the indispensable role of faith and God's grace, rejecting the notion of self-earned salvation, and urging humanity to respond to God's love with gratitude and obedience, Lutheranism emerges as a champion of a Christianity that embraces the fullness and costliness of God's redemptive love.

At Highwood Lutheran, we strive to live together in the community as disciples of Christ, supporting each other, praying for each other, and sharing the riches of God's grace. As a faithful congregation, we see what God has done and wants to do through us. Being part of a community that lives by faith, hope, and love is essential. Come to Highwood and discover the beauty and power of Lutheranism.

Pastor Mike



**12 Months Ended Dec. 31, 2023
Financial Summary**

- Total church receipts of \$176,770 were \$3,115 over budget. Current offerings were of \$138,099 were down 1.3%. Church rental income of \$33,387 were up 78% as compared to budget.

- ELCIC benevolence receipts of \$2,175 were up 95% over 2022.

- Donations to charitable organizations of \$5,510 were down 18% compared to 2022.

- Total church expenses of \$172,865 were \$791 under budget and \$2,828 lower than 2022 mainly because of lower repair and maintenance expenses.

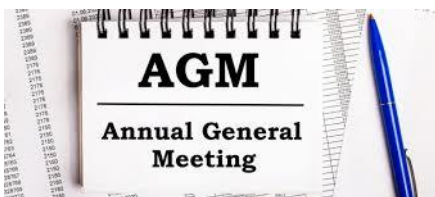
- Highwood had a 2023 operating surplus of \$3,905 compared to a shortfall of \$10,523 in 2022.

- Highwood's accumulated operating surpluses sitting in the capital account as of December 31, 2023 was \$27,016 as compared to \$22,431 at December 31, 2021.

- Memorial Fund: During the year \$5,000 was donated leaving a balance of \$10,375.

- Building Fund: No capital projects were undertaken in 2023. Donations of \$1,005 were made to leave a balance of \$1,005.

- Highwood Lutheran Liturgy Scholarship: No changes during the year. Balance in the account is \$14,000.



The Annual General Meeting of the congregation will be held on **Sunday, February 4th** following a **Soup and Bun Lunch** after the service.

SHROVE TUESDAY



PANCAKE SUPPER
Tuesday, February 13, 2024
6:00 PM

Please sign up downstairs or phone the church office



Wednesday, February 14, 2024
7:00 PM

Holy Communion with the Imposition of Ashes.



Abdul Conteh
Lillian Einarson
David Patychuk
Cameron Schneider
Vernon Schnell
Serena Wenslawe
Arthur Wildeman

**Bishop's Message for
Month**

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:

[Canadian Lutheran History](#)

<https://www.photopills.com/articles/astronomical-events-photography-guide>

<https://www.pravmir.com/australia-orthodoxy-fastest-growing-church-amidst-general-christian-decline/>



HOW LENT CAME TO BE

The period of Lent and its emphasis on penitential practices evolved slowly over the centuries.

THROUGHOUT EARLY CHRISTIANITY

In the early church, baptism and penance were key Lenten themes. Candidates would prepare themselves for baptism at Easter and Christians would do public penance for sins. In later years, the emphasis shifted to private penance. Lent became a time of forgiveness and reconciliation.

DURING THE MIDDLE AGES

Strict 40-day fasts, which included abstinence from meat and other foods, were obligatory for Christians. Gradually these practices became less rigid.

TODAY

The emphasis has shifted from long periods of fasting to prayer, meditation, and reflection on the meaning of Easter.

WHY LENT IS FORTY DAYS LONG

Fasting and prayer have been important observances since Biblical times. For example:

- Moses fasted and prayed for forty days. During this time God gave him the Ten Commandments. Read Exodus 34:27-28.
- Elijah fled for this life, fasting for forty days until he came to Mount Horeb, and then God appeared to him. Read 1 Kings 19:1-8
- After his baptism, Jesus withdrew to the desert to fast and pray for forty days. Read Matthew 4:1-2, Luke 4:1-2.

Sundays are not considered to be part of the forty days. That is why they are labelled as “Sundays in Lent” and not “Sundays of Lent.”

A NOTE FROM PASTOR MIKE

I came across an old copy of a little book by Helmut Thielicke. It is called *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians* and is full of wisdom and insight on practising theology in a faithful, humble, and edifying way. As a small book, anyone may enjoy exploring it and perhaps use it as a devotional. It will challenge, inspire, and equip you for your theological journey.

