

+ Numbers 6:22-27 + The Lord Bless You + 1st Sunday after Pentecost: Holy Trinity + 26 May 2013 +

Have you ever considered how often you ask God to bless others? A person sneezes and automatically you say, "God bless you!" You wrap up a phone call or an e-mail or you simply want to wish someone well, so you say, "God's blessings!" You ask God to bless the food you're about to eat. In our home, we even have a little blessing for the kids to conclude their prayers before going to bed. As Christians, we ask God to bless others a lot.

...But do you realize what you're asking when you do that? Have you considered what you're saying when, for example, you ask God to bless someone who has just sneezed? Do you think about what you're saying when you ask God to bless the food you're about to eat? Do you realize what's happening at the end of the worship service when the pastor raises his hands and says, "***The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with his favor and give you peace.***"? Or has it just become automatic?

There's no reason for us to stop uttering such familiar blessings. Asking for God's blessing on others is very loving. Yet this Trinity Sunday, let's take a moment to better understand what the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is giving us when he blesses us. Centuries ago, the Lord instituted a special blessing through which his priests would place his name on his faithful people, a blessing still being used for that purpose today.

From the very beginning, Christians have recognized the teaching of the Trinity, three persons in one God, embedded in the threefold repetition of this blessing. We don't hear the actual words "Father", "Son" and "Holy Spirit", but we still hear the blessing of the triune God—the care of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the peace of the Holy Spirit. As he did for the ancient Israelites, so also for us the Lord uses simple, familiar words to tell us, **THE LORD BLESS YOU.**

Word was spreading throughout the camp. "It's time to go!" Israelite families began packing up their tents and possessions, their kids and animals. For nearly two years, they had been camped at the base of Mount Sinai in the middle of what was largely a barren wilderness. The Lord had commanded Moses to bring the people there so God could reveal to them his holy Law—not only the moral law, but the ceremonial and civil law that would guide them. Now it was time to go, time to head back out into the wilderness towards the Promised Land of Canaan.

The Lord had miraculously delivered his people from slavery in Egypt. He had brought the Egyptian empire to its knees with ten plagues. When the Egyptian army pursued them, the Lord parted the Red Sea so the people could pass through on dry ground. Nearly two million had traveled to the base of Mount Sinai. How was the Lord going to protect and provide for them? How was he going to take care of them? How could they be sure?

To strengthen his people, the Lord made preparations for their worship life, preparations that would remind them of his gracious presence. He had them build and dedicate the tabernacle, a movable tent that would serve as a visible reminder of the Lord's constant watch over those he loved. The Lord also commanded Aaron and the priests of Israel to verbally remind the people of his fatherly care. "***The LORD bless you and keep you...***"

In these words, we recall the work of God the Father. Basically, **the Lord bless you with his fatherly care.** For a moment, look around and consider how the Lord has blessed you and continues to bless you. Consider how he gave you the gift of life and gave you your physical being—your soul, your body, your senses, your talents, your mind, and all your abilities. He gave you all those things, but now he continues to care for you.

Out of love, your heavenly Father also provides clothing and shoes, food and drink, property and home, family and children, all that you need for this life, and even everything else you own. The Lord blesses you with all that. What's even more amazing is that he provides all these physical blessings for all creation, as King David once wrote, "***The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.***" (Psalm 145:15-16)

On top of all that, your heavenly Father provides even more blessings—spiritual blessing for all who are his sons and daughters through faith. Your gracious Father keeps watch over you. He preserves and protects you. Watch a parent snuggle a child close when that child isn't feeling well or has had a bad dream. In a similar way the Father keeps you close to his heart. The Psalmist once sang, "***The LORD watches over you—the LORD is your shade at your right hand...the LORD will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.***" (Psalm 121:5,7-8) Your heavenly Father watches out for you. He watches over you. He sends his angels to protect you and guides all things for your good, whether in this life or in the life to come. He is your good and merciful Father in heaven who blesses and keeps you.

Amazingly, your heavenly Father keeps watch over you, even though you don't deserve it. You see, by nature you and I are enemies of God, haters of his free and faithful grace and born to disobey him at every step. In spite of your inborn wickedness, your heavenly Father still pours out his gracious love to make you his beloved child and keep you close to his heart.

