

FEBRUARY

NEW SCANDINAVIA LUTHERAN CHURCH FEBRUARY NEWSLETTER 2025

Grace and peace to you on this beautiful day.

I have no clue where you will be when you read this... and what it will look like for you as you get your mail today. As I write this, I am sitting in my living room with the sun shining somewhere out there. The dogs occasionally ask to go outside and sometimes "Elliot" (my 3-legged dog) changes his mind when the door opens. Today is one of those -15 days and even in my living room, my laptop is cold.

I have been thinking these days about the people who are not as lucky as myself. It is easy to not think about the things we do not see. In rural areas, we do not see the homeless and it is easy to assume we do not have that problem around us but oh would you be surprised. It's not just the people wandering the streets, people gathering at store entrances, or on the offramps of our city streets begging for money. There are "couch surfers", many of whom are high school students, who go from one friend's house to another, getting out of the cold by sleeping on someone's couch and while they have a warm place to sleep on a day like this, they too are homeless. There are children who are sleeping with their parents in their cars tonight and if school gets cancelled because it is too cold, they must find a warm place to hang out for the day while their parents are at work (yes, most homeless people do have jobs).

During my time in South Dakota, I invited the pastor of *Church on The Street*, a street ministry in Sioux Falls, to travel to Highmore to speak with our congregation and the VBS kids to share her call with the people she serves who are living on the streets. The pastor was shocked by the questions of these elementary students as they tried to grasp what homelessness means. These young Christians were asking honest questions of "why don't we help them?" and while we pointed out all the ways we are helping, one child said, "that's not enough." Yes, young one. You are absolutely right! It is not enough.

Over the years, I have heard "church" people suggest the solution is simple- people just need to get a job. And while there are some honest realities to that idea, like the cost-of-living vs wages for people with no diploma, a GED, or even a basic high school education, some find that there is still not enough money to pay rent and if you don't have substantial credit, even renting can be difficult. But that is not even the starting point. As Christians, the "get a job" solution finds no Biblical backing and "God helps those who help themselves" is NOT in the Bible. So, *what* does the Bible say?

Isaiah 58:6-7

*⁶ Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?*

*⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?*

And Matthew 25:34-45

[Jesus said] ³⁴Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." ⁴¹Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴²for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." ⁴⁴Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?" ⁴⁵Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me."

Now, as a single woman who has extra bedrooms at the parsonage, the idea of inviting a stranger into my home is a little scary and may not be safe. So, does that mean I get a pass on welcoming the stranger? Absolutely not. I may not be able to open my home to random people, but I need to know who can help. I know it is my responsibility, as a Christian, to know those places that assist those struggling. It may take a few phone calls but that is what it means to be Christian: to help the stranger. In our area, the Salvation Army of Barron County is a great start and can be reached through their 24/7 hotline: **(715) 606-4150**.

But that isn't the end of the discussion. This liturgical year, we focus our attention mostly on the Gospel of Luke. I once was told that the concern in Luke's gospel centers on those who needs attention and compassion. Maybe today Christ is calling us to see the homeless because, whether it is the talk of homelessness, hunger, imprisonment, or healthcare, we, as Christians, must do more. People are struggling and while society tells us to look away because it's not our problem, Jesus tells us differently. The nightly news is full of people who need our help, near and far. There is work to do and whether it is our physical work, financial support, and the addition of our prayers, Jesus continues to call you into action, to be the hands and feet of God. Emagine the warmth of the world if the Christians would step up and show the world that we take seriously what Jesus asks of us each day.

So, stay warm and spread the warmth (and love) of God.

God's peace be with you.

Pastor Sara