Thielicke was a German theologian and preacher who lived through the Nazi era and the World War II. He taught theology at various universities and seminaries and was known for his clear and engaging style. In this book, he addresses some of the common pitfalls and challenges that young theologians face, such as:

- The temptation to become proud and arrogant because of their knowledge and skills.
- The danger of losing their spiritual vitality and passion because of their academic pursuits.
- The difficulty of communicating their theological insights to the ordinary Christians in the church.
- One must balance one's critical thinking with one's personal faith and devotion.

In his book, Thielicke urges young theologians to remember that theology is not an end but a means to an end: the knowledge of God and the service of his people. He warns us not to separate theology from spirituality and to integrate it into life in a holistic way. He encourages us to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit and consider counsel from the church's traditions in our theological endeavours. He also reminds us that theology is not a static or finished product but a dynamic and ongoing process that requires constant learning and growth.

Thielicke's book is relevant for young and old theologians and anyone who wants to deepen their understanding of God and his word. It is short and easy to read, with profound and practical advice.

Pastor Mike

LENTEN THOUGHTS

God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy. *Pope Francis*

The command to love and serve—not merely tolerate—each other requires more commitment and sacrifice than we care to give, and so we do the polite minimum from afar. The seasons of Lent and Easter bring thoughts of surrender and sacrifice. *Nana Dolce*

Lent is a time of going very deeply into ourselves...What is it that stands between us and God? Between us and our brothers and sisters? Between us and life, the life of the Spirit? Whatever it is, let us relentlessly tear it out, without a moment's hesitation. *Catherine Doherty*

ROSE VESTMENTS

The rose colour used in liturgical vestments, such as stoles and paraments, holds particular significance in the context of the Christian liturgical calendar. This colour is most notably associated with two specific Sundays during the liturgical year: Gaudete Sunday and Laetare Sunday.

1. **Gaudete Sunday (Third Sunday of Advent):** Gaudete is Latin for "Rejoice," and Gaudete Sunday, which occurs on the third Sunday of Advent, marks a shift in tone during the Advent season. While the earlier weeks of Advent are often focused on penitence and reflection, Gaudete Sunday is a day of joy and celebration. The rose colour symbolizes the joy of the approaching Christmas season, representing a moment of anticipation and hope as the faithful prepare for the birth of Christ.
2. **Laetare Sunday (Fourth Sunday of Lent):** Similarly, Laetare Sunday takes place during the season of Lent, typically on the fourth Sunday. Laetare is Latin for "Rejoice," and on this day, the Church encourages a brief respite from the penitential character of Lent. The rose colour serves as a visual reminder of the joy that comes from the anticipation of Easter and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It provides a glimpse of the hope and celebration that lie ahead, even in the midst of the Lenten season.

In both cases, the use of rose is symbolic, representing a moment of joy, anticipation, and hope within the broader context of the liturgical calendar. The specific choice of rose is a departure from the more common liturgical colours of purple or blue used during penitential seasons, and it serves to convey a distinct message of rejoicing within the worshipping community.

PROVIDENTIAL THEOLOGY

One of the challenges I struggle with is to understand "Providential theology" related to Christ and to reconcile the doctrine of justification by faith alone with the doctrine of divine sovereignty over human affairs. Lutherans affirm that God is the creator and sustainer and redeemer of all things, and that nothing happens apart from his will and permission. We also affirm that God justifies sinners by grace through faith in Christ alone, and that human beings have a capacity of a responsible response to the gospel. These two aspects of God's relationship with humanity can be challenging to harmonise without compromising either one.

Comprehending this challenge is to emphasise the distinction between God's hidden and revealed will, and to acknowledge that human beings cannot fully comprehend how God works in history and in individual lives. God's hidden will is

his eternal plan and purpose for all things. God's revealed will is expressed in his commandments and promises and covenants, which he makes known to us through his word and sacraments. We can trust that God's hidden will is always good and wise, even when we do not understand it or when it seems to contradict his revealed will or, perhaps more confusing, our moral understandings.

When we let God be God, we can trust the distinction between God's antecedent and consequent will, and to recognise that God's will is not static but dynamic and responsive to human actions. Consider the story of Jonah and the saving of Nineveh. God's antecedent will is his original intention and desire for all things, which reflects his goodness and love. God's consequent will is his adjusted plan, as he changes his mind, and decision for all things, which takes into account human sin and rebellion in light of God's redeeming grace. We see this as God does not change his antecedent will, while he may change his consequent will in response to human repentance or resistance.

