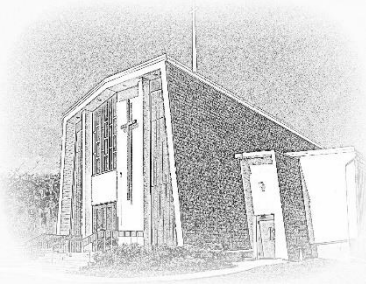


# HIGHWOOD HIGHLIGHTS

March 2025

The Newsletter of Highwood Lutheran Church



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## Pastor's Message

Scripture addresses forgiveness in various contexts, both divine and interpersonal, often implied through repentance, grace, and redemption themes. We explicitly see this in the passages visited in the rite of confession and absolution. In Psalm 51:10, we read, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." This Psalm by David after his sin with Bathsheba shows a plea for divine intervention in forgiveness, highlighting the human need for God to cleanse and renew. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12:9, "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'" Here, Paul speaks to the sufficiency of God's grace, which is needed when we feel our weakest, including moments of self-condemnation. We receive more direction in 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This scripture directly connects confession with forgiveness, emphasizing that God's forgiveness absolves, not our self-forgiveness.

I am more afraid of my own heart than of the pope and all his cardinals. I have within me the great pope, Self.

- Martin Luther

Accepting God's grace requires a high level of intentional self-awareness. The season of Lent presents as a means of grappling with the weight of personal guilt and the shadow of past actions. In Lutheran theology, forgiveness is addressed within the broader framework of sin, repentance, and the Rite of Absolution.

Martin Luther's theology emphasises the doctrine of \*sola fide\* (faith alone), where forgiveness and salvation are gifts from God received through faith, not earned through human efforts, meaning self-forgiveness is impossible from this theological perspective, forgiveness for sin can only come from God. We hold that only God is Holy and Just, so only God has the authority and power to forgive sins. Humans, therefore, cannot grant themselves forgiveness because they do not possess the divine authority or purity to do so.

Lutheran theology is rooted in the Augustinian emphasis on the doctrine of original sin, which posits that all humans are inherently sinful by nature. The corrupt nature of humanity cannot absolve sin because it is part of the problem. In his "Confessions," St. Augustine offers a profound introspection into human sinfulness and the longing for redemption. His views on the human condition reveal a deep understanding of why self-forgiveness is impossible.

"Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee."

- St. Augustine

The confession presents the continuous struggle with humanity's need for a Saviour. One of the most famous attempts to understand this is based on a theology presented by Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109). His formulation of the satisfaction theory of atonement becomes the basis of the development of Substitutionary Atonement Theology. According to Anselm, particularly in his work "Cur Deus Homo" (Why God Became Man), sin is an affront to God's honour.

**Continued Page 2**

Since we human beings cannot pay the debt for this affront due to our sinful nature, God, in the person of Jesus Christ, takes on human form to offer a sacrifice sufficient to restore God's honour. Christ's death is seen as an act of substitution, in which he pays the debt on behalf of humanity.

Augustine, Anselm et al. present a Christological philosophy that suggests that true peace with ourselves, including forgiveness, is found only in God. Indeed, all Christology attempts to explain the human struggle with our need for a Saviour. How do we answer the challenge of living with sin as a form of restlessness, an internal discord that one cannot resolve alone? Forgiveness requires a transformation that transcends mere human capability; it involves a return to God, where true healing and forgiveness are found.

As Christians, Prayer is a pivotal way to explore faith by asking questions, seeking understanding, or contemplating theological issues. Prayerful engagement can lead to a more robust faith as understanding deepens. Luther's struggle with his sense of unworthiness and sinfulness famously led to his pivotal understanding of "Justification by Faith."

"To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing."  
- Martin Luther

This quote underscores our need for prayer to connect with God, which is crucial for forgiveness. Luther was profoundly impacted by the understanding that humans cannot forgive themselves because of inherent sinfulness. God's grace as the only true source of absolution. The human heart, burdened by its judgment, cannot lift itself out of guilt without divine intervention.

