

And now this is what God told Moses: *“So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.”* Everything Jesus is, you are. When you were baptized, God put Jesus’ name on you. That’s what you are, right? A Christian! That means that in God’s eyes, everything Jesus is, you are. Remember what God the Father thinks about Jesus? *“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased”* (Luke 3:22). That’s how God thinks about you! God’s blessing isn’t just a fancy way to say, “The End,” at the end of church. Those words of blessing is God putting his approval on you so that you can go through the week with peace. It doesn’t matter what any other person thinks about you. It doesn’t matter what you think about yourself. Here’s the truth: In Jesus, you are blessed! You need to hear that.

Maybe we’re not used to it, but let’s try speaking God’s blessing on some special people today. Donna Thompson has spent 21 years teaching our children about God’s grace. Can you bless her with me? Let’s use the words we use at the end of our services: *“The LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The LORD look on you with favor and give you peace.”* It’s great to have our Sunday school kids here. Can we bless them together? *“The LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The LORD look on you with favor and give you peace.”* Parents, this is something you could do at home. Bless your kids!

We have been blessed by our Sunday School teachers and Lutheran school teachers throughout this school year. Can you bless them with me? *“The LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The LORD look on you with favor and give you peace.”* We have some guests here with us today. We are so happy to have you join us! Let’s bless them together: *“The LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The LORD look on you with favor and give you peace.”* It’s always wonderful to see our members here. I want to encourage you today not to let summer push you away from God. He wants to bless you. You need that! Let’s bless each other: *“The LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The LORD look on you with favor and give you peace.”*

Remember the man I told you about down south? He’d ask me how I was doing, and I would say, “Good!” Then I would ask him, and he would smile and say, “Blessed!” That’s you. Blessed!

Numbers 6:22-27
Pastor Nathan Nass

Trinity Sunday
May 22, 2016

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.”

“Blessed!”

My wife and I lived for a year in Peachtree City, GA. We loved living in Georgia, except I felt rude everywhere I went. Real southerners have a special way of talking. No matter how polite I was, I could not out-polite anyone! I tried. I remember politely saying, “Thank you, ma’am” to a lady at the gas station, and she said, “Oh, God bless you, sugar.” How could I match that? Or I thanked the server at a Waffle House, and she said, “Oh no, thank Jesus, sweetie.” Blessing people just seemed to be part of the culture. There was a man who would always ask me how I was doing. I would say, “Good. How are you?” And he would smile and say, “Blessed.”

“Blessed.” I don’t know about you, but that’s not how I talk. That’s not how I grew up talking. Most of us aren’t used to blessing people. People talk about Minnesota nice, but blessing just isn’t so much a part of our vocabulary, is it? We say, “Good,” not “Blessed.” We say, “Have a nice day,” not “God bless you.” Even in our Lutheran churches, I don’t think we really have the practice of blessing each other. Do we? Yet, God wants to bless his people. He says so today.

Because God knows that we need to be blessed. To be blessed is to be in a position of happy contentment. Isn’t that what you want? You need to be blessed. You need to know that you matter to someone. You need to know that someone approves of you. You need to know that if you weren’t here, life would be different. That even when things go wrong, it’s going to be okay. If you feel any of those needs, you need to be blessed!

And God knows that. So he reaches out to bless us. In fact, God told Moses to tell the priests, *“This is how you are to bless the Israelites.”* This whole idea of blessing the people was God’s idea. You don’t have to beg for God’s blessing. God wants to bless you! God wants to make it possible for people to live their lives with happy contentment. This is the kind of God that we have. No begging required. God wants to bless you! So God gave Moses the blessing we still say at the end of our services: *“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.”*

Did you notice the name for God that Moses uses? *“The LORD...”* Sometimes in the Bible the word *LORD* is written with all capital letters. Have you ever wondered why?

When the name for God is used as *LORD* with all capital letters, it's a special name that God gave himself. No other god is ever called the *LORD*—just the one true God. God explained what his name means when he said, "*The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin*" (Exodus 34:6-7). We have a great God! This is the *LORD* who wants to bless you.

And when God says "you," he really means *you*. In English, the word "you" can refer to one person—"you"—or a whole bunch of people—"you." When God says, "*The LORD bless you and keep you...*," the "you" is singular. He wants you to believe that his blessing is meant for you personally. God's blessing is not like the t-shirt cannon at Twins games. When the pastor speaks God's blessing, it's not like it's hitting some people around you, but not you. God never wants you to wonder whether his love and blessing really apply to you. He wants you to live in happy contentment in his care.

