

HIGHWOOD HIGHLIGHTS

November 2023

The Newsletter of Highwood Lutheran Church



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PASTOR'S MESSAGE

The Joy of Paradox, or Why Simple Ain't Simple

Preparing for confirmation class is an excellent time to sharpen one's theology. Of the concepts I explore with confirmation students in their Bible Year, one of the more challenging is the theological exploration of paradox.

Paradox is a term that describes a statement or situation that contradicts itself but may nevertheless be valid. Paradoxes are often used in literature, philosophy, and theology to challenge our assumptions and provoke deeper thinking. In theological contexts, a paradox can sometimes expose a glimpse into the mind of God, and this helps us explore why meaning and understanding. Reflecting on the distinctions between theological ideals, such as love and indifference, law and gospel, sinner and saint, already and not yet, good and evil, and condemned and redeemed gives insight into our own understanding of the transcendent.

Martin Luther was one of the most influential 16th-century theologians because he used paradox to express his insights. Luther was well aware of the limitations of human reason and language when describing God's mysteries. He also recognised that God often reveals himself unexpectedly and surprisingly, especially through suffering and the cross. To emphasise this paradox, Luther coined the term "*theology of the cross*" to contrast redemptive theology with the "*theology of glory*," based on human speculation and achievement.

The *theology of the cross* is a way of understanding God's revelation that emphasises his hiddenness and his grace. It is based on faith, not certainty, and acknowledges that God's ways are not ours. The theology of the cross does not shy away from the paradoxes that arise from God's self-disclosure but instead embraces them as expressions of his wisdom and love. For Luther, paradoxes are not problems to be solved but invitations to explore, gain insight, to trust, and, to worship.

Many paradoxes are associated with Luther's theology and are articulated explicitly in his writings. Perhaps the most pivotal paradox is his description of Christians as *simul iustus et peccator*, or "at the same time righteous and sinner", which describes how even though we are justified by faith alone in Christ, we still struggle with sin and temptation in our daily lives. (Martin Luther (2012). "*Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*", p.56, Fortress Press) This contrast lands us in our baptism as we realize we are in need of confession and absolution and remember that we are not perfect, but by the grace of God, we are forgiven. Luther's description of law and gospel is another potent juxtaposition. The law says, "Do this", and it is never done. Grace says, "Believe in this," and everything is already done. Luther was adamant that we understood that we cannot earn salvation by obeying God's commands, but we receive it as a gift by trusting in his promises. The law shows us our sinfulness and need for grace, while the gospel shows us God's mercy and gives us a new identity in Christ. Such theological contrasts are found regularly. When we say that God is hidden in his revelation, we understand that God does not reveal himself according to our expectations or desires but according to his purposes and plans. God often hides himself under his opposite, such as weakness, foolishness, suffering, and death. The supreme example of this is the cross, where God reveals his power in weakness, his wisdom in foolishness, his glory in shame, and his life in death.

Continued Page 2

Continued from Page 1

These paradoxes are not meant to confuse us or make us doubt God's goodness but rather to point us to the mystery and majesty of God's grace. They show us that God is not bound by our logic or categories but transcends them in surprising and beautiful ways. They also show us that God is not indifferent or distant from us but intimately involved in our lives and history. They challenge us to look beyond appearances and trust in God's promises.

As we encounter Paradox, we receive a gift where we can glimpse the mind of God, who is both transcendent and immanent, both hidden and revealed, both just and merciful. We can also find meaning and understanding in the distinctions between theological ideals, such as love and indifference, law and gospel, sinner and saint, already and not yet, good and evil, and condemned and redeemed. These distinctions help us to appreciate the complexity and richness of God's character and actions as we recognise our sinful condition and need for grace.

Ultimately, Paradoxes are not contradictions or errors. They are expressions of truth that go beyond our comprehension. They are not obstacles to faith but growth opportunities. They are not signs of weakness or confusion but evidence of transcendent strength and clarity. Paradoxes are part of what makes Lutheran theology so compelling and relevant for today's world as they invite us to wrestle with theological insights and discover new dimensions of God's grace.

See you on Sunday.

Pastor Mike

Bishop's Message for Month

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



NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Elizabeth Anderson
Ethan Cress
Ruth Gummo
Nicky Mutschlechner
Anna Sribney

BIRTHDAY SUNDAY

On November 19th following the service there will be a soup and bun lunch. **Three volunteers are needed to make their favourite soup.** Attendees and soup makers, sign up on the list downstairs.



LUTHERAN CAMPUS MINISTRY



BETTER TOGETHER 2023

Better Together is Lutheran Campus Ministry-Calgary's annual fall fundraising event for 2023.

