

Dear People of University Lutheran Church

For several weeks now, a pair of mallard ducks have been hanging around church. I have watched them wading through puddles in the parking lot and eating grass just outside my office window. But more recently, I saw the drake, with his beautiful green head, standing in the yard facing University Avenue, as if he were guarding something. He was! In fact, Todd Cummings, texted me Sunday night, saying he saw the ducks and he thought they might be nesting in the arborvitae adjacent to our front door. Then, on Tuesday morning, Jen Hanson and I found the mother duck sitting on her nest.

I love that these two ducks are seemingly unaffected by the coronavirus. They do not care about any daily Covid-19 totals. As God has designed them to do, they are just going about their springtime business, and having baby ducklings. It's what they do every year at this time, whether there is a worldwide pandemic or not. By the same design, the sun rises every day, the maple trees and rosebushes are budding, the grass is turning green, and the robins in my backyard are yanking worms out of the ground. None these are worried about the virus, staying in place, social distancing, or the related politics.

One of my favorite Bible passages is Proverbs 3:5-6. It says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." This verse reminds me how different we are from the sun, maple trees and rosebushes, grass, robins and ducks. While we, like each one of them, are creatures of God, we have minds which think beyond the world of simple instinct. In fact, the Lord has designed us for something more, a relationship where we trust that he will take care of us, and that he will make our paths straight.

Perhaps our instincts right now are to fear the coronavirus. Maybe we want to hide away from possibly ever being exposed to this disease. First, let me say, it is certainly appropriate to try to avoid Covid-19. If, for example, you are high risk for this virus to cause you great harm, then you should indeed stay in place. It is also appropriate for the rest of us to be extremely careful and to try to maintain proper social distancing, so that we are not unnecessarily exposed to or unknowingly passing on this illness to other people. These seem entirely appropriate, necessary, and commonsensical.

However, while our instincts may tell us to do these things, the Lord reminds us not simply to rely on our own insights. Instead, the Lord calls us to trust that he will lead us through this hard time. The Lord calls us to acknowledge that he will help us and heal us through these days. The Lord calls us to confess that while we may be smart and discover many resourceful ways to deal with the coronavirus, that he alone will provide us with the straight path through this pandemic. So, in least one way, the Lord calls us to behave something like the two mallards hanging around ULC.

What do I mean by this? Well, these mallards are quite aware of the dangers around them. So, the mother is quietly staying in place, keeping her social distance from predators, and even curious pastors like me. The father is keeping watch out for his family, providing his mate with food, and doing what he can to keep the two of them and their unhatched ducklings safe. Despite these dangers, they are doing exactly what God has designed them to do. In other words, they are going on with their lives amidst everything else, despite the presence of predators, pastors, pedestrians, and even the coronavirus.

While it is critical that we take good care of ourselves and others at this time, it is also critical that we do what the Lord has designed us to do – to trust him. We are designed to trust the Lord will get us through this time, and we are designed to acknowledge that when the world gets through this it will be because of God's grace. So, we pray every day for the Lord to overcome this virus. We need him as much or more than scientists, medical personnel, government officials, and even toilet paper. Right? Without the Lord, none of these even exist. As Proverbs says, trust in the Lord with all your heart.

There is every reason to do so. Throughout the Bible, the Lord has promised us many things. The Lord has promised to hear our prayers. The Lord has promised to heal our diseases. The Lord has promised to

calm our fears. The Lord has promised to forgive our sins. The Lord has even promised through the cross of Jesus Christ to overcome our death and give us eternal life. This is the one we trust in the time of the coronavirus. This is the one who we acknowledge as our Savior, the one who loves us so much, that he, like the mallard drake in our church yard, stands guard over us even through this pandemic.

You are in my prayers,
Pastor Tom