

Sunday, October 4, 2020 – Commitment Celebration Sunday
“The PLAN Forward”

Acts 1: 1-11

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV
Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

In this, the culmination of our Forward in Freedom emphasis and the celebration of our commitment, we look ahead. It's good to know where you're going. The dictionary definition of the word “forward” is, “in the direction one is facing or looking; toward the front.”

Our own history has had some forward-looking plans. Some, complicated as they were, were able to be realized – the liberation of Europe with the D-Day invasion. Or President Kennedy's speech in which he said, “We choose to go to the Moon – not because it is easy, but because it is hard.” Others are aspirational, realized in part but with a long way to go – President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves but left Civil Rights for another day and Martin Luther King's dream remains a struggle.

Yet none of these plans are as long in scope or universal in application as God's forward-looking plan. In the direction one is facing or looking; toward the front – is Jesus heading His Church. Our text finds Jesus looking forward toward the mission and putting His disciples on it – the most forward looking plan in history – to seek and save the lost. It's a plan set out over millennia and lived out over millennia to come, including the time in which you and I are living today.

Ominous as our Gospel lesson is today in Jesus' very quick summary of the whole history of the Old Testament to the consequences of rejecting Jesus' gift, God didn't just scrap His creation that rebelled against Him. A plan was set in motion from the time of our first parents Adam and Eve. He grafted the whole world onto the true vine, Jesus. The mistake of the wicked tenants was that they tried to rely on their own righteousness, as Paul said in our reading, their own goodness and works, instead of the plan God set out from the beginning – to save His people. Jesus makes us His own. Indeed, the plan is to make the whole world His own! Jesus

says, *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."* You will be his witnesses in Northwest Las Vegas and Clark County, in Nevada and everywhere else!

Yet the plan Jesus develops is strange. There's no assurance it'll take – and the cost for an unsure investment is ridiculous. He gives His own life on the cross to ensure that your sins and mine have consequences paid in full so we don't suffer those consequences. Even more incredible, He then takes us sheepishly unworthy recipients of this ridiculous gift and deputizes US to carry this message out to the people we meet in the world. He entrusts sinful, perfect people who won't always live up to what His gift deserves. The way we live, the way we talk, the example we make for others to see and experience of us isn't always worthy of the Jesus who died for us – and yet that is God's plan forward.

It looks destined to failure but our history shows God's hand in it. Jesus is always with us. He gives us the Holy Spirit, too. Just look at the flawed humans to whom Jesus was speaking in Acts 1, His disciples, and the sacrifices they made and how powerfully God used them. Most of them ended up giving up their lives to make sure that the Good News of Jesus went forward. Because of their devoted work churches sprang up throughout the known world, preaching and teaching Jesus. Or Paul in our epistle lesson who said, *"I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ."* They all left homes and families, suffered shipwrecks and abuse, imprisonment and death to preach Jesus Christ. Their message weaved through generations and is shared between neighbors, coworkers, classmates and even between prisoners and captors. Someone – a parent, a teacher, a friend – shared this Good News with you – and you, in turn, are called and have shared it with your children and others. This is God's great plan to move His message forward!

God is still getting His Word out through flawed people today – including us right in this space. We're here because people have planned forward. Generations of people, now long

deceased or moved away, pastors, all of whom except for one I've never met, have faithfully planned forward and we are now those blessed through their work, standing on their shoulders... which are none other than the body of Christ. And now we are the flawed people called to share this message with God to the generation here today and those yet to come.

Think of that for a moment – God is entrusting you and me to share His Gift of eternal life. When the details of this day and our celebration are long forgotten, written in a footnote set on some bookshelf or digital file in the dust covered pages of our congregational history, the results of what God will do through the ministry carried out, the impact of God and His ministry in which He deputizes us to be His plan to move the plan Forward – that will impact this church and community for generations to come. Our hearts can brim in humble pride – a pride that boasts in the Lord – that He would commission and empower us to be part of His great plan right here and now! We're in a long lineage of disciples of Jesus, eyes toward the front, in the direction Jesus is looking and leading. That's what this Forward in Freedom campaign is all about.

Allow me a moment to explain the Commitment Card before you. There are two versions – some of you have a card that looks like this on heavy card stock. Others of you at home or in the sanctuary are invited to the website: www.mvlcs.org/fif/commit. There are various types of commitments. The first is our commitment to be in prayer, which is something that has grounded us through this entire experience, from the moment we gathered for the first of two brainstorming sessions a year and a half ago with our Beyond 2020 team to the development and adoption of our new campus plans and Master Plans for the congregation in January, all through this stretched out campaign cycle. The second is a commitment of our time and our talents. As we move into construction we'll be evaluating bids, talking to contractors, making design and material decisions. The third is financial. We know the downturn means some people have lost income – by all means if you're struggling to make ends meet because you've lost your job our bigger concern is how we can help your family through – in fact, we have

resources available to that end. And yet our congregation, perhaps more so than most, has seen less impact on people's livelihood in general than the community around us. There's a line asking you what your three year commitment will be. Remember, this is above and beyond regular giving – we still need tithes to continue in order to support the day to day ministry of MVLCS. The line at the bottom asks for your three year commitment total. Please take a few moments now to pray over that. If you'd like to wait until the Commitment Celebration this afternoon you can do that, too.

Above all, we pray. Moving Forward in Freedom is a small part of our being commissioned to look forward in the direction Jesus looks, standing on the shoulders of the people making up the body of Christ who've come before, for the sake of those still yet to come to know Jesus through God's mission at MVLCS. In Jesus' name, Amen.