



JANUARY NEWSLETTER 2026

NEW SCANDINAVIA

LUTHERAN CHURCH

God's peace be with you all

As I sit in front of my computer, listening to Christmas music and hearing "Pastor, when will you be done with your newsletter article?" I ponder all that has taken place over 2025 and even what has happened over the last couple of days. Two American soldiers and one translator were killed in Syria. A famous couple, an actor/director and a well-known photographer were killed in their LA home by their son. In Australia, 15 people confirmed dead (as of when I type this) with 40 people injured. And that all happened in two days. My heart breaks but am I really surprised? Isn't this what we have been working toward? There is the song "they will know we are Christians by our love", but does anyone believe that song anymore? Where is the "sleep in heavenly peace" that we sing on Christmas Eve or have we completely given up on that possibility.

The truth is, my heart breaks every time I hear government leaders calling current non-US born people or even those born in this country "garbage", "monsters," and "scumbags". I hear clergy calling people within the LGBTQ+ community "evil" and recommending they "ought to blow yourself in the head in the back of the head. You're so disgusting." I've overheard people within our own communities say horrible things about people with darker skin, who pray different, and see love different. Where are the people who once believe that the Bible had the answers? Where are the people claiming this to be a Christian country and yet living lives based on something other than the Bible? Where are those who point to "the others" as the root of all of this country's problems? What do those people have to say about the following?

Ezekiel 22

The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the alien, denying them justice.

Leviticus 19

When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the native-born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

We allow fear to lead our words and anxiety to navigate how we speak about others. We hear that "they" are rapists and murderers. We read that crime has increased because of "them." How many times have you heard that said? Have you ever heard of Illusory Truth Effect, where statements, both true and false, heard at least three times are processed in our brains as truth. So maybe we need to fall back on standards that are worth standing behind. Maybe we need to start seeing our neighbors as something other than the enemy.

Ephesians 4

So then, putting away falsehood, let each of you speak the truth with your neighbor, for we are members of one another... Let no evil talk come out of your mouths but only what is good for building up,^[h] as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. Put away from you all bitterness

and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander; together with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Galatians 5

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

I hear what people say about the poor when it involves caring for our neighbors who might be homeless and hungry, thinking that life is easy for all, that jobs are available for everyone. I sometimes forget that the Bible has some guidelines on how to care for our neighbors who are struggling.

Levitcus 19

“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the LORD your God.

“You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand idly by when the blood of your neighbor is at stake: I am the LORD.

“You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

Proverbs 25:21

*If your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat,
and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink*

Did you know that the Bible appears to hold little sway when it comes to immigration? A LifeWay Research poll found that 90 percent of all evangelicals say that “the Scripture has no impact on their views toward immigration reform.” It then appears that many “Evangelicals” are not basing their views on scripture. Instead, they are acting out of a powerful, cohesive worldview.

Luke 6

[Jesus said] ²⁷ “But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; ²⁸ bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹ If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks of you, and if anyone takes away what is yours, do not ask for it back again. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.

³² “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive payment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵ Instead, love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.^[el] Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

³⁷ “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you.

1 Peter 4

Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words

of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

I don't know where this world or this country is going. Heck, I don't know always where I am going. I too struggle with all that is in the Bible. I too struggle with the frustration in heart and know I am not doing enough to support my neighbor. I struggle because I am human. And even though I struggle, I continue to pray for myself, for these congregations, this community, and the world to find a way that, as Christians, we can remember where Jesus stood. It's the reminder that, as told by the Rev. Dr. Duane Priebe, "the minute you draw a line between who's in and who's out, and you know that you are on this side of the line, you'll see Jesus on the other side of the line you drew." Which means we all have some work to do.

Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.

Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be

With God as our father, [siblings] all are we

Let me walk with my [sibling] in perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me. Let this be the moment now

With every step I take, let this be my solemn vow

To take each moment, and live each moment, in peace eternally

Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me

Songwriters: Jill Jackson / Sy Miller

We all can do better and I will begin with myself.

Pastor Sara