

**Sunday, October 1, 2017 – 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
**“Free Reign”**

Philippians 2: 1-18

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

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Is God real? Does He really exist? Is Christianity the one and only true religion that reveals God to us? Or are we all just deceiving ourselves? Is religion the “opium of the masses” as communism once declared it to be – the drug, the sedative to ease the pain of living in hostile world? Is the Bible actually and truly God’s one and only Word explaining and describing a single, glorious, universal plan for all of mankind or is it just one version of the never ending human attempt to explain the unexplainable and comfort those like me who are too ignorant or unsophisticated to handle the reality that there either is no god, or as the theology of one bumper sticker put – “My God is too big for your religion.”

You see at some point everyone has to answer those questions in their own mind. At some point, if faith is going to be a genuine, life-altering experience in the real world we live in and not just an empty habit or ritual passed on to you by your parents, or some annoying little guilt trip you take on occasion, then you will have to come to terms with the question of whether Jesus reigns as the Lord of the universe who will come again in glory and at whose name every knee, both friend and enemy will bow in honor or humiliation.

Coming to church doesn’t solve the problem, in fact it raises its own dangers. The biggest danger of coming to church is that we are lulled into a false sense of security. We begin to imagine that as long as we go through the motions – in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit . . . I a poor miserable sinner . . . yada, yada, yada . . . Amen – that we don’t have to dig down deep and constantly root out the never ending reality of our sinful nature that wants to put ourselves back on the throne of life and have God as our footstool.

Listen to Paul’s appeal in our text: “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.”

In his book *Ghost Soldiers*, Hampton Sides tells the story of a dramatic mission during World War II. On January 28th, 1945, 121 hand-selected Army Rangers slipped behind enemy lines in the Philippines in an attempt to rescue 513 American and British POW's who had spent three years in a hellish prison camp.

Sides described the first effects of liberation on those prisoners as chaos and fear. The prisoners were too mentally brittle to understand what was taking place. Some even scurried away from their liberators. One particular prisoner, Bert Bank, refused to budge, even when a Ranger walked right up to him and tugged his arm. "C'mon, we're here to save you. Run for the gate." Banks still did not move. The Ranger looked into his eyes and saw a vacant stare, registering nothing. "What's wrong with you? Don't you want to be free?" And slowly Bank began to comprehend the new reality unfolding around him. The Ranger pulled him to his feet and pointed him at the route to freedom.

Friends, freedom is yours through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But like the soldiers held prisoner and abused by the enemy for so long the first reaction to that freedom is often not a joyful obedience to His command to head toward home and new life but instead the blank, vacant stare of uncertainty and fear, trapped in your past and afraid of your future.

People, you are free from the past. At the cross Jesus bled and died to wash away every foolish, mean, spiteful, humiliating, moment of your life. That bitter, angry feeling in you carry around with you, the one that sometimes makes you timid and withdrawn and then turns around and has you lashing out mercilessly usually at the people you love the most – you don't have carry that around with you anymore.

At the cross Jesus bled and died to kill that resentment you harbor whenever your spouse suggests that you might work on your marriage relationship and grow into something new.

At the cross Jesus bled and died to put to death that vengeful spirit that drives you to hateful attitudes and thoughts and words toward those who don't agree with you on your social media feed.

At the cross you are set free from yesterday but it is amazing how often we are afraid to move on to the resurrection. Jesus did not stay dead. Jesus rose again. Now listen to this from Ephesians 1, “ I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.”

By the resurrection we are guaranteed eternal life, that is life without beginning or end. Not only are we set free from the past at the cross but you have the very same power that God the Father used to raise Jesus dead body back to life again at work in you! The future, all of it, forever and ever and ever, is truly yours. And nothing can undo what Jesus has done.

Now please, please ponder this possibility – if the past is destroyed at the cross and the future is guaranteed by the resurrection – then what about today? What is possible for you as a believer in Jesus Christ?

Get it? See?! “Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” This is not the fear and trembling that you might mess it up and lose your salvation – this is the fear and trembling of pure excitement and exhilaration at having the power of the resurrection at work in every detail of your day to day life.

What if you as an individual were swept up in the sudden realization that resurrection – new life power – is in you as you greet the person sitting behind you after church?

What if you as an individual were swept up in the sudden realization that resurrection – new life power – is in you to do your job tomorrow as if you could really make a difference?

What if you as an individual were swept up in the sudden realization that resurrection – new life power – is yours perhaps to do something, I don't know, take a risk, tell someone you love them, say I'm sorry, start over.

And that's just you as an individual – here is where the hair on my arms starts to stand up... what if we as a community of believers we were swept up in the sudden realization that

resurrection – new life power is ours to proclaim to our whole community that Jesus reigns!  
What if in the resurrection of Jesus Christ we have been given Free Reign to serve God right here and right now, without guilt, without fear, without loathing or vacant stares and boredom – engaged in Connecting, Caring and Sharing through Christ?

Friends Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit and we are already equipped for exactly that! Let's go! In Jesus' name, Amen.