...But how is that possible? It's not because any of us are so lovable before God. In fact, we're all conceived and born as his mortal enemies, but our heavenly Father makes it possible through his Son, Jesus Christ. ***"The LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you..."***

The Lord bless you with his shining grace. Now that might sound a little strange, but think of it this way. When a child is born, how do the faces of mom and dad look as they gaze at their little one? They beam with love and joy, don't they? In a similar way, the Lord reminds you why he looks at you with love and joy. Sin left you in the darkness of rebellion and wickedness. By nature, your heart blindly sought to disobey your heavenly Father, but now the Lord shines his grace on you through his Son.

What was it that moved Jesus to take on human flesh like yours, to face the same trials and temptations and challenges that you face? It was grace—the undeserved, self-sacrificing love of the triune God. Grace moved Jesus to be the faithful Son who perfectly obeyed God's holy Law in its entirety because you could not. Grace is the reason that, as true God, Jesus shattered sin's darkness in your life with his perfect faithfulness and poured in the warm, bright light of the Father's gracious love through faith in him.

Grace moved Christ to make his way through the dusty, dirty roads of this life until he reached the cross, where he suffered the death you deserve because by nature you are lost and condemned. With Christ's holy, precious blood and his innocent suffering and death, the gracious love of the heavenly Father poured out from the cross through Jesus, his Son, to you. There on the cross you see how deep and broad and high the love of the triune God really is for sinners like you and me. Then his gracious love conquered death once and for all with Christ's resurrection from the dead.

The victory of God's grace is yours now, because Christ has purchased you with his blood. Now in this blessing he shines the light of God's grace into your sin-darkened life. He shatters your gloom and scatters your guilt. The triune God looks at you with love and joy like parents gazing on their newborn child. The Lord has shined his undeserved kindness on you through Christ's work of deliverance, but now he shines the light of his grace through you to the sin-darkened world around you. That, too, is grace, as he gives you the privilege to be his light sharing his love with sin-darkened souls.

...But how is that possible? How does all that become yours? For you to enjoy any blessings from the triune God, you need the final blessing that the Lord gave his ancient people. ***"The LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace."*** In that phrase, we're basically told, **The Lord bless you with his reconciling peace** or as we're used to hearing, ***"The Lord look on you with his favor and give you peace."*** In his grace, the triune God grants you his peace through the reconciling work of the Holy Spirit.

In centuries past, a king had to give his attention to a subject if that person wanted the king's favor. What could move the King of kings to turn his love towards you? It's certainly not because of your own thinking or choosing or merit that moves God to turn his love toward you.

Instead, the Giver of life, the Holy Spirit reconciles you with God through the Gospel—the good news of what Christ has done for you. In Holy Baptism, he cleanses you with water connected with the Word and places the name of the triune God on you. In the Lord's Supper, the Holy Spirit brings you Christ's forgiveness, strength for your life in Christ, and the assurance of salvation as you receive Christ's body and blood in, with, and under bread and wine. Through these means of grace, the Holy Spirit restores peace between you and God. He alone directs God's love towards you.

How awesome to have the Holy Spirit care so much about you that he brings true peace to your life, peace that comes purely from the grace of God! That peace guides you in life and in death. That peace allows you to put your head on your pillow at night confident that the Lord is watching over you and will one day bring you to be in heaven with him. When faced with trial or struggle or frustration or pain or grief, the peace that comes from the Holy Spirit leads you to echo the words of St. Paul, ***"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** (Romans 8:38-39)

"The Lord bless you!" Those aren't mere words that we repeat over and over again. They're not merely a signal that the service is about to end and you can finally get out of that uncomfortable metal chair. No, this is the precious gift of the triune God who puts his name on you as his son or his daughter. The heavenly Father will continue to shower his blessings on you and keep you close to his heart. The Son in grace continues to guide all things for your good. The Holy Spirit continues to strengthen you through his means of grace until you enter glory. So then, ***"The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace."*** Amen.