



First Things – March 2024

Understanding Hardship

Following the theme of last Sunday's sermon – remember, carrying the cross from Mark 8:31-38 – when hardship comes your way, will you tell yourself it's a tool of God's grace and a sign of his love, or will you give in to doubting his goodness?

If you are not on God's redemptive agenda page, you will end up doubting his goodness. One of the most important questions you could ask is: "*What is God doing in the here and now?*" The follow-up question is also important: "*How should I respond to it?*" It is nearly impossible to think about life properly and to live appropriately if you are fundamentally confused about what God is doing. If someone were to ask you the first of those two questions, how would you respond? Are you tracking with God's agenda? Are you after what God's after? Are you living in a way that is consistent with what God is doing? Do you struggle with questions of God's love, faithfulness, wisdom, and goodness? Do you ever envy the life of another? Do you sometimes feel alone? Do you fall into thinking that no one understands what you're going through? Are you ever plagued by doubts as to whether Christianity is true after all? If you aren't struggling with these things, are you near someone who is?

Here's the bottom line. Right here, right now, God isn't so much working to deliver to you your personal definition of happiness. He's not committed to give you a predictable schedule, happy relationships, or comfortable surroundings. He hasn't promised you a successful career, a nice place to live, and a community of people who appreciate you.

What he has promised you is himself, and what he brings to you is the power of the cross. No, he's not first working on your happiness; he's committed to your holiness. That doesn't mean he is offering you less than you've hoped for, but much, much more. In grace, he is intent on delivering you from your greatest, deepest, and most long-term problem: sin and its consequences. And so, he offers you gifts of grace that transcend the moment, that literally are of eternal value. He has not unleashed his power in your life only to deliver things to you that quickly pass away and that have no capacity at all to satisfy your heart.

This means that often when you are tempted to think that God is loving you less because your life is hard, he is actually loving you more. The hardships that you are facing are the tool of his exposing, forgiving, liberating, and transforming grace. They are drawing you closer to him. These hard moments aren't in your life because God is distant and uncaring, but rather because he loves you so

fully. These moments become moments of faith and not doubt when by grace you begin to value what God says is truly valuable. Do you value what God values? Check out James 1:12–18.

Ladies, Look at What's Coming!!!

The Lutheran Women's Missionary Society (LWMS) Spring Rally

will take place at

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

in Holmen

Saturday, April 13,

with Registration starting at 8:00 AM

Pastor Philip Henselin

will speak about

WELS Institutional Ministries

Women of First will be carpooling and
have room for more.

WELS Coulee Women's Retreat

will take place at

Luther High School

Saturday, April 20

Scan the QR code below for more
information



The 2024 **WELS Women's Ministry Conference**
will take place in **Pewaukee, Wisconsin** July 28-30.
More information is available [HERE](#).

The **Lutheran Women's Missionary Society Convention** – year in and year out the largest gathering of WELS Lutherans – will take place in **Sioux Falls, South Dakota, June 27-30**. More information is available [HERE](#).

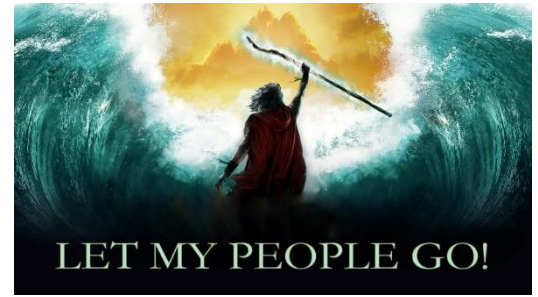


1 PETER 2:5
**BEING BUILT INTO A
SPIRITUAL HOUSE**
Sioux Falls, South Dakota | June 27-30, 2024

Lent Continues

Pastor Unnasch will be here at First on March 6 and Pastor Krueger on March 13. I'll be back here on March 20.

And then comes Holy Week.



Holy Week Worship

Palm Sunday, March 24 – Our ELC children will be singing.
Let's support them and their families!

Maundy Thursday, March 28 – Worship with Holy Communion – 6:30 PM

Good Friday, March 29 – worship at 6:30 PM

Easter Sunday, March 31 – worship at 7:00 and 9:00 with Easter breakfast at 8:00

Board for Lay Ministry

2024 Finances Through January

Church Expenses	\$21,376
<u>Church Offerings/Income</u>	<u>\$17,271</u>
Deficit	- \$4,106

ELC Expenses	\$32,378
ELC Income	\$44,319*

* This includes an unexpected carry over from 2023

In 2023 the church expenses were \$10,000 less than was budgeted at the beginning of the year. However, the offerings in 2023 were \$20,000 less than they were in 2022. And so for the year, the total deficit was \$21,500.

The proposed budget for 2024 is \$247,825. That's just 2.68% more than was spent in 2023. If offerings were to remain the same as they were in 2023, we anticipate a \$30,000 deficit.

That's the *bad news*. The good news is that in 2021 and 2022, the congregation raised \$110,000 over and above what was needed for the budget in order to pay for the new metal roof and for the new flat roofs.

And so, the board believes that the congregation members will also respond to this need. We encourage all of our members to consider how God has blessed them and how he has enabled them to respond. You can respond to this need by using the **Reduce the Deficit** envelopes.

First Evangelical Lutheran
Church

La Crescent, MN

Amount: _____

Envelope # _____

Name: _____

Reduce the Deficit
Giving Envelope

RaiseRight – The New Scrip Program

The First Steps Early Learning Center has begun a **new Scrip program**.

Through your **smart phone** you can purchase (and immediately receive) gift cards to a great variety of stores and restaurants. These companies then pay the early learning center a percentage of the purchase, sometimes as much as 15% of the purchase.

Here's what you need to do to participate:

1. Download the RaiseRight mobile app [HERE](#) or scan the QR code:
2. Choose "Join a Program" to enroll
3. Enter the First Steps Early Learning Center code:
Q6PGHYV6B2CJ
4. Create an account – Follow the prompts to create your RaiseRight account.
5. Navigate to your Wallet – Tap the Wallet icon located at the bottom of the app homepage.
6. Select "Add Card" and register the card – Follow the prompts to register the gift card and add funds (this earns for your organization). Store the physical card somewhere safe—do not throw it away. (Note: The card number for registering gift cards from certain brands may be hidden behind a scratch off.)
7. Go shopping! – Shop in-store or online and use your gift card as payment. You can pay with the physical gift card and some retailers also allow you to scan the barcode at checkout right from your account Wallet!
8. Add more funds to the card (this earns for your organization) – Many gift cards are reloadable, meaning you can keep using the same card and add funds within your Wallet at any time. (If your card is reloadable, it will appear in your Wallet.) Tap the gift card in your Wallet to view the gift card details. Select "Add Money" to add funds to the card and follow the prompts to choose an amount and checkout. Every time you add money to a gift card in your Wallet, you earn for your organization!
9. Keep earning – Shop 750+ gift card brands on the RaiseRight mobile app — use gift cards from RaiseRight as payment instead of cash or credit cards to earn on everyday purchases.



Lent and Easter are busy times of the year, but they are also the most blessed times of the year and we hear once again how Jesus suffered and died for us, and how his resurrection guarantees that the gates of heaven are open to us all.

God Bless,

Pastor Mark