

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. Amen.

Ah, good, no one left. I was afraid someone might. I'm hoping the words from our first lesson this morning were familiar to you because you hear them every week. And you can tell me when.

But what do they mean? Have you ever really given some thought to those words before? Or is it something you usually just gloss over, without so much as a thought. Pastor says the blessing, the service is pretty much over, and that's it, right? The blessing is just the bridge between the last two hymns, right?

But those words are so much more because in those words, every week, the Triune God Blesses You!

Isn't it neat? The way we close our worship service week after week, that's how it's been done by believers for thousands of years. Our verses from Numbers this morning really make up the oldest part of the liturgy, of the worship service.

But why are they here, at this point in our text? Well, the Israelites, they were in the wilderness after God miraculously delivered them out of Egypt. They were on their way to the Promised Land, and they were camped out at Mt. Sinai for some time, while God gave them the Ten Commandments and other laws to govern their daily life and their worship life.

Here, God was preparing them to finally leave Mt. Sinai for the last leg of their journey to the Promised Land. But, before they left, God took a census of his people, to show how his promise to Abraham, that his descendants would be too numerous to count, how that promise had been graciously fulfilled, with hundreds of thousands of descendants.

In the chapters leading up to our verses this morning, God was, in a way, gathering his congregation together through this census, organizing the Levites, the priests, and then showing how his people would come before him to worship him as purified and clean.

And then, when that's done, when everything is set up, we have our verses. The people are ready to go, and God gives them this final blessing. Hear again the blessing of the triune God, "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."

Now, the triune God? Now, you and I know the Trinity is present throughout Scripture. But how can I say we see the triune God here when we don't see the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit specifically mentioned? Or maybe you can see it. Look at that blessing again. "The LORD...the LORD...the LORD..." Three times that name is mentioned. I don't think it's a coincidence.

But, if that's not enough evidence, if you're still looking to see the triune God here, well, look at each phrase.

“The LORD bless you and keep you.” Bless and keep. Sounds a lot like what God the Father does, right? Do you remember what Martin Luther said about God the Father in his explanation of the Apostles’ Creed? “I believe God made me...I believe God still preserves me by richly and daily providing clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, cattle, and all I own, and all that I need to keep my body and life, and by defending me against all danger and guarding and protecting me from all evil.”

God the Father, who not only created you and me, but he also provides daily blessings, everything we have, everything we need. That’s one way he preserves us, but he also keeps us and protects us from evil and danger, from the world, from the devil, from our sinful natures. “The LORD bless you and keep you.” I can see the Father there...can you?

How about the next phrase? “The LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.” Be gracious to you. I see the word grace there, and you know who we often associate grace, that undeserved love, with, don’t you?

Well with Jesus, God the Son, who showed grace through his life, death, and resurrection, just as Luther wrote concerning God the Son, “He (Jesus) has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won 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.”

That’s grace, a deep, profound love that loves us also when we deserve it least because of our sin. And the result of Jesus being gracious to us? Just as the face of a proud, new mother radiates love, so God looks at us, covering all our sins with the perfect redemption that Christ has purchased for us. That’s the LORD, who makes his face shine on you and is gracious to you.

And finally, we have our last phrase, “The LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.” Peace...isn’t that the work of the Holy Spirit, the one, who as Luther wrote, “has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith,” the one who “daily and fully forgives all sins to me and all believers,” the one who “on the Last Day will raise me and all the dead,” the one who “will give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ”?

Isn’t the Holy Spirit the one who, through his gift of faith, also gives us peace because we know that through Christ we are reconciled to God? We also know with the certainty of faith that as long as we are right with God through Christ, everything in our life will also work out right for us. And now, because of the Holy Spirit, we enjoy a peace that stands up in the fiercest trials – yes, even in the face of death.

Can you imagine a better way to go out, for the Israelites to face the unknown, a journey certain to be full of dangers and uncertainties, and to have this blessing, this comfort, this encouragement from God...from the triune God?

There’s a reason why we use those same words as our final blessing Sunday after Sunday. Do you know what it is? Why do you need the LORD to bless you and keep you? Why do you need the LORD to shine

his face on you and be gracious to you? Why do you need the LORD to turn his face to you and give you peace?