Join us at Hope Lutheran Church on **November 25 at 3:00 PM (doors open at 2:30)** for Holden Evening Prayer, a short program about LCM-Calgary, and a simple supper of soup and bread. **Get your free ticket [here!](#)**

Donation of items to the auction are welcome. To learn about donating an item to the Auction, please visit the [Auction Items Donation](#) page. The auction will run from **November 15 — November 25 ending at 8:00 p.m.**

Church Financial Report

Nine Months ended
September 30, 2023

September current offerings were \$10,113 and church rental receipts were \$2,950. Synod benevolence receipts were \$200 and non-budget benevolence receipts consisted of \$245 for CLWR. Total September 2023 offerings and church rentals of \$13,063 was \$793 less than last year.

September expenses of \$13,085 were \$1,386 under budget.

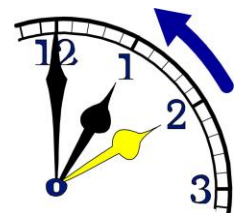
Highwood had a small shortfall of \$22 for September 2023 compared to a surplus of \$867 last year. Year to date, Highwood has a shortfall of \$2,883 compared to a shortfall of \$15,405 last year. Church receipts for 2023 are \$11,682 higher than last year (\$365 higher on Offerings and \$11,317 higher on church rentals) and church expenses are \$840 lower than last year.

Capital Fund – \$45 was donated to the Highwood Ladies group (current balance of \$1,288) and \$60 to the Building Fund. The balance in the Capital account at the end of September was \$46,911.

Memorial Fund – No changes. The balance at the end of September was \$10,375.

TIME CHANGE

Set your clocks **back** one hour on Sunday, November 5, 2023





STEWARDSHIP

Managing God's Gifts To Us

TEN STEWARDSHIP PRINCIPLES

- 1. Respond gratefully** to what God has first given us. All that we do is a response to God's grace. Everything we are, have, and use comes from God. "...but they gave themselves first to the Lord." 2 Corinthians 8:5
- 2. Obey responsibly** to glorify God as a faithful proclamation of God's word. We acknowledge our faith and show our faith in the gospel for the glory of God and for the building up of the body of Christ. "...you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ." 2 Corinthians 9:13
- 3. Sacrifice proportionately** as Christ sacrificed for us. For our sake Jesus gave up everything to make us rich through the cross and the resurrection. "...gave according to their means, and even beyond their means." 2 Corinthians 8:3
- 4. Give willingly** as moved by the Holy Spirit. We have been prepared to give of ourselves. We give our time, talents, and resources freely. "For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave..." 2 Corinthians 8:3
- 5. Share abundantly** as we have received. We give to build up the body of Christ. We use and share our gifts for the benefit of all. "...and God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work." 2 Corinthians 9:8
- 6. Give proportionately** is our way of giving in relation to our abundance. We are to give according to our "means," not according to an income or a budget. "If the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have," 2 Corinthians 8:12
- 7. Commit intentionally** means making a statement about your intent and following through. As members in the body of Christ, we are asked to make a commitment of our time, talents, and resources as a faithful response to God and as a statement of support for God's work. "...arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised." 2 Corinthians 9:5
- 8. Contribute regularly** means practicing our stewardship on a daily basis. By doing so this becomes a lifestyle. Paul instructs us: "On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn." 1 Corinthians 16:2
- 9. Live genuinely** means putting your faith into action. This is the tangible demonstration of what is sincerely on our hearts and where our treasure is, not simply a verbal expression. The Macedonians set an example that Paul called to the attention of the Corinthians. "I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others." 2 Corinthians 8:8
- 10. Accept a challenge** means recognizing the dynamic nature of our faith. As our faith grows so will our blessings, and our responsibilities. Paul writes, "...the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." 2 Corinthians 9:6

Source: *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.*

OUR HIGHWOOD FAMILIES

MEET JOLLY AND SAM MATHEW



Here is a little insight to our background. Most of you know that we are from India, but not much more than that. We were all born in the State of Kerala, India and were raised in Christian families. Both of us completed our Graduate and Post-Graduate Degrees from the University of Kerala, India. Both of us were working in the Capital city of Kerala for several years and leading a very comfortable and gratifying life, professionally and personally.

We briefly lived in the United Arab Emirates for a few years before immigrating to Canada. During this three-year period, we saw a lot of advertisements in the newspapers, from the Canadian Immigration Lawyers and Consultants, titled "Canada is Calling Professionals" and so on. These advertisements created some interest in us for Canada and we applied for Immigration in the Independent category for Professionals, based on our education, experience etc. It was a point system at that time and purely merit based. It took only a few weeks for us to get a call to attend an interview.