There must be some allowance for response to circumstance. This demands the distinction between God's causal and permissive will, and faith to accept that God allows some things to happen that he does not directly cause or approve. God's causal will is his active involvement and intervention in all things, which manifests his power and glory. God's permissive will is his passive allowance and tolerance of some things is required for honest relationships and must be part of a loving integration which respects human freedom and responsibility. God does not cause or approve of evil, but he ordains (gives permission of allows) it for a greater good or for a just judgment.

Pastor Mike

SEEN ON CHURCH SIGNS

We've given God so many reasons to walk away. Thankfully he never does.

When life isn't a bed of roses, remember who wore a crown of thorns.

If you walk with God, you will never be out of step.

Tomorrow's forecast: God reigns and the Sun shines.

Store the Bible in your heart, not on a shelf.

If you are more fortunate than others, build a longer table not a higher fence.

Lord, help us to be the people our dogs think we are.

God loves you, whether you like it or not.

God didn't create anything without purpose, but mosquitoes do come close!

Eternity is a long time to think about where you went wrong.

BREAD FROM HEAVEN

Jesus's teaching on eating his flesh and drinking his blood may sound strange initially, but it profoundly connects to the Old Testament. The Hebrew scriptures show God created people to have a close relationship with him. This is expressed through the image of a meal, represented by the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden, which Adam and Eve could potentially eat from (Genesis 2:9, 3:22). Only because of their eating from the tree of good and evil, they were expelled from the Garden, losing their friendship with God and eternal life (Genesis 3).

We see the offering of bread continues throughout scripture. Melchizedek, the king of Salem (peace) and "priest of God Most High," offered bread and wine to thank God for Abram's victory (Genesis 14:18-20). Later in Exodus, God established the Passover feast to save the Israelites from slavery and death in Egypt (Exodus 12). It involved killing a spotless lamb and eating a meal with lamb and unleavened bread. By putting lamb's blood on their houses and eating its flesh, the Israelites were spared from the angel of death and freed from slavery, and in the desert, God gave manna as food (Exodus 16).

Jesus is the new Bread from Heaven, feeding us with his Body and Blood in the Eucharist as we travel toward our heavenly Promised Land (John 6:32-58). In the same way, Jesus, the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29), poured out his blood on the Cross and gave us his Flesh in the Eucharist. Through this sacramental meal, we are rescued from spiritual death and liberated from the power of sin. Jesus' sacrifice makes the Cross the new Tree of Life, giving us access to God and eternal life by means of The Holy Meal at the Last Supper, when he took bread and wine and said, "This is my body... This is my blood" (Matthew 26:26-28). He commanded his disciples to "do this in memory of me" (Luke 22:19). Our "King of kings" and "great high priest" changes bread and wine into his Body and Blood in Jerusalem, offering them as the perfect gift from the father (Hebrews 10:1-18). We understand that the communion rite "re-presents" Jesus's passion and resurrection and is the source and summit of the Christian life. When we receive the Eucharist, we believe that we are receiving the real presence of Jesus himself, not just a symbol or a reminder. Through this sacramental meal, we are rescued from spiritual death and liberated from the power of sin as it strengthens our union with Christ and his Church and prepares us to face the future.

THE HARDEST GIFT

Many people struggle with accepting love or grace from God. They may feel unworthy, guilty, ashamed, or fearful of God's judgment. They may have been hurt by others who claimed to represent God, or they may have doubts about God's existence or goodness. They may think that they have to earn God's favour by doing good deeds, following rules, or avoiding sins. The truth is that love or grace from God is the hardest gift to receive and the gift we most need.

Love or grace from God is the hardest gift to receive because it goes against our human nature. We are used to economic exchanges, which makes for conditional love, where we have to meet certain expectations or standards to be loved. We are used to transactional relationships, where we must give something in return for what we receive. We are used to performance-based evaluations, where we are judged by our results or achievements. But God's love or grace is not like that. It is unconditional, free, and unmerited. It is "not" based on what we do or don't do. Instead, it is based on who God is and what He has done for us.

Love or grace from God is the gift we most need because it is the source of spiritual healing and transformation. Without God's love or grace, we would be lost in our sins, broken by our wounds, and stuck in our patterns. Without God's love or grace, we would have no hope, no peace, no joy, and no purpose. Without God's love or grace, we would be separated from Him forever. With God's love or grace, we can be forgiven, restored, and renewed. With God's love or grace, we can have eternal life, abundant life, and meaningful life. With God's love or grace, we can be reconciled with Him and with others.

