

## Sermon for May 26, 2013 – Holy Trinity

Numbers 6:22-27

### Theme: You belong to the LORD:

- 1) *To the Father, who keeps you.*
- 2) *To the Son, who is gracious to you.*
- 3) *And to the Holy Spirit, who grants you peace.*

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

The words are familiar. You hear them almost every Sunday. Many think they signal the end of worship. Truth be told, they really signal something far more important: the continuation of God's gracious service toward us.

The Benediction (or: Aaronic blessing) is like God telling us: "Don't be afraid to go out into the world. You are my dear child. I love you and forgive you. I will be with you. Hold on to me in faith and I will deliver you from every evil attack and bring you safely into my heavenly kingdom."

Let us meditate on these truths, under the theme: **You belong to the LORD**, 1) *To the Father, who keeps you.* 2) *To the Son, who is gracious to you.* 3) *And to the Holy Spirit, who grants you peace.*

### Part One: To the Father who keeps you.

Imagine what it was like for those who first heard our sermon text. The Israelites had been in the desert for a little over two years. During this time they faced enemies, heat, perceived food and water shortages, and much more. This desert journey was a real test of their faith. The Israelites were forced to rely on God to provide even the most basic necessities of life. We can imagine that their thoughts may have questioned: What if the LORD doesn't go with us, then what? How can we be sure that the LORD will go with us? Our journey is long, scary and difficult.

Our lives can be likened to the Israelites' journey through the desert. Life is scary. There are so many enemies - dangers to both our bodies and souls. There are so many things to worry about, like our finances, health, and children. The future is getting more uncertain. The world seems to be getting even more confusing and godless than before.

And so, seeing not only the potential fears of the Israelites, but also what we face, *the LORD said to Moses,* <sup>23</sup> *"Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. With this statement, the LORD has given his church of all time the command and direction of how to bless His beloved people. And who are they? They are those who have been baptized in His triune name and have received his gift of salvation in faith. God wants to bless us and He works in all things so that we can be blessed, as we see in the first part of the Aaronic blessing.*

*"The LORD bless you and keep you;*

The word "bless" basically means to make happy. God the Father wants us is to be happy. "If God the Father wants us to be happy," someone might ask, "why do I struggle financially? Why am I sick? Why did God call my loved one home?" I do not know the mind of God, and cannot give you specific answers to those questions. But what I can tell you is this: The ultimate happiness God desires for you is not wealth and health here on earth, but rather an eternity with him in paradise. God, in his wisdom, knows that there are things on this earth that distract us from this, true happiness. Let me use an example: when I was a young child, I loved motorcycles. I thought that if I had a motorcycle, I would be truly happy. But, my parents never gave me a motorcycle. Was it because they didn't want me to be happy? No, just the opposite was true. They knew I was too young for a motorbike and that giving me such a gift would hurt me. In the same way God the Father also knows what is best for us. Even though we, in our child-like minds, may not understand why God withholds things from us, we can trust that He knows what is best for us, and will work in all things for our good. And, do you know what?

This knowledge that I can trust God - that He is working in all things for my good - truly makes me happy. This promise gives me confidence to face each new day, because I know the LORD keeps me.

The word translated in our text as *keep* (*The Lord bless you and “keep” you*), has the basic idea of “exercising great care.” God the Father exercises this care over us by keeping us from evil, that is by helping us avoid spiritual and physical harm, and by providing all that we need to stay alive and more. Martin Luther, in his excellent explanation of the 1st Article of the Apostles’ Creed, summarizes the Father’s keeping us in this way: *I believe that God has created me together with all that exists. God has given me and still preserves my body and soul; eyes, ears, and all limbs and senses; reason and all mental faculties. In addition, God daily and abundantly provides shoes and clothing, food and drink, house and farm, spouse and children, fields, livestock, and all property—along with all the necessities and nourishment for this body and life. God protects me against all danger and shields and preserves me from all evil. And all this is done out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all! For all of this I owe it to God to thank and praise, serve and obey him. This is most certainly true.*

When you consider all that God the Father does to bless and keep us, how can we not be happy and be filled with faith? When the devil tempts you to feel sorry for yourself, that you don’t have this or that material thing, think of all the wonderful things you do have from God - the care He has shown you in the past, and promises to continue to show you in the future.

Part Two: To the Son, who is gracious to you.

*The LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;*

You know how it is when a person is happy, how their entire face just seems to glow? And how wonderful it is to be the recipient of such happiness! Do you remember the feeling, as a child, when your parents were happy with you and expressed it?

Jesus’ face shines upon us. We didn’t do anything to deserve Jesus’ joy over us. Rather, his undeserved love is what makes him so happy with us. He is happy that through His work of saving us, we are once again members of His family, and can enjoy His presence forever. He is happy that we trust him, and have a renewed relationship with him.

Jesus’ happiness with us has everything to do with the fact that He is gracious to us. “But, what does that mean? What is grace?” Grace basically means free love. Grace is an expression of God’s undeserved love for us. How is Jesus gracious to us? While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8-10). He paid our debt of sin in full, so that we could have a renewed relationship with him. By forgiving our sin, Jesus tore down the barrier that separated us from God in order to give to us eternal life

Martin Luther describes Jesus’ gracious work for us in this way: *I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father in eternity, and also a true human being, born of the Virgin Mary, is my LORD. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned human being. He has purchased and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. He has done all this in order that I may belong to him, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true.*

Whenever temptation or trouble comes your way, remember the promises Jesus speaks through the Benediction: The LORD promises to be gracious to you, just as he has in the past. If ever you feel unworthy of God, remember the gracious love He expressed for you on the cross. Remember how he put his name on you in Holy Baptisms. You belong to God.

Part Three: And to the Holy Spirit, who grants you peace

The final part of the Benediction blessing deals with the relationship the Holy Spirit has with us: *the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.*

Let me illustrate what this means: remember, as a child, you had some problems that you needed to talk to your parents about. They might have been reading the paper or watching TV. You called out to them. They stopped what they were doing and looked up to you to listen. Or maybe you were on the playground, and your mother sensed some trouble. She looked up to you, ready to act. In a greater, more loving way than this, the Holy Spirit turns his face towards us, ready to help, defend, guide and comfort us.

The Holy Spirit is always watching over us, just like a mother watches over her children. And why? Because we are God's children through faith in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit is in the background, working to keep us in the faith, through his Word and Sacraments. He is guiding history and commanding his angels concerning us. He does all these things in order to grant us peace.

The Hebrew word for peace is a special word that includes wholeness, health, completion, unity, and a restored relationship with God. The Holy Spirit grants us a greater peace than the world knows: He grants us a peace of conscience through the forgiveness of sins. He grants us peace in the sense that there is nothing we need to worry about, because the Holy Spirit himself is looking out for us. We can face any and every trouble with this peace. The Holy Spirit offers this peace to us through the Word and Sacraments that are offered in the Church, as Martin Luther explains: *I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my LORD or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins—mine and those of all believers. On the Last Day the Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and will give to me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.*

What does this Aaronic blessing mean for us? Why is it a part of our liturgy? The last verse of our text tells us: *"So they (the priests) will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them."*

We belong to the LORD. He sealed us as his own when He put His name on us at our baptisms. The Aaronic blessing we have just considered is God's irreversible contract with us: The Father promises to keep us. The Son promises to be gracious to us. The Holy Spirit promises to grant us peace. When we recall what it means to belong to the LORD, we realize that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35-39). With this confidence, let us face each day saying: I belong to the LORD and He to me. Nothing can separate me from Him. Amen.