Augustine also speaks to the concept of \*original sin\*, suggesting that our very nature is inclined towards sin, making self-forgiveness a flawed endeavour. As we start from a state inherently flawed, how can we, from our flawed perspective, offer ourselves the grace that only God can provide? Luther's torment over his sins illustrates why self-forgiveness is impossible, as we are too close to our faults to judge ourselves fairly or mercifully. Our perception of our sin can become diminished or exaggerated in our own eyes, making honest self-forgiveness unattainable. Luther often referred to himself as the "chief of sinners," highlighting his deep sense of personal sinfulness and the need for divine forgiveness:

"If I am a hypocrite, I am of a peculiar kind, for I am conscious of my hypocrisy; I am a chief of sinners, and there is no sin of which I have not been guilty."  
- Martin Luther

These statements reveal Luther's intense self-awareness of his sinfulness, suggesting that acknowledging oneself as the "chief of sinners" is not a barrier to God's forgiveness but rather an acknowledgement of the depth of divine grace required for forgiveness.

Understanding the Lutheran worldview, we see humans as "simul justus et peccator" (simultaneously justified and sinner). Our transition is a process, so even though God forgives Christians, they still struggle with sin throughout their lives the old Adam must die.. Because of this ongoing battle with sin, humans cannot fully forgive themselves in a way that would be theologically complete or satisfactory; only God's forgiveness fully addresses their sinfulness.

Receiving forgiveness starts with repentance (acknowledging and turning away from sin) and faith in Christ's work on the cross. Lutherans believe one must confess sins to God and trust His promise of forgiveness through Jesus. This confession is about receiving forgiveness from God first before any form of self-forgiveness. The sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper play crucial roles in forgiveness. Baptism is seen as a means of grace where one's sins are washed away, and the Lord's Supper is where believers receive grace through the body and blood of Christ. These sacraments are administered by the church, not by oneself, further highlighting forgiveness's communal and divine aspect rather than a personal, self-administered act.

While people may forgive one another, self-forgiveness must begin with a divine act because we are too entangled in our guilt to untangle ourselves. The Bible teaches that God's forgiveness is unconditional, yet our human condition limits our capacity to forgive ourselves. While there might be a psychological aspect to feeling forgiven or forgiving oneself (like moving past guilt or shame), this does not equate to the divine forgiveness necessary for salvation. Self-forgiveness might psychologically help one live a more peaceful life, but it does not have the salvific impact that divine forgiveness has.

The struggle to forgive oneself is futile when viewed through the lenses of Luther, Anselm, Augustine, and the Bible. The need for a Saviour is fundamentally about recognizing our limitations in dealing with sin and guilt. Self-forgiveness then is a second order step as it is not merely about absolving oneself but about first aligning with a divine process of redemption. Luther teaches us to look beyond our failing efforts to God's grace. Luther's acknowledgment of being the "chief of sinners" underlines his understanding of the heart for reliance on the divine forgiveness from God rather than self-absolution. We face an intrinsic restlessness without divine peace, and the Scriptures provide the narrative of God's role in our healing and forgiveness. Ultimately, all forgiveness starts with the personal acknowledgment of one's need for divine mercy, in a process where we surrender our self-judgment to God's loving judgment. Christianity is then a journey from self-condemnation to redemption by receiving the grace that only God can give, that we extend that grace to ourselves and others. In this theological framework, self-forgiveness is less about forgetting our sins and more about remembering Christ had already forgiven them.

