

Numbers 6:22-27 May 26th 2013 Holy Trinity Sunday

A dad struggles to change his newborn's diaper in the hospital. "Bless your heart," says the nurse, as she gives him some much needed pointers. The dad's heart swells with pride ~ yes, he is changing a diaper. Good of the nurse to notice how he's helping out his wife. ... Or maybe that's not quite what she was expressing.

Reality check: I learned a little about what "Bless your heart" really means in the South, when I was talking to a friend who has lived here in NC for quite some time. Other than the friendly compliment I used to think it was ~ it's an expression which means: you just did something or said something rather foolish. You ever heard that?

If you haven't yet experienced that, you can at least relate to this example... Tell me the most common time people say "Bless you." [pause for answer] Did you ever wonder why it's at that awkward time when one sneezes that a total stranger from across the room ~ almost anywhere you go ~ will call out: "Bless you!"?

Yikes! Is this the only time people seriously hear a blessing? Sneezing or doing/saying something awkward or embarrassing?

Maybe you're one of those kindhearted people who try to remedy the situation: You may say, "Have a blessed day!" But do people know what this means? Maybe it's no different to the hearers from "Good luck!" or "Hope everything goes well!"

One of the amazing things about our God – praise be His holy Name – is: he blesses his people. But how often do you think about – when was the last time, for example, you slowed down in a busy day to really think about – the words of blessing the Lord speaks to you? ***"The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord shine his face toward you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his face to you and give to you peace."*** – vs.24-26

Do those words mean no different than a "Good luck"? Do they simply mark the end of the church service before "you're free to go"? No. No.

God gives words that don't only wish us well; they actually carry blessing to us. Listen: ***"and they will put my name upon my people, and I will bless them"*** (vs.27). There is no uncertainty – no wishyness to these words. Our God – the Lord turns and looks towards us with love – He speaks his blessing to us, he throws open his arms from heaven. And blessings pour down on his people. He nurtures and preserves our lives. He gives us peace.

He also gives us the assurance of His help with the beginning of a new week. We, like God's Old Testament people, navigate dangerous terrain as we make our way through life. Here our God imparts comfort, strength, hope and confidence to counter doubt, fear and fatigue as we face any and every troubling situation we could possibly face. How recently have you been rejected, lonely, or sad? Is there something painful in your life, confrontation coming from someone close to you, uncertainty of some sort?

As I go into a world that competes for my attention, where the devil & demons plot their next attempt to tempt me away from my security and peace in Christ... the Lord's blessing reminds me: the One with us is greater than all the forces opposed to us. You have the Lord's word of promise right here – saying that he will be with you and will bless you – you who through faith are shielded by His power.

This blessing paints the assurance of God's face beaming toward us – and that smile radiates his love for you. ***"The Lord make his face shine upon you... the Lord look with favor on you."***

When I say "you," I mean "you" and "you" and "you" ... (insert names of those present...) ... each of you. It can be spoken to a whole crowd of people, but the words are directed to you, the individual. The Words from God here – vs.24-26, the blessing itself – shift to a personal, singular assurance to each of you, each of God's people.

Think how much this means. Often in our day you'll notice: people fail to give a person undivided attention. You know what I mean? [Example acted out with someone in the front row] "I'll just get this text to Susan done (glancing up & down), while Joe here is telling me about his day." Our Lord does not treat us that way. His own word of blessing assures you of his unwavering focus on you. And with that comes his personal, individual, all-the-time attention to you (include names of individuals)... and to you... and to you.

Our world hungers for this. Hungers for the way things should be in our relationship with God.

The Father designed a perfect creation before time began. He filled it with beautiful sunrises and sunsets painted across the canvass of the sky... blankets of golden flowers to brighten your way home... things to delight you in your walk with him through life.

Then sin erected a barrier between man and God – man-made, but insurmountable for man to overcome.

Now all of humankind aches for peace. We ache for "everything the way it is supposed to be." Prof. Paustian, in one of his books, explains: "everything the way it is supposed to be" is a description that comes a little closer to the meaning of the Hebrew word "Shalom." Unspoiled harmony. Perfect wellbeing. What you've never fully seen, but inwardly ache for.

