

First Sunday after Pentecost — Holy Trinity

May 27, 2018

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM

Numbers 6:22-27 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 on 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 Identity in the Triune God”

Today we are celebrating the Holy Trinity. Right off the bat, it probably sounds pretty intimidating. It sounds like one of those dry, stale doctrines that you would find explained in excruciating detail in one of those large, dusty church books without any pictures. But it doesn't have to be. This Sunday isn't about cramming your brain full of religious facts and then handing you a final test to see if you should really be called a Christian or not. The Bible teaching (after all, that's all doctrine means) of the Trinity is mainly meant to give us comfort.

We can think of it this way. We don't have to know how coal or natural gas or the process of nuclear fission creates electricity and then gets transmitted into our homes and powers our devices. We just need to know that it works and the electricity is there when we need it. Just like we don't need to be able to explain how gas goes from the pump into our cars and powers the engine. We just need to recognize that we need the gas and that it helps get us where we need to go.

That's what we see in Numbers chapter six. We hear these words as the blessing at the end of our services almost every Sunday. And we can connect the phrases in this blessing to help identify the Holy Trinity at work. But the most important thing we need to know is that the Trinity blesses us. Without understanding or being blessed to explain the inner workings of the Trinity, you have a new identity in your Triune God. You are blessed with goodness, grace and peace from the Triune God.

I. Getting to know the Creator's goodness and preservation

Just because we don't need to have everything 100% flawlessly accurate about every Bible teaching doesn't mean we should shy away from the difficult teachings in the Bible. One

Christian writer puts it this way: “Doctrines are not God: they are only a kind of map.”¹ I like this picture, because we aren’t worshipping doctrines or making our lives revolve around them. We are simply using them. And it lets Christians know just because we come across something new or unfamiliar in the Bible, that doesn’t mean we are in uncharted territory. Other Christians have been here before. They have explored. They have taken wrong turns. They have charted a course we keeps them consistent with what the Bible says without forcing the doctrine to say too much or too little. We simply get to compile all the information about one particular topic in the Bible and clarify it as much as God allows us to.

But I think we can all recognize doctrines aren’t popular in our world. As a natural human experience, we don’t want people teaching us what we should or shouldn’t believe about religion. And this is just an educated guess, but I think it goes along with our consumer mentality that we bring to just about everything in life. We don’t want to be limited. We have to have options. Choices. And having carefully crafted doctrinal statements just feels a little stifling.

We want to be able to choose our connection in life. We want to decide for ourselves which relationships are best for us. And sometimes that means getting to experience God in our own way on our own terms. And that is why it is actually pretty common to hear people tell you that they go hiking in the mountains or fishing on their favorite river as their way to experience God. And that is something that sounds attractive. And yet, what does it really do? Where does it really lead? You can watch the waves come crashing in on the beach or feel the exhilaration of a great bike ride or rock out to your favorite music, but what will it bring you besides that feeling?

Staying away from dogma or doctrine or the teachings that seem so smothering won’t mean you have no ideas about God. It just means you have no way of knowing if your ideas are completely flawed or contradictory or lead you to a dead end.

And that’s the tragedy of relying on our own attempts to acquire our own blessings. We can try things our own way. We can explore our own experiences. But we will end up with a life missing out on God’s blessings.

And here is what God actually wants for you: **“The Lord bless you and keep you.”** (Numbers 6:24) You can think of God as your loving Father. Your heavenly Father wants to keep you close to him so you can experience all the riches and blessings and care he has in mind for you. God wants to watch over you and and take care of you. God, your Father is not just your Creator. He is the one who desires to bring you his goodness and his loving care all throughout your life.

II. Growing awareness of God’s grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ

¹ C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, p. 154.

Bringing you his blessings does not mean God is done with you. God understands that sometimes we experience an identity crisis. It happens when you finish kindergarten or graduate from high school. You aren't that person you thought you were. When you lose your job or your marriage falls apart, it causes you to question who you really are.

That is another danger of putting so much emphasis on our own experiences to define who we are. We focus so much of our time and energy on the people in our lives. We obsess over the places we go and the things we see. We tally up all our accomplishments and achievements to create this biographical summary of our identity. But God wants you to see that life is more than we you see and experience.