When we first moved to Canada, it was to Saint John, NB. There were no Churches with the same denomination that we had back in Kerala. We started attending the Trinity Anglican Church there, which is one of the oldest Churches in Canada. Most of the liturgy and songs were English versions of those we were using back home. Our son Litt was confirmed at the Trinity Anglican Church.

Christianity is the third-largest practiced religion in Kerala, accounting for 18% of the population according to the Indian census. Although a minority, the Christian population of Kerala is proportionally much larger than that of India as a whole. A significant portion of the Indian Christian population resides in the state of Kerala. Saint Thomas, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, arrived on the coast of Kerala in AD 52. This is the reason why Christianity rooted very much in the State of Kerala. Saint Thomas founded eight Churches in Kerala, and they are still maintained.

Our forefathers were followers of the Church that Saint Thomas founded, called the Mar Thoma Church and we continued the same traditions as of our forefathers. We were actively involved in the Church activities like, Sunday School, Youth League, and the Choir.

As Saint John was a very small town with very few immigrants and a deteriorating economy, both our children wanted to move to bigger cities for better prospects. Our daughter Leena wanted to move to Halifax when she was offered a job with Price Waterhouse

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Coopers. Litt wanted to pursue Civil Engineering. When Litt was in Grade 8 in Lorne School, he was the Provincial Champion for Chess for his grade. The National Tournament was held at the University of Calgary. So, Sam and Litt came to Calgary for the first time and Litt wanted to attend the University of Calgary once he completed his High School in Saint John High. Leena attended the University of New Brunswick. Both of us were working in Saint John, NB, even though our jobs were not at all challenging or satisfying our professional aspirations.

When we landed in Canada, to much of our surprise, we found out that Canada is not calling or welcoming professionals as the immigration lawyers and consultants advertised. Canada wanted workers, but not professionals, as many professionals could not find a suitable job easily as their qualifications were not recognized here. Even though our educational syllabus back in India was much superior, there was no reciprocal recognition of the professional qualifications. For instance, the professional curriculum in Canada was hardly 40% of what Sam had to study in India. This was quite strange and disheartening. In addition, the departmental heads of various employers who have a strong say in hiring, were hesitant to hire us, either on the ground that we were born in a different country or on the ground that we are more overqualified and experienced than them for the jobs that were available. We came to know about these facts from an independent Staffing Company.

With many business mergers, acquisitions, and bankruptcies that we witnessed in NB, and as Litt wanted to come to Calgary for his Undergraduate Studies, we also moved with him to Calgary. During that time, one day, we received a flyer from the Highwood Lutheran Church and for that reason we attended one service. Within days, Pastor Don Neville visited our home and extended a warm welcome to the church. The Congregation was so gracious to receive us. Music was one of the factors that attracted us to this Church. It was Jim and Joyce Rasmussen who sponsored us to become members of the Church and were the first couple to invite us to their home. Throughout the years, they provided us with extraordinary support and help and made us feel at home.

Leena and Brandon and their children, Alex and Isabella live in Halifax. Litt and Joanne and their daughter, Avery live in Calgary.

This time, we express our gratitude to all who welcomed us, and supported us to this day. Let us all be stewards of the Lord. Let us contribute our time and talent to glorify His name on earth. Where should we begin?

At the feet of our Lord, "Our Father in Heaven-----"



The Men's Breakfast Group is starting again. The church is now occupied Saturday morning so we will meet at Denny's on McNight Blvd (5015 4th Street NE) the first Saturday of the month beginning November. 4 at 10:00 AM. There is a sign-up list downstairs.

PRAYER FOR PEACE IN THE HOLY LAND

The letter is from The Most Rev. Hosam E. Naoum, Anglican Archbishop of Jerusalem, whose words may inspire our prayers this day and in the days which follow.

Oct. 16, 2023

Grace and peace to all people of peace,

It has been ten days since Hamas organized its brutal attack targeting civilians in southern Israel. Such violent atrocities, wherever they occur, are abhorrent; they violate human dignity, and they offend God. We join our voices to others in denouncing them in no uncertain terms. As subsequent military actions in Gaza unfold, and many Palestinians are displaced, a humanitarian crisis degrades in the region by the day and puts more lives at serious risk. To make matters even worse, around the world, and close to home, people use this conflict to justify their antisemitism, islamophobia, or both, with instances of hate crimes targeting these communities on a significant rise.