Peace be with you  
Pastor Mike



### FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

Abdul Conteh  
Lillian Einarson  
David Patychuk  
Cam Schneider  
Vern Schnell  
Serena Wenslaw  
Art Wilderman

### MARCH BIRTHDAYS

Chloe Giacomini  
Thelma Jung  
Joyce Rasmussen  
Phil Tang  
Andres Torres Ferreros  
Sandra Whitehead  
Megan Whitehead  
Jamie Whitehead  
Laura Woycenko

### SHROVE TUESDAY SUPPER



Join us on **Tuesday, March 4<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 PM** for a pancake and sausage supper. Please sign the sheet in the basement to indicate how many will be attending, or phone the church office (403-289-8206) if you wish to attend.



We begin the Season of Lent on **Wednesday, March 5<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 PM** with a Service of Holy Communion with the Imposition of Ashes.

### BISHOP'S MESSAGE

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



**1 month ended January 31, 2025**

### Financial Summary

January current offerings were \$14,622 and church rental receipts were \$3,300. Synod benevolence receipts were \$10 and non-budget benevolence receipt consisted of \$100 for CLWR and \$50 for Calgary Foodbank. Total January 2025 current offerings and church rentals of \$17,922 were \$4,696 more than last year.

January expenses of \$16,449 were \$998 over budget. Extra expenses for Jan consisted of \$584 for 2025 Eternity for Today subscription and utilities were higher by \$616.

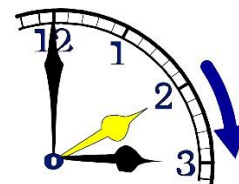
Highwood had a surplus of \$1,473 for January 2025 compared to a shortfall of \$4,886 last year.

Church receipts for January 2025 were \$4,696 higher than last year (\$4,711 higher on offerings but \$15 lower on church rentals) and church expenses were \$1,663 lower than last year.

Capital fund – Highwood received a \$40 donation for Building fund and \$118 for the Highwood Lutheran Women account (current balance \$1,827). The balance in the capital account at the end of January was \$28,234.

Memorial fund – No changes. The balance at the end of January was \$12,000.

### DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME BEGINS



Daylight Savings time begins on **Sunday, March 9<sup>th</sup>** at 2:00 AM. Set your clocks **ahead** one hour.

## THE SONS OF THUNDER

The "Sons of Thunder" refers to James and John, two of Jesus Christ's twelve apostles, as mentioned in Mark 3:17. The term "Boanerges," which translates to "Sons of Thunder," was a nickname given to them by Jesus. While the Bible does not explicitly explain the reason for this name, it likely reflects their fiery and zealous personalities. For example, in Luke 9:54, James and John suggested calling down fire from heaven to punish a Samaritan village that rejected Jesus, showcasing their passionate and impulsive nature.[1][2][3]

James and John were fishermen by trade, sons of Zebedee. They were among Jesus' closest disciples, often included in significant events such as the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1). Over time, their zeal was tempered by Jesus' teachings, transforming them into leaders of the early Christian church. James became the first Apostle to be martyred (Acts 12:2) (the first martyr was Stephen; Acts 7:54-60), while John lived a long life, earning the title "Apostle of Love" for his writings emphasising love and truth.[2][3][5]

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[2] Why did Jesus refer to James and John as the sons of thunder? <https://www.gotquestions.org/sons-of-thunder.html>

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## THE 5<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY HERESY THAT IS ALIVE AND WELL

Pelagianism is a 5th-century Christian heresy attributed to Pelagius, a British monk, and his followers. It emphasises the inherent goodness of human nature and the freedom of the will while rejecting the doctrine of original sin. According to

Pelagianism, Adam's sin did not corrupt human nature or tarnish humanity with original sin; instead, individuals are born morally neutral, capable of choosing good or evil without divine grace. Pelagius asserted that God would not command the impossible, thus humans must possess the ability to lead sinless lives through their own efforts, even though this rarely occurs in practice.

The Church at the Council of Carthage condemned the heresy in 418 AD for denying the necessity of divine grace for salvation and undermining key doctrines such as Jesus' atonement. Augustine of Hippo firmly opposed Pelagianism, emphasising humanity's total dependence on God's grace due to the inherited corruption from Adam's sin.

