

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
May 26, 2013  
Trinity Sunday**

**Numbers 6:22-27**

**Don't Leave Without the Blessing!**

- 1. The Aaronic Blessing**
- 2. Trinity Sunday**
- 3. Don't Leave Without the Blessing**

**Hymns: 195 – 193 – Closing “Glorify Thy Name”**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

*The LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.’”*

*“So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.”*

You may or may not know this, but for each Sunday of the church year, there is a set of assigned Bible readings. Those readings serve to bring the whole service together under one theme. Typically, a pastor will pick one of those readings to use as the basis for his sermon message. When I read the words from the first of the lessons that are listed for this Sunday, I didn't give them much initial consideration for use as my sermon text. I thought, “Those are too familiar. I speak them every single week. The people hear them every single week. They know what they mean. There isn't much more to say about them.” But then I thought about it more, “Maybe that is exactly why I should pick this text. Perhaps I was doing with my text consideration what all of us often do with the parts of the order of service, not giving them all that much thought.” So the words which we will use for our sermon message this morning are these familiar words from our worship liturgy, as they are found in Numbers 6, **“The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”** I hope that as we look at them, God would lead us to appreciate the simple and common ways in which he speaks to us and works for us.

Those familiar words that we find in Numbers 6 are known as the Aaronic Blessing. It was the

blessing that God gave to Aaron and his sons, the priests of Israel, to speak to God's chosen people when they gathered for worship. And as they spoke it to the people of Israel, they were proclaiming a pure gospel message. In the worship life of the Israelites, God wanted to be known as a gracious and merciful God. And as they listened to these words, the Israelites would be called to consider all that their gracious God had done for them in keeping them, blessing them, loving them and giving them peace.

And because these words so clearly present God to us as the God of free and faithful grace, we continue to use this blessing still today. In clear, precise words that direct us to the work of our Triune God, we hear the beautiful gospel message. These words are all about the abounding love that God has and promises to continue to give to us out of his grace. The benediction speaks of the blessings that he wants to bring into our lives. So, really, it is the ideal way for us to close each time we gather in God's house. As we gather to unload our burdens, as we are assured of our forgiveness, as we are refreshed through the Word and Sacrament, we are ready to go again out into the world. But before we do that, God has one final word to speak to us. Like a parent who calls out, “I love you,” to their child as they are heading out the door, so God calls to us. Before we leave his house, he has that one last message to say to us. “Remember! You have my blessing; you are in my care. I'm looking after you. I'm filling your life with my love.” What an ideal and reassuring way to go out from God's house and into the world – with the blessing of our Triune God.

Yet, what is often the reality when it is time for the blessing in the service? Are our ears still listening attentively to God's words? As we hear those words that mark the end, do we more often have our mind on other things? Do we use the Blessing as our cue to get ready to go. Pack up the things; flip to the closing hymn; check the watch to see how long you've been here; start thinking about the day ahead; while Pastor says those same words that he says every other week. Are we like the teen running out the door, who misses his parents call of “I love you;” because he is thinking about what he and his friends are about to do. It is easy for us to gloss over this wonderful proclamation at the end of our service where God says one more time, “I love you.” It is easy for the blessing to get lost there at the end of our service.

In a bit of irony, I believe the day of the church year when the recorded words of God's blessing is found in our lectionary, or order of Bible readings, is on Trinity Sunday. As the blessing is given at the end, Trinity Sunday also comes at the end. It is celebrated at the end of the Festival half of the church year, after the great celebrations of the Christmas and

Easter seasons and the meaningful days of Ascension and Pentecost. And like the blessing, Trinity Sunday can serve a wonderful purpose there at the end. Ideally, Trinity Sunday is a day in which we get to celebrate all that we have seen our Triune God do for us during those great festivals. It is almost a culmination, a celebratory review of what we have heard about in our worship services over the last few months. Ideally, we can gather together and give thanks for the work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Ideally, this is to be a day of great celebration as we leave the great Festivals of the church year behind.

Yet, realistically, Trinity Sunday often gets lost. It gets lost at the tail end of the great Christian festivals that are so familiar. I'm sure it doesn't find its way onto our calendar like Christmas and Easter. It gets lost as the first Sunday in the "non-festival" half of the church year. (Non-festival – that sounds exciting, doesn't it?) This year, it even gets "lost" on a holiday weekend, on the Sunday after Confirmation no less.

The Blessing of our God and Trinity Sunday both have this ideal potential to send us out with a wonderful message, but realistically, we often leave without hearing the Blessing from God.

So, today, on this Trinity Sunday, let us focus on these words that we so often hear, but maybe don't as often think about and treasure. Let us use words of the benediction to contemplate, celebrate, and treasure all that our Triune God has done to bless us in his love.

As we look at the Aaronic blessing here in Numbers, we do not have the persons of the Trinity listed as they are in the apostolic blessing where we hear, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." However, the work of the Triune God is clearly pointed to in these words.

As we hear "the Lord bless you and keep you," our thoughts go to the work of God the Father. In his providence, God seeks to give us blessings in all aspects of life.

- Preservation in this life
  - From the world that we live in that provides for our needs (natural blessings)
  - To the ability to work (material blessings)
  - To health and medicine
- Protection
  - From soldiers and police and fire
  - Safety from natural disasters (tornado in OK) or sudden accidents (bridge in Mt. Vernon)

- Blessed and Kept in Spiritual matters
  - Given grace and a plan of salvation when we didn't deserve it
  - Kept from temptation
  - Guarded from the evil around us.

That care and keeping is a blessing from God the Father, the first person of the Trinity.

The second part of God's blessing points us to the person in whom we see the love of God. God points us to his grace when he says, "**The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.**" When we consider God's grace, we think of Jesus Christ, in whom God's grace is most clearly seen. As we think about his work, we must also think about our sin. Our sin makes us objects of God's wrath. Our sin causes God's face to be turned away from us. But as we hear the second phrase of God's blessing, we are reminded that in his love and through the work that Jesus did, we are no longer cast out of God's presence forever. We stand before him. His love shines upon us. That is a blessing that comes from Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity.

Then finally, in the third part of this benediction, we receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit. "**The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.**" Without the converting work of the Holy Spirit, the grace and love of God the Father that is put into action by God the Son would mean nothing to us. In spite of our sins, God does not turn his back on us, leaving us to the end that we are deserving of. Instead, the Holy Spirit comes and seeks us out, turning us to God so that we might see what God has done for us. He turns us to God so that we might know the peace that only belongs to those who know the favor of God. It is a peace that brings us comfort as we go through this world. But, more importantly, this blessing from God gives us security in death and calm even as we consider our eternity. This is the peace that God wants us to know and live in each and every time we leave this place; he wants us to know that this peace is ours after we have heard all that he has done for us. That peace before God is a blessing given by the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity.

When we look at the work of the Triune God, we very quickly see the magnitude of what God was giving to the people of Israel and to all of us when he gave God's ministers a way "to put his name upon the people to bless them." As we go out from this place each and every Sunday, may we wait with eager anticipation for those final words that God gives to us. And only after we have heard the blessing of our God, may we be confident to go and live out in the world. So when you hear those words at the end, cherish them for what they are: A blessing from your Triune God. Amen.

May God the Father, your Creator and Preserver, bless and keep you! May Jesus Christ, your Savior and Lord, make God's face shine upon you and be gracious to you! May God the Holy Spirit, your Sanctifier and Counselor, turn God's face toward you and give you everlasting peace! Amen!