When we witness tragedies of this magnitude, messages and statements are always insufficient to adequately express the feelings of anger, pain, grief, and despair. Sometimes it is better simply to join the groans of our hearts and spirits to those of the most directly suffering. Mindful of this, many Christian leaders living in Jerusalem have designated today, October 17, as a day for fasting and prayer, calling on others around the world to join with them in a spirit of vigil this day.

While this will be in part an opportunity to fast and pray for peace, may it also be about more. May it also be a time to fast and pray prayers of confession, to acknowledge the biases and hatred we so often hold towards others deep within our hearts; a time to fast and pray for repentance, seeking to see people turn away from the hostilities that divide the human family and prevent us from seeing one another as kin and fellow beloved children of God; a time to fast and pray intercessions, asking God for wisdom to know how to advocate and act for true restorative justice in Israel-Palestine and in our local communities; a time to fast and pray for healing for the generations of trauma and harm.

As local church leaders representing communities from Greater Edmonton, Central/Northern Alberta, and surrounding areas, we invite members of our communities to embrace this call from our siblings in faith in the Holy Land on Tuesday Oct. 17, either by engaging on their own, or gathering together when this is possible.

Lord, have mercy. Amen.

† Brenda Tiessen-Wiens, Moderator, Mennonite Church Alberta
† Rev. Dr. Larry Kochendorfer, Bishop, Synod of Alberta and the Territories, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

† Rev. Helen Reed, Chairperson, Northern Spirit Regional Council, The United Church of Canada

† Moravian Church, Canadian District

† Rt. Rev. Stephen London, Bishop, Anglican Diocese of Edmonton

For the offering of consolation:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the source of all mercy and the God of all consolation, who comforts us in all our sorrows so that we can comfort others in their sorrows with the consolation we ourselves have received from God.

PASTOR'S STEWARDSHIP MESSAGE

While you hear from congregation members about stewardship, perhaps you might also like to hear from your pastor.

I stand before you today; my heart is overwhelmed with gratitude and warmth. It is not just the beauty of this sacred space or the melodies of our hymns that make worship in this congregation unique. Every one of you, your unyielding love and your unwavering support, have touched my life and the lives of many.

In the tapestry of our shared life, we have laughed, cried, and lifted each other in times of need. In our togetherness, we have embraced each other's flaws and celebrated each other's strengths, for it is not in our perfection but in our shared imperfections, our humanity, that we find the true beauty of this community.

As a congregation, we are not immune to the trials and tribulations of human existence. We stumble, we falter, and we make mistakes. Of these errs, I know that I, too, am guilty. Luther pointed out that he "was chief among sinners", and I believe all pastors face this paradox. Yet, precisely in these moments, your love shines through, reminding all that we are not alone and that we can address any challenge that comes our way through faith and fellowship.

Your kindness, compassion, devotion, and support have nurtured a spirit of warmth and acceptance within these walls. The Holy Spirit makes this congregation not just a church but a sanctuary where each soul is welcomed and embraced for who they are.

As your pastor, I remember that you are God's people, claimed by him, and I understand that my stewardship is a responsibility that transcends mere words and actions. I have promised to walk alongside you, to guide and support you, and to nurture the seeds of faith that we sow together as best I am able, and with God's grace, be the steward you need, while also recognising that your unwavering love fuels my commitment to this office.

As we continue this shared spiritual experience, let us hold onto the bonds that unite us, cherish the moments that define us, and continue to be the embodiment of Christ's love and compassion that this congregation so beautifully represents.

May God's blessings be upon you, now and always.

With heartfelt gratitude and love+

Pastor. Mike

THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION



One Body, One Spirit, One Hope

The Thirteenth Assembly of The Lutheran World Federation, held in Krakow, Poland, 13-19 September 2023 concluded with a message affirming the communion's gift of unity in diversity, and the call to serve the neighbour. The General Secretary Re. Dr. Anne Burghardt emphasized the call to "bring the gospel of reconciliation to all people" and build "a trustworthy world." For more information: <https://2023.lwfassembly.org/>

ON THE WEB

BEYOND OUR WEBSITE

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

- Joint Study of the Augsburg Confession: <https://www.ncronline.org/vatican/vatican-news/vatican-lutheran-officials-call-joint-study-augsburg-confession>
- Viewing the Real Presence Altarpiece: [Viewing the Real Presence — Lutheran Forum](#)
- Google Search Results are Tainted: <https://www.wired.com/story/google-antitrust-lawsuit-search-results/>
- Creation and Evolution: [Does Science Confirm the Creation Story in Genesis? | Creation vs Evolution - Beliefnet](#)

PASTORAL EMERGENCIES

If you need a pastor during Pastor Mike's vacation., please contact Pastor Aaron Schnell at 587 988 4327.