I hear that word, "shalom," and I shrink in disgust from my own acts of meanness, cowardice, ignorant or deliberate selfishness. My actions have spoiled moments for the others whom God has graciously placed in my life. I have caused my relationships – with people and with my God – to be "not the way it's supposed to be." ... You too? Right. [thoughts from *More Prepared to Answer*, p.175]

Look back to the blessing spoken here! 3 times the Lord's name is spoken in the blessing. This is no accident. In each mention, you hear expression of the blessings the members our Triune God convey to us.

God planned a way to tear down the wall that separated you & I from him. He chose us from all eternity to be his own. Then he carried out His plan at just the right time.

God the Father sent His One and Only Son, who came into this world full of grace. He is God the One and Only who makes our God known to us. "His incarnation was a quiet echo of the ancient 'let there be light'" [Paustian, *ibid*]. Look at the connections to John's gospel: He is the light of the world. He came to pierce / to shatter our darkness. The connection to Numbers: "the Lord make his face light up upon you / make his face shine upon you – and be gracious to you."

Grace. Only Jesus lived life that lives up to the description "everything the way it is supposed to be." See the retelling of the details sparkle with shalom as you hear Jesus say: "let the little children come to me" – as you see his tired arms stretch out as he speaks, "I have compassion on these people, for they are like sheep without a shepherd" – and delight as he doesn't send the thousands away with empty stomachs, but provides them all something to eat. Stand in the crowd and hear him teach, and see him heal the sick. Hear him offer the greatest gift: "Son, your sins are forgiven you" / "Daughter, go in peace."

From the fullness of his grace we have received one gift after another. Jesus is our path to God. Jesus is our payment for sin. Jesus wraps us in his holy life. In that way, through Jesus, God our Father has been gracious to us.

And the Holy Spirit is the one to thank for bringing us to know him, to believe in his saving work! He gifts us with faith, so that we experience "peace" – peace beyond human understanding, his peace.

Father, Son, Holy Spirit. On Trinity Sunday, we hear our Lord explain in Vs.27: "**place my name upon them.**" "Name" – notably – is singular. Yet again, just prior notice in the blessing how "the Lord" is spoken 3 times. This fits

as an OT passage to place beside Jesus' words at the close of Matthew ch.28. There he says: "baptize in the name" – and, "name" is singular. There is only One God. Then Jesus goes right on to expression of the 3 persons of our one God: "baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

This is the name spoken at my baptism, where God through his powerful Word along with the water splashed upon me at His command brought me His soul-saving forgiveness and the inheritance of his kingdom. He put his name on us... claimed us as his own, made us his dear son – his dear daughter, when he made his light shine in our hearts.

Now his Word of blessing is spoken time and again to me and to you. And I am reminded of just what He did to make me his own; my trust in His love for me is confirmed; He gives me his blessings once again – new for each day.

He preserves us through life, gifting us with all we need for survival, and much more. **"The Lord bless and keep you"** is filled with shoulders of friends to lean on... tastes dancing across your tongue as your eyes feast on the smiles of family or friends gathered around a table. . . the power of the Word to lift my burdened soul . . . the end to all loneliness in life as I realize I have a Companion God who will never leave me alone to bear the heartbreak of life in this fallen world.

And these are only the tip of the iceberg of God's blessings. And think of how much better His blessings will be in Eternity – when he brings us by His hand out of this sin-sick world, to the better land he has in store for us.

We might consider rewinding & replaying in our mind this blessing again and again throughout the ins and outs of the week, and repeating the blessing to one another.

The Lord reminds us of his name upon us: "You are mine. I have called you by name. I've engraved you on the palm of my hands. No one can snatch you out of my hands:

- "When your accuser the devil, my enemy and yours, comes to challenge your status... listen to me tell you again: 'I put my name on you. You are mine – my son, my daughter, and recipient of my blessings now and forever.'"
- "When your conscience throws you into turmoil, and you wonder if I still love you and am here to forgive you, listen to me tell you again: 'I am gracious to you, and my face is shining upon you. I give you peace.'"

Only our Almighty Lord could make such a promise and keep it. For he alone is God – there is no other. We rejoice in that truth today.

So tonight when you go to bed... tomorrow when you get up... throughout the days of this week, replay / hear again the Lord's Word of blessing to you... and be comforted by all it means: **"The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace."**