

Dear People of University Lutheran Church,

The coronavirus took the Dow Jones down under 20,000 today! That's one strong microscopic organism, isn't it? I had an appointment to get a flat tire fixed this afternoon, and since I was on the south end of town, I stopped at Petco to get some cat food (You're welcome Pepper and Piper), and I went into Target to get a few items I needed – toothpaste, shaving cream, deodorant, cat treats and cat litter. Walking through the aisles, I saw further proof of the strength of this virus. Empty shelves without toilet paper, water and hand sanitizer demonstrate the fear we are feeling in our hearts.

I want to say more about this fear later, but a few housekeeping items first. Seanne mailed a letter to you all today which I hope you will receive tomorrow. It tells you some things you have already read on Facebook, and a few new things as well. This letter is being sent to make sure everyone knows we are not having public worship or any other activities at ULC for at least the next couple of weeks. Even now I am wondering how many people will show up for 5pm Lenten supper or 6pm midweek Lenten worship this evening. Just typing that last sentence makes me sad. I will miss you tonight!

After some discussion, Jen and I decided we would use Facebook Live to stream our worship service this Sunday at 10am. We may change this in the weeks to come, but for now it is the easiest answer. Tell your friends to tune in at 10am on Sunday whether they are members or not. We will try very hard not to disappoint! It will not be a full-blown worship service, but we will have music, puppet play, sermon and prayers. The text I am using this Sunday is the very well-known Psalm 23. This was the assigned Psalm for this Sunday anyway, and I have chosen to use it alone to keep things simple. Of course, the service will remain on our ULC Facebook page if you are still sleeping at 10am!

So, back to the fear we are feeling in our hearts. When the disciples were bailing water in their sinking boat in Matthew 14:22-33, the Lord Jesus Christ came walking to them on the water. As I like to say, I can walk on water too, as long as it is in North Dakota in January! But Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was actually walking on water, and the disciples already terrified by the storm were really scared now. They think he is a ghost. Trying to bring some peace into their troubled hearts, Jesus says, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." I'm not sure how much this helped the disciples, but one thing it did was to give Peter enough courage to try and walk to Jesus on the water.

Well, you know the story. Peter walked on the water for a time, but then he noticed the wind and also probably remembered human beings are not designed to walk on water, and he sank. Now, I've heard many Christian people say at this point, "If Peter only really believed, then he could have walked on water." My response to this statement is, "Let me see you walk on water." I think the real point of this story is the next three words that Peter spoke, "Lord, save me." Matthew says that Jesus "immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him." In other words, as little as Peter's faith was, and as much doubt and fear as Peter had in his heart, when he called out to Jesus to save him, Jesus saved him.

As we face the uncertainty of these days – the stock market going down, people we love getting laid off, the number of coronavirus infections rising – this is our time not try and walk on water, but to say, "Lord, save us." The world might think I'm foolish for saying this, but I believe when we ask Jesus to save us, he immediately reaches out for us and takes hold of us. In fact, I think we should say these words to Jesus every day, "Lord, save us." As we do, there is no doubt in my mind that a faithful and loving Lord takes hold of us and saves both here on earth and one day in heaven.

My advice to you today is this – tell the fear in your heart to move over, because Jesus is moving in, and when Jesus moves in, the Lord himself will tell all your fears to clear out. Amen!

You are in my prayers,
Pastor Tom