The modern culture makes it seem easier to reject or resist God's love or grace than to receive it with gratitude and humility. Remember, there is no such thing as kingdom bucks or merits. There is no point in trying to earn or repay God's love or grace. Instead, we respond to grace and love with faith and obedience, as we follow Christ. Our lifelong challenge is to not take for granted or abuse God's love or grace but cherish it and share it with others. For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9)

HEALING DOES NOT MEAN CURE

"In its ministry of healing, the church does not replace the gifts of God that come through the scientific community, nor does it promise a cure. The church offers and celebrates gifts such as these: God's presence with strength and comfort in time of suffering, God's promise of wholeness and peace, and God's love embodied in the community of faith.

THE BIBLE

An army chaplain was visiting wounded soldiers in the hospital. The chaplain offered to read some Bible passages to one young soldier. But the soldier said, "I'm cold," so the chaplain wrapped his own coat around the young man. Next, the soldier asked for something to drink. The chaplain propped up the soldier's head and held his own water canteen to the young man's lips. Then the chaplain asked again if he could read some passages to the young man. This time, the soldier replied, "If there is anything in that Bible that caused you to do what you've done for me, yes. Please read to me that part of the Bible".

LUTHERANISM

Lutheranism, Protestant movement founded on the principles of Martin Luther. Lutheranism arose at the start of the Reformation, after Luther (as traditionally believed) posted his Ninety-five Theses in Wittenberg, Ger. It spread through much of Germany and into Scandinavia, where it was established by law. It was brought to the New World by the colonists of New Netherland and New Sweden and spread through the U.S. Middle Atlantic states in the 18th century and the American Midwest in the 19th century. Its doctrines are contained in the catechisms of Luther and in the Augsburg Confession. Lutheran doctrine emphasizes salvation by faith alone and the primacy of the Bible as the church's authority. The Lutheran ministry is one of service—not special status—and is described as the priesthood of all believers. Lutherans accept two sacraments (baptism and the Eucharist) and believe in predestination to salvation. The Lutheran World Federation is based in Geneva, Switzerland. See also Pietism.

MARTIN LUTHER

Martin Luther, (born Nov. 10, 1483, Eisleben, Saxony—died Feb. 18, 1546, Eisleben), German priest who sparked the Reformation. Luther studied philosophy and law before entering an Augustinian monastery in 1505. He was ordained two years later and continued his theological studies at the University of Wittenberg, where he became a professor of biblical studies.

On a trip to Rome in 1510 he was shocked by the corruption of the clergy and was later troubled by doubts centring on fear of divine retributive justice. His spiritual crisis was resolved when he hit on the idea of justification by faith, the doctrine that salvation is granted as a gift through God's grace.

Luther urged reform of the Roman Catholic Church, protesting the sale of indulgences and other abuses, and in 1517 he distributed to the archbishop of Mainz and several friends his Ninety-five Theses (according to legend, Luther nailed the theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg); the theses questioned Roman Catholic teaching and called for reform. In 1521 he was excommunicated by Pope Leo X and declared an outlaw at the Diet of Worms.

Under the protection of the elector of Saxony, Luther took refuge in Wartburg. There he translated the Bible into German; his translation has long been regarded as the greatest landmark in the history of the German language.

He later returned to Wittenberg, and in 1525 he married the former nun Katherine of Bora, with whom he raised five children.

Though his preaching was the principal spark that set off the Peasants' War (1524–25), Luther's vehement denunciation of the peasants contributed to their defeat.

Luther's break with Rome led to the founding of the Lutheran Church; the Lutheran confession of faith or, Augsburg Confession, was produced with Luther's sanction by Philipp Melanchthon in 1530. Luther's writings included hymns, a liturgy, and many theological works.

PHILIPP MELANCHTHON

Philipp Melanchthon, orig. **Philipp Schwartzerd**, (born Feb. 15, 1497, Bretten, Palatinate—died April 19, 1560, probably Wittenberg, Saxony), German Protestant reformer. His education in Germany was greatly influenced by humanist learning, and he was named professor of Greek at Wittenberg in 1518.

A friend and defender of Martin Luther, Melanchthon was the author of *Loci communes* (1521), the first systematic treatment of the principles of the Reformation, and of the Protestant creed known as the Augsburg Confession (1530). He also reorganized the entire educational system of Germany, founding and reforming several of its universities. His willingness to compromise with Catholics on theological issues in his later years became controversial.

Source: [Lutheranism summary | Britannica](#)



Almighty God, guide us now, so that, following your Son, we may walk safely through the wilderness of this world toward the life you alone can give, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.