

Dear People of University Lutheran Church,

Did you know I jumped off a bridge last summer? Last July when our mission team was in Ecuador, I, Tom Colenso, foolishly jumped off a bridge. Our mission team took a planned day off from our mission work at the orphanage in Latacunga, to tour a place called Baños, a city high in the Andes Mountains next to the Amazon Rainforest. Ecuadorians call this city the Gateway to the Amazon. Baños is known for its many breathtaking waterfalls, its beautiful Basilica – the Church of the Virgin of the Holy Water, its many shops and eateries for tourists, and what is called Extreme Sports.

For example, many of us, including me, ziplined across a river gorge. But one of the especially extreme sports is called bridge jumping. Josh Denman and a few others had been asking to do this even before we left Grand Forks. In fact, Josh had been pestering me for days to jump too. In the end, eight of us jumped off an extremely tall bridge attached to a bungee swing over a rocky river gorge. I am going to name the seven other folks who jumped, so you don't think I was the only fool: Eric Bonn, Josh Denman, Lexi Grinolds, Amanda Denman, Kendra Briske, Emily Denman, and Megan Solberg.

So, when it was my turn, the man placed a helmet on my head and a bungee harness around my body. At first, I felt only a little nervous. However, when I climbed onto the ledge of the bridge and realized what I was about to do, anxiety and fear set in big time. I remember thinking that I had just barely got to know Addison, my newly born granddaughter, and that I really wanted to see her again. I really wanted to see her crawl, walk, talk, go to kindergarten, etc. Then, the man counted, "Uno, dos, tres," and I fell forward off the bridge, anxiously wondering about my future, and praying aloud, "O God, please help me".

Does that feel like the present day to you in any way? This is after all an unprecedented time due to the coronavirus pandemic. We are living through days where we are being asked by our government to stay home, to pay special attention to washing hands and sanitizing hard surfaces, to not to gather in groups of more than 10, and if we are around people to stay 6 feet apart. So, are you wondering what the future days, weeks, months, and years will bring? Maybe you too feel like a you are standing on a tall bridge and being asked to jump into an unknown future. So, pray with me, "O God, please help me!"

The good news is I survived my jump. Truth be told, after the initial few seconds of wondering if I was going to survive or not, it was actually kind of fun. I am pretty sure I won't do it again, but I am glad I did it and even more glad I lived through it. Maybe these strange and difficult days of our encounter with this virus is similar. Maybe we have jumped into scary moment of human history. Some of us who are at high risk to be hurt by COVID-19, might even for a moment worry if we will survive. Faith and prayer are so important in times like this, when the future is uncertain, and we really need God's help.

One of my favorite verses about the importance of prayer comes from Psalm 91:14-15. This is the Lord speaking to you and me, and He says, "Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name. When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them." In other words, as you jump into this or any uncertain future, pray to the Lord who loves you and protects you, who hears you and answers your prayers, and who helps you and saves you whenever you are falling. And, you don't have to jump off a bridge to figure this out!

You are in my prayers,  
Pastor Tom