

Dear People of University Lutheran Church,

Did you know there is a tunnel in North Dakota? While we have bridges and overpasses, we don't have a lot of need for tunnels. Yet, in western North Dakota there is what is called the Cartwright Tunnel. Just miles from the Montana border, it is named for the nearby unincorporated town of Cartwright, North Dakota, population 223. The tunnel was built 1912-13 and connects to the Fairview Lift Bridge, which crosses over the Yellowstone River. Strangely, the lift bridge was never used for one single steamboat. The tunnel and the bridge were put out of commission in the 1980s.

You can, however, still walk across the bridge and through the tunnel. They are well-cared-for because they are both on the National Register of Historic Places. The only problem is that there are no lights in 1,458-foot tunnel, which as you might guess, discourages many people from entering it. Certainly, if I were to walk through it, I would want to have a fairly significant lantern or flashlight. I am not afraid of the dark, although dark places are kind of spooky. Plus, I prefer to see where I am going, and to know if there is anything I could trip over or walk into along the way.

While I was thinking about this whole coronavirus situation earlier today, my mind somehow wandered (it does that a lot) and remembered this tunnel. I started to think about how facing these weeks of the coronavirus spreading through our nation, state and probably very soon our city, is just like standing at the entrance of the Cartwright Tunnel. There is a lot a darkness before us, and before we actually go through it, we definitely need some light. The good news is that there is a light which will help us make our way through this coronavirus tunnel, and his name is Jesus, the Christ.

Jesus says in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." In other words, Jesus is the lamp and the lantern who accompanies us through these strange and dark days. If indeed your life looks like a dark tunnel before you, whether that tunnel is the coronavirus, or any other hardship or challenge you are facing these days, do not enter without the "light of the world". As I understand it, the Lord more than anything wishes to be part of your life and to be your light in such times, so trust his presence and light to lead you.

Since I was a young teen, this verse from Psalm 119:105 (Yes, it is a very long Psalm!) has been one of my favorites, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." I understand this "word" as the Bible, or Jesus himself. Certainly, as you read the Bible, it will be like light giving you guidance for your life and through a hard time like we are facing now. So, I encourage you, if you really are practicing social distance in the quietness (or craziness if you have small children) of your home, then spend time every day reading your Bible. It will be a light which guides you through this time.

However, I also want to suggest this "word" is especially the presence of Jesus, who is wonderfully and mysteriously present with everyone of us who are hibernating in our homes right now. Jesus, the "light of the world", is present with you to give you help, hope and healing as you need it, and to care for you and love you through everything you face while walking through this very long tunnel. I am certain, it would be easier to walk through the Cartwright Tunnel without a flashlight, than to walk through this present darkness without the "light of the world". But then again, you don't have to!

You are in my prayers,
Pastor Tom