

TRINITY SUNDAY

Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

Triply Blessed

Number 6:22-27

²² The LORD said to Moses, ²³ "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: ²⁴ ""The LORD bless you and keep you; ²⁵ the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.'" ²⁷ "So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them."

Today is Trinity Sunday. This is the one Sunday on the church calendar when the entire service focuses on the majesty and the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Actually, that is a bit of a misstatement. The reality of the matter is that every Sunday focuses our attention on our triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So much so, that at times we might take it for granted.

Let's look at the order of service as it is found in the worship folder and see how many references we make to the trinity. The service begins with the trinitarian opening: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." On the next page, you find the prayer of the day, which concludes with the words: "Through Jesus Christ, you Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever." The psalm of the day always includes the *Gloria Patri*: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit..." On the next page you find the Apostle's Creed: "I believe in God the Father...I believe in Jesus Christ...I believe in the Holy Spirit." The closing prayer makes specific reference to the trinity. And then you have the closing blessing. This is the part of the service that we take a closer look at in our sermon today as the words of this blessing are taken directly from our sermon text, which is recorded in the book of Numbers.

That's a pretty amazing thing to think about. Although this bulletin was printed just this week, the words on this page were written about 1400 BC. That makes this the most ancient part of our liturgy and also one of the most special parts of the entire service. These are the very words the Lord instructed his Old Testament priests to use as a blessing for his people Israel. As we use these words today, we are able to connect ourselves directly with the children of Israel. That alone is enough to make us sit up and pay attention, asking "What does God have to say to me with these special words?"

But how much attention do we pay to that final blessing? There is a strong temptation for you to think to yourselves, "We've made it the benediction, that means the service is almost over. I wonder what time it is. What was the errand I need to run on the way home? Oh yeah, 'Amen. Amen. Amen.'" There is a similar temptation for me, as the pastor, to think to myself, "Good. Made it through another service," and let the words exit my mouth without passing through my heart first. Shame on us. Shame on us if we ever treat these words of God with such slight regard. These are not just some nice sounding sentences that signal the end of the service. This is the blessing of the triune God. These words are rich in theology and power for daily living. My prayer is that by looking more closely at the message of these verses, you will gain a greater appreciation of their beauty and enjoy more fully the blessing they impart.

The blessing easily divides itself into three parts. This is a very significant fact, especially as we look at these words on Trinity Sunday. One can easily see the mystery of the triune God—three persons, yet one God—reflected in the three thoughts of the blessing. The first one focuses our eyes on the work of God the Father. It begins simply, "*The LORD bless you.*" I think the word "bless" is one of the words most abused by our modern society. How many times don't you hear people say, "Bless you" or "I feel really blessed to be here today" or "That is a real blessing"? These are all nice sentiments. But they are meaningless if they are not connected to the one who does the blessing. It is good for us stop and count our blessings. No matter who you are or what your position is in life, I'm sure you could come up with a long list. Even more important than counting those blessings is knowing the one from whom those blessings come. Your Father in heaven has provided every good gift you have on this earth for you.

And not only does God provide you with so many blessings, he preserves you as well. "The LORD bless you and *keep* you." The second thought of this verse is very much the same as when we pray, "Lord, deliver us from evil." There

really is no way for us to know just how much physical danger and spiritual disaster the Lord spares us from day after day. This is all part of his work as our great Preserver. Sometimes he also carries out this work by allowing times of testing to come into our life—not to drive us away, but to keep us even closer as he works all things out for our good. The greatest work of preservation God carries out for us is preserving our faith unto death, so that we might receive the crown of life. All of these blessings are given to you with the words, “The LORD bless you and keep you.”

The next verse of this blessing turns our attention to the work of Jesus Christ. It says, “*The LORD make his face shine upon you.*” What does it mean for someone to make his face shine? What does that look like? If you have been to a wedding lately, all you had to do was to look at the face of the groom standing at the front of the church with his bride walking down the aisle. That’s what it looks like to have one’s face shining. Or you could have come here on Friday and looked at the faces of the Learning Center parents as they watched their children celebrate “Moving on with Jesus” day. Their faces beamed with pride and with joy. In this blessing we ask for the Lord to look on us with the same sense of pride and joy. But how is that possible? I don’t know about you, but when I think back to some of my words and actions of this past week, I think God would sooner turn his face the other way than look down upon me with a great, big smile. Yet, that is exactly what he does. And he is able to do so because of the work of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus hung on the cross, he experienced his Father turning his face away from him. In doing so, he assured us of the fact that God would never turn his face away from us. The punishment that we deserve has already been taken out on Jesus. God now looks on us with the same kind of love and affection as a Father has for his dear child. Why did Jesus go through such great pain so that we sinners could know such joy? It was grace. It was his undeserved love. And that is exactly what the next phrase of this blessing asks for: “The LORD make his shine upon you and be *gracious* to you.”

The third and final verse of this blessing points us to the work of God the Holy Spirit. It says, “The LORD look upon you with favor.” The Hebrew phrase literally says, “The LORD lift us his face upon you” or “turn his face towards you.” The thought behind these words is that God would give you his special attention. The “you” that is used throughout these verses is the singular form in Hebrew. This blessing is not written to “y’all” as a group, it is written to “you” as an individual. It is amazing that the LORD of all the universe is interested in you as an individual. But you can be certain that it is true. One of the ways he shows this personal interest in you is by placing his Spirit in your heart. At your baptism, God claimed you as his own dear child and gave you his Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing your eternal life. Ever since that day, you have the opportunity to enjoy the most personal and fulfilling relationship that you can experience in the world—that with your LORD.

The result of this special one-on-one relationship is the final phrase of this magnificent blessing: “and give you *peace*.” The peace the LORD gives you is the peace that you need. It is the peace that comes from knowing how much he loves you and cares for you. It is the peace that remains in your heart even when the world around you seems to be in chaos. It is the peace that means that you can wake up in the morning not afraid of what the day ahead will bring you, but confident that the LORD is by your side to face together with you anything that comes your way.

With that word of peace we come to the conclusion of this amazing blessing. And what makes this blessing especially great is the promise that is attached to it. God said about these words, “*And they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.*” When these words are spoken at the close of a service, they are so much more than wishful thinking or a nice sentiment. With these words, God places his name upon you and promises to bless you. I cannot think of a better way to begin a week than under this blessing of the LORD. As you leave the church, you can be confident that God will carry out his promise. He will bless you and keep you. He will make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. He will look with favor upon you and give you peace. Appreciate the power of those words and live under the blessing of your triune God. **Amen.**

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