In the movie "Fight Club," the main character gathers together people who are ready to escape from their mundane existence. They live boring lives and pass countless hours in offices. But when they meet up with other people like themselves and participate in brutal fights they get to be somebody else, even if just for a brief moment. At one crucial moment in the movie, the main character, Tyler Durden launches into a powerful diatribe against the false identities we assume: "You're not how much money you've got in the bank. You're not your job. You're not the car you drive. You're not the contents of your wallet. You're not your family. You're not your problems. You're not your age. you are not your hopes. You're not your khakis."

As people living under God's blessing we have a different take on that speech. You have a caring Father. But you also have his gracious Son. And because of that you have this blessing: **"the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you."** (Numbers 6:25) Because of Jesus Christ, God's Son, you are not who you think you are. You are much more. You are not the sum total of everything you have done in life. You are not the accumulation of your friends or family. You are not the last level you graduated from in school or your most recent job promotion.

Because of God's Son, Jesus Christ, you are not someone God turned his back on. You are not someone God has given up on. You have a Father and you have His Son. You are not your sin. You are not your rebellion. You are not your failed marriage. You are not your naughty children. You are not your wounded friendships or fractured family. You are not your DWI or school detention. You are not the A- that brings you so much shame or the grade you have to take over. Your identity is found in the merciful face of your God shining on you. Your identity is in the gracious sacrifice of your Savior for you. In Christ Jesus, you are not your failures. You have all the perfect obedience to cover you.

My grandmother was an interesting person who always had a strong opinion about everything. But there was a time when I got more curious about her own ancestors and my own background. She didn't. "What if we find out they were horse thieves?" was her reply to my inquiry. It would be shameful for her to come to grips with disappointments in your family history.

But what if it was different? What if you found out that you had a great-great-great-grandfather who was a hero? Who saved his village from attacking enemies or spared them

from sure destruction from disease and starvation? Wouldn't it fill you with pride? Wouldn't it give you that unique humble pride of something you are without the arrogance of something you had actually accomplished? You do have a hero. You are connected to the Second Person of the Trinity through faith in Jesus Christ. You get all of his heroic achievements. You are blessed to have an awareness of God's grace to you in Jesus Christ.

II. Generating Gratitude with peace through the Advocate

Blessings of God's grace in Jesus and God's goodness in the Father doesn't necessarily guarantee that we always understand how that relationship with God works. We still struggle with this flawed concept of how blessings work. So often, we think of blessings as transactions. If we do something for God, then God will do something for me.

So our lives are filled with this waiting game. We are waiting for that day for God to live up to our expectations. That day when we are done with the next level of school. That day when God enables us to start a family. That day when our family won't demand so much of our time and attention. That day when we get that dream job. That day when we will be free from work obligations. That day when we can spend more time with family. That day when we have the physical strength and stamina to enjoy each day.

But blessings in God's way of interacting with his people isn't some barter system or exchange of favors. God's blessing is growing in a deeper appreciation of your identity. It is also a dawning awareness of what you have through your relationship with God. Here's what this blessing looks like: **"the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace."** (Numbers 6:26) God, the Holy Spirit, has an ongoing role in your life. The Spirit deepens your relationship to help you realize the benefits you have with God.

The Holy Spirit helps you see that God chose you. The Holy Spirit gifts you to see the goodness and grace God pours out into your life. The Holy Spirit opens your eyes to see the whole and healthy relationship you have with God through Jesus. The Holy Spirit deepens your understanding of how Jesus put you at peace with God. The Holy Spirit opens your eyes to see that happiness doesn't depend on your definitions of success in this life. You don't have to wait for some day to experience success. The Holy Spirit brings you closer to God to appreciate your ultimate prosperity and happiness comes through him.

God gave this blessing to Aaron and his sons so they could speak it to his people. He passed it down so God's people of all times and places could have his name put on them. His identity is our blessing. Connected to the Triune God makes us who we are.

So whenever you receive this blessing from God you can think of it as an invisible tattoo that is traced on you. When we make the sign of the cross at this blessing, it is a reminder of who you are. As you step out of this building and back into the world, you carry that identity with you. No matter what anyone else sees or knows about you, God knows who you are. And you know you belong to him. Amen.