It's because you don't spend your entire life in the safety of these walls. For an hour, maybe an hour and a half a week, you gorge on God's Word here, receive that precious nourishment and encouragement for your faith and your soul. And then you go out to face a week full of uncertainties, and yet, a week certain to be full of temptations from the world and Satan's evil traps.

And we fall. Not one of us can stand here and say we successfully avoid all of Satan's traps week after week because we can't. I can't, I don't always have pure and decent and loving thoughts in my mind, especially when someone wrongs me or makes me mad and I just have no patience or no tolerance for them.

I don't always check what comes out of my mouth because sometimes that lie needs to be told so I can cover my backside, or that curse word needs to come out so I can fully and vulgarly express my frustrations, or that rumor needs to be told so I can make myself feel better because I'm not as big of a screw-up as so and so.

And I don't always think about how my actions might be perceived by others, like if I don't try to get involved here at church, does my apathy really portray who I am, a child of God? Or, if I go out of my way to avoid sharing my faith with others, can others question if I'm faithfully carrying out God's mission.

Yeah, week after week, day after day, we fall. And, without the Lord's blessing, we would be powerless. Without the Lord's blessing, we could do nothing but give in to Satan's temptations. Without the Lord's blessing, we would only deserve God's full and just punishment for our sins.

Thankfully, the blessings of our triune God do not depend on you and me. Thankfully, our triune God lays his blessing on us every week. Thankfully, our triune God gives his blessing to us every day, every hour, every moment!

Do you understand why our triune God not only speaks that blessing to you and me, here in his Word, but also why he gives us everything in that blessing in our lives?

It's a one word answer, and it's in our verses, used at least three times. Can you see it? Because our triune God is the LORD, all capital letters.

Now, I know we've talked about this beautiful name before, but can you recall what's so significant about it? The LORD is the name God uses for himself whenever he refers to himself as the God of free and faithful and loving grace. And when we talk about the blessings of the triune God, the name LORD is the perfect name to use.

For us who open ourselves up to the attacks of Satan and the temptations of the world day after day, and give in to them, the LORD, the God of free and faithful grace, the Father, he blesses us and keeps us. He lovingly provides for us daily, and he preserve and protects us from those enemies.

For us who deserve only God's wrath and punishment for our many, many sins, the LORD, the God of free and faithful grace, the Son, he is gracious to us. He lovingly forgives all of our sins, past, present, and future, because of what he did for us...lived the perfect life, died an innocent death on the cross to pay for our sins, and then rose triumphantly from the grave.

For us who often ruin our relationship with God, doing our best to drive a wedge further and further between us every time we sin, the LORD, the God of free and faithful grace, the Holy Spirit, he turns his face towards us and gives us peace. The peace that comes from our forgiveness. The peace our Spirit-worked faith in Jesus grabs hold of. The peace the Holy Spirit keeps us assured of, both in this life and for the life eternal.

From our triune God, from the Lord, there is no better blessing than that. Well, maybe one more, on par with that. In our last verse, God says, "They (the priests) will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them."

The name of God was indeed on the Israelites, for in the name Israel is the meaning "man of God." In the New Testament, that name is also on us as we claim the name Christian, which means we are followers of Christ.

Every week, you hear those words, our blessing, and as you leave this place, God reminds you who you are. You are his. And as we go throughout the week, we strive to live our lives in a way that is worthy of that name.

So the way that you talk, even outside of church, is it God-pleasing? What you do with your time, finding the best way to use it, how you can spend some of it doing something for God, to serve him. Shaping our entire lives so we live as redeemed children of Christ and as his faithful followers. And as we go and do that, we have the blessing of the LORD, our triune God.

"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."

I hope those words don't just signify the end of the service to you anymore. I hope they remind you Sunday after Sunday of the incredible blessings you have from the triune God, the LORD, the God of free and faithful grace. And I hope they will always give you the encouragement to live as a child of God, because he places his name on you.

TO such a benediction, believers in all ages have gladly said, "Amen. So be it." Amen. So be it! Lord, God the Father, Creator and Preserver, bless and keep us!" Amen. So be it! Lord, Jesus Christ, Savior and Lord, make your face shine upon us and be gracious to us! Amen. So be it! Lord, Holy Spirit, Sanctifier and Counselor, turn your face toward us and give us peace! And he will! He does! Amen.