Lutherans view Pelagianism as a serious heresy because it denies original sin and humanity's need for God's grace in salvation. According to Lutheran theology, as articulated in documents like the \*Formula of Concord\*, humans are born in a state of sin and are incapable of initiating their salvation or achieving righteousness without divine intervention. Pelagianism is rejected because it attributes too much power to human will and downplays the necessity of Christ's sacrifice and grace in redemption. Lutherans also reject Semi-Pelagianism, which suggests that humans can make an "initial move" toward God without His grace.

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## SOME LENTEN TRADITIONS

### PINATAS



The tradition of whacking a papier-mâché creation filled with candy originally started in Italy as a Lenten tradition and then was picked up by the Spanish and brought to Mexico, where it became associated with parties. The original pinata was brightly decorated and had seven cones,

representing the Seven Deadly Sins, and if you could 'defeat' the Seven Deadly Sins, then you got heavenly rewards in the form of that candy.

### PRETZELS



In the early Middle Ages, Lenten fasting required giving up meat and dairy, so pretzels became popular. Parents used to give them to children as treats for good behavior. The twisty shape is meant to represent "arms folded in prayer,"

### HOT CROSS BUNS



These buns with the shape of the cross on top have become a traditional dessert during the Lenten season. At first, the cross on top was just how monks would score the bread, so it doesn't bake unevenly. Medieval monks would hand out the mini loaves to the poor. The English made them into a fruit cake and

drew the cross on top with icing. Superstitious people would wear hot cross buns around their necks as amulets, and if they got sick, they would nibble on them because they thought that would help them get better.

### MARDI GRAS



*Mardi Gras* is French for "Fat Tuesday" and is the celebratory carnival that leads up to the beginning of Lent, the season of fasting and penitence. It gets its name from the practice of

consuming foods that would be forbidden during Lent leading up to the beginning of the fast on Ash Wednesday.

The ceasefire in Gaza offers a fragile moment of hope, creating a rare opportunity to reach those in desperate need. Your support will help deliver medical care, trauma support, and essential supplies like food, blankets, and hygiene kits to those in urgent need. Please consider making a gift today. We thank you for your generosity and your commitment to the people of Gaza. To read the full appeal, [please click here](#).

Individuals and congregations wishing to support relief efforts during this critical window of time can donate as follows:

- Make a designated offering for "Gaza Relief" through your Highwood Offerings.

- Call CLWR at 1-800-661-2597 (locally at 204-694-5602) to donate or go online at [clwr.org/gaza](http://clwr.org/gaza).

- Send a cheque made payable to CLWR and mailed to CLWR, 400-185 Carlton St., Winnipeg, MB R3C 3J1. Please indicate that you wish to contribute to "Gaza Relief"

## SOME THOUGHTS ON LENT

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

"Unless there is Good Friday in your life, there can be no Easter Sunday." *Fulton J. Sheen*

"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*

"Prayer does not change the purpose of God. But prayer does change the action of God." *Chuck Smith*

"Seek a relationship when you pray, not answers. You won't always find answers, but you will always find Jesus." *Fr. Mike Schmitz*

"Lenten practices of giving up pleasures are a good reminder that the purpose of life is not pleasure. The purpose of life is to attain a perfect life, all truth and undying ecstatic love—which is the definition of God. In pursuing that happiness, we find happiness." *Fulton J. Sheen*

"It is not just about giving up our favorite food but it's about going further and giving up things like hatred and unforgiveness. You need to clean your heart and prepare yourself for purity." *Amanda Jobs*

"During these 40 days, let me put away all my pride. Let me change my heart and give up all that is not good within me. Let me love God with all that I am and all that I have." *Genesis Grain*



### Critical Window of Support for Gaza

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada joins with Canadian Lutheran World Relief (CLWR) in responding to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. While your support has been lifesaving and vital, it's difficult to fully grasp the scale of the need still facing the people of Gaza and the West Bank.