Here's how that's possible. "*The LORD make his face shine upon you...*" You hear this all the time, right? What does that mean? "*Make his face shine upon you...*" Isn't it true that the look on someone else's face can bring us so much pain or so much joy? They say that even little babies study our faces to get a glimpse at our hearts. A look of disappointment or anger can sadden or frighten us. A look of joy or kindness can make our day. So when God looks at us, his people, which is it? God's face shines upon you. Isn't that a beautiful thought? God approves of you.

But maybe you think about your life, and you think, "No way. There's no way that a perfect God should approve of sinful me." You're right! But listen to how God's blessing continues, "*The LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you...*" I hope you're learning to appreciate the word "grace." Grace is God's unconditional love for us. It's the love that doesn't treat us as our sins deserve, but sent Jesus to be our Savior. Our God is gracious to us. Did you notice that in this blessing there are no conditions? Not, "If you be good..." God's blessing is completely separate from our actions. It's tied to Jesus' actions for us. God's face shines on you—God approves of you—because Jesus your Savior has taken every sin away.

That's why we can pray, "*The LORD turn his face toward you...*" We're right back to the face of God again. A grandma I met here in Saint Peter has a granddaughter who is deaf. So she's learning how important her facial expressions are. The child can't hear or understand what she's saying. But the child can see her face. That little granddaughter just stares at her face, desperate for love and approval and affection. So what do you think this grandma does when she's around her granddaughter? She smiles and smiles and smiles! That's how God feels about you. There are things we can't understand about God. He is so much wiser and greater than we are, but he wants you to understand the look on his face—his smile. His love. His grace. He loves you. He approves of you. He wants to bless you.

"...and give you peace." God wants to put peace on your heart today. And here's

what peace is: Peace is knowing that because of Jesus and his forgiveness, God your Father is smiling at you today with love and grace. Peace is knowing that you don't have to spend your life struggling for other people's approval or fighting for your place or worrying about your identity or searching for your purpose, because you've found all of those things in Jesus. You have all you need in Jesus. You are blessed! That's where real peace comes from. You are blessed!

But that doesn't sound good enough, does it? Sure, we shake our heads in church, "Yep, God loves me. That's great." But then what do we do? We live our lives as if gaining other people's approval is the most important thing. For some reason, "blessed" doesn't sound that great. Test it for yourself. In your heart, which would you rather be: "Blessed" or "Beautiful" or "Popular" or "Famous" or "Cool" or "Loved by fill in the blank." Isn't it true that in life we are always struggling to win the approval of other people? That's why we dress the way we dress. "What are they going to think?" That's why we act the way we act. "What will they say?" That's why we don't have peace, because we always need one more person's approval to be content with ourselves.

So who are you trying to hit a home run for? Whom are you dying to impress? For a lot of men, it's our dads. We want dad to finally approve of us. Maybe it's your spouse. Maybe it's that friend. Maybe it's the cool crowd you want to be part of. How much effort don't we put into everyone else's approval? You worry about your clothes. You worry about your face. You worry about your weight. You worry about your words. I understand. I do too! But isn't it true that there is no peace in seeking to win other people's approval? The drive to be popular, cool, respected will never end. You will never get there. If only _____, then I would have peace. What a lie!

God knows us. He knows that we are wired with this need to know that we are loved. That we are special. Like a child, we are always looking for approval. So God offers us something better than "Cool" or "Beautiful" or "Popular"--"Blessed!" He told Moses, "I want you to tell my people over and over and over again that I couldn't be more pleased with them. I want you to tell them over and over again that because of Jesus their Savior, they have my approval. They are beautiful and wonderful and blessed in my eyes! They need to hear it over and over again, because it's only in realizing that my approval is the one that counts that they can have peace!"

We're talking about the Trinity today, and one time that we see the whole Trinity together—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—was at Jesus' baptism. Jesus—the Son—stood in the water as John the Baptist baptized him. The Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove. And God the Father spoke from heaven. And what did God the Father say? "*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased*" (Luke 3:22). What was he doing? God the Father was giving his approval to his Son Jesus. Even Jesus, in his perfect relationship with his Father, needed to know that he was blessed. That he was good enough. "*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*"