

**Sunday, March 15, 2020 – Third Sunday in Lent/Forward in Freedom Campaign Kickoff  
“Formed, Forgiven, Forward in Freedom”**

Romans 5: 1-8

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV

Text Applied

Forward in Freedom Inform Series

To everyone gathered here this morning and those listening at home, may God’s grace, mercy and **peace** be with you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

I had no idea the timeliness of this text from Romans, the great comfort and hope that it has for the occasion when I set to planning this sermon. The rapid changes in our way of life that took place during this week, especially over the past four days, are without precedent in most of our living memory – the few of you who remember life during World War II are an exception. Even 9/11 pales in comparison, at least insofar as it affects the average citizen’s daily routine. And moreover this is a global phenomenon.

All of which elicits fear. An understandable human reaction, giving the head spinning turn of events and the prospect of pestilence – even if not a concern for yourself, then certainly for anyone you know who is already in poor health – because we want doctors to have the margin to treat your parents who have a stroke or your spouse with a heart attack or to check out an ominous growth, much less be able to appropriately manage people with severe COVID 19 issues – so an aside, like the Scherrs said – in love – NOT out of fear – for the most vulnerable among us, let’s observe that social distancing and flatten the curve to delay the peak of COVID 19! And then there’s your family’s health... and even if you’re in the minority that is relatively unconcerned with the coronavirus outbreak, you’re in the same boat as everyone else when it comes to your work, your childcare, your concern over access to necessary provisions, your retirement savings, the dread of alienation – with no live sports to boot. And for some, there’s the fear of leaving the house, fear of being near other people and when is it all going to end? Will it end? If you feel locked up, trapped, afraid – you’re not alone.

The words of our text are written for folks who lived in a world of similar fears. Ancient Rome was no stranger to epidemics and large numbers of deaths as a result. Within a decade of Paul writing this letter, some of those Christians hearing this letter read out loud for the first time would also be numbered among the 30,000 in Rome to die from plague in the year 65 and then the very next year they'd see themselves heavily persecuted by the government, hiding, often unsuccessfully while they were falsely accused and then martyred for setting a fire that destroyed a large percentage of the city.

So don't think that these words are some generic comfort or that they aren't for you! You're made innocent in God's sight by Jesus! We have peace with God because of Jesus! Jesus gave us this faith, this key to be gifted as God's chosen, forgiven people so that we can stand in His holy presence not with fear and dread but with joy!

And friends, this is true of us today. Whether you've been at Mountain View half a century or half a month, Jesus – our access by faith into this grace in which we stand – that access, that key aspect of Jesus opens us up to the glory of God. That's what Mountain View has always been all about. For 63 years God's Word has gone forth from this congregation, and not always at *this* place, but over on Decatur as well – His Word read and preached, the sacraments – tangible holy acts instituted by God that forgive sins – put us into direct contact with the divine. The Holy Spirit lives *inside* you in baptism Jesus *enters* your physical body in the Lord's Supper. These are God's Gifts to us, this contact, personal and communal as a people with the God who sets us free.

Jesus unlocks the door to a new way of living. We've already got this new life in Him. Now, we can move forward in freedom, even when things are hard. We didn't know when the Forward in Freedom name was chosen for our capital campaign name that the coronavirus impacts on our world and life together would be happening. And I have to tell you honestly, we've given some thought to the timing of this launch in the past few days. Is this wise? Is it tacky, insensitive, foolish, with so many scary and uncertain things happening in the world? I'm being very open and vulnerable with you about this

because honestly these were some of the very things happening in my mind. And then I read this text again – and you'll hear about that more in a second.

Brass tacks – there's a financial commitment connected to the campaign, and it's a major focus of the end phases of the campaign a couple months out – but it's not what's driving the bus. What's driving the bus is ministry. The ministry that has taken place here for 63 years. The ministry mindset that led our forebearers 30 years ago to plan for a preschool on the old campus. The ministry vision to take a big risk, pick up stakes and move across town because of the potential to impact children and their families with the good news of Jesus through school ministry... and I think of the large number of families who are part of our life and mission together today because of that ministry. The ministry that has raised disciples through Confirmation and Bible studies and our worship life. The ministry heart to say yes, let's step forward with calling a second pastor and yes, let's step into this ministry future together – because loving others and discipling others is God's mission for us going forward – COVID 19 or not – and to pull a plug on that mission is to succumb to fear. And while how we do that mission may look different for the foreseeable future make no mistake – there will be a future.

A day will come when this pandemic subsides, as all pandemics do – often with significant damage in their wake. We will be in for some challenging days ahead but they won't be days without ministry. That's why we move Forward in Freedom – an act of defiance to satan, who would have us succumb to our fear. An act of encouragement to each other, who so desperately need encouragement and connection, even if moderated by social distancing or electronic communication. My prayer is that this suffering would produce endurance. The plans for our future campus are not short-range plans – they're meant to facilitate ministry for decades to come. The trials we'll bear up under with coronavirus can also build up endurance to face future challenges.

Endurance, in turn produces character. Folks, we're here to love and disciple others. Others, as in the people that are part of our MVLCS community *and* others in Las Vegas who also need the love of

Jesus. We have an opportunity to love in precisely that way. We're working on some tangible ways we can respond in love as life rapidly changes so that our Christian character of generosity would be evident to everyone we meet. As we have a clearer picture of what our needs are as a community, you'll be hearing more about this.

Character produces hope. Hope is the opposite of fear, although the sometimes hope and fear live very close together. A hopeful person can be in a terrible situation, but their hope has the foundation of being innocent with God by faith, through Jesus that gives access to God's Gifts and brings us joy. The opportunities before us to bring the light of hope to our community are enormous. That's one of the reasons we decided to move Forward in Freedom – because God's mission doesn't stop, even as how we do ministry changes for a time. People around us (and let's be honest, some of us) are struggling with fear. Being clear eyed, sober and honest about the challenges before us is critical – we must not minimize the very real struggles people are going through – that would be the opposite of loving our neighbor. That said, I believe this moment may just be the biggest mission opportunity we've had in the 63 years of this congregation's life. As we pray and research ways to do ministry well in this moment, please join us in stepping Forward in Freedom. I hope you'll join, appropriately spread out, the event in the gym. God bless you in Jesus' name, Amen.