



MARCH NEWSLETTER 2026 NEW SCANDINAVIA LUTHERAN CHURCH

“...you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” Genesis 3:9

Some time ago, a young woman stopped me in a very public space, asking to chat for a moment. As a pastor, I have no longer found this strange to have random people stop me to chat about their personal lives.

It took us a moment but we found a somewhat private place to talk and it was there that she let out a deep sigh as her eyes filled with tears. She told me that she was struggling with her faith and then said, almost to herself “or maybe I don’t have it at all?”

I saw the tears that she was working hard at holding back. I heard some of her words crack as she tried to speak. I felt the energy gone out of her as she glanced around, hoping no one would hear or see her. I asked her if she needed a hug to which she quickly said “NO!” Truth is, I knew that a hug would just open the floodgates.

She quietly opened her heart to me and all that was going on. She had found out that her closest friend, the one who knows all her darkest secrets, was sharing some of those secrets with others. She had been in a relationship with a guy that had recently ended. She felt pressure around her to do things she was uncomfortable doing. She had been praying and praying for God to help... praying for months... and things seemed to be getting harder, not easier. She said she had always been told that God always hears her prayers but then why wasn’t God answering? Why were the lies continuing? Why was the emptiness inside continuing to grow? Where was God? Was there a God?

And please, before you think about telling her that this is part of God’s plan or that everything happens for a reason, know that those words would not have helped her, especially in her struggle to see, hear, and feel God in her presence. In fact, in the midst of her pain, if she thought God was allowing and even causing this pain to continue, it would add to her decision that faith in God was not worth it. And I would agree with that idea.

My heart went out to her because I too have been there. I told her that even now, I have those days, and why wouldn’t I? I still go through things that she was experiencing. I too have days when loneliness is heavy. I too have days when it feels like everyone around me is turning on me and whispering lies. I too have days when I look at the world and think “God, have you not heard my prayers day after day?”

The truth is, this world is full of brokenness. I don’t need to tell you that. You watch the news. You read the stories. You have experienced heartbreak, and loneliness, and maybe even unanswered prayers. If you have never had a moment where you have wondered about your faith or God’s love for you, you are lucky because from my end, and the hurting people I speak with, it is a horrible place to be. But then God finds a way to speak.

I knew that my stressing that God is with her wouldn't do any good. She couldn't feel it and didn't even know where to look. She lost the feeling of God's touch in her life. So I gave her homework... to find love and to start with the easiest. Does she have a family member who would be willing to give her a hug without asking questions? Of course she did.

Assignment #1- ask for a hug from a family member.

What is her favorite food? She told me and

Assignment #2 was set: have someone make you your favorite food.

I told her, "Don't do it yourself. Let someone do it FOR you." I asked her if she liked baby animals, like kittens? Of course she does.

Assignment #3: Go to the local animal shelter and ask to play with the kittens.

She smiled and said she would be willing to do them all.

A few weeks later, I ran into this young woman again. Did she do her homework? She smiled and she said she had. I wasn't about to ask if her faith was back because I knew that would take time, but I asked if she had seen any love around her lately. Of course she did. I was surprised when she said "I didn't realize that it has been along time since I have been touched" and it was that where she found love the strongest.

I type this the day before Ash Wednesday and I know what tomorrow brings. Tomorrow is the day when people will stand before me as I touch each of their foreheads and, with ashes, mark them with the sign of the cross. It is a reminder that God is not some god who watches us from a distance. This is not a hands-off God but a God who is hands on. This is the God of love, who touches us through a hug from a loved one and the rub of a kitten. This is the God who couldn't stay always from us any longer and came, in the form of a helpless baby, and grew up with lives as simple as you and I. This God, in human form, ached at the treatment of the sick and the widows. This God cried at the death of his close friend and didn't say a word when people yelled that he was guilty and ordered him to die. This was the God who was abandoned by those closest to him and walked to his death while the world spat upon him.

I wish I knew that the young woman who I encountered some time ago would and could read this because I want to remind her that this God, that she struggles to see and feel, understands what she is going through. And that's what makes this God special. Because the gods that we create, the god that tells us that we are better than the poor and more important than the marginalized and that more wealth means you are more loved are simply gods we create when everything in life is wonderful. But it is in the heartbreak that this one God that we worship, makes God face known. For it is in the brokenness that OUR God comes forth. It is THIS God that touches us in the midst of heartbreak. It is God who walks to the cross and takes on the worst that we and the world have to offer. All because of God's love for the world- for us and for everyone we encounter and even those we will never meet.

This Lenten season, let us remember all those who the world casts aside as not worth loving, and pray for God's love for them, and for us, and for the world.

Pastor Sara