

In the name of our Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—Amen.

Another school year has just ended. After running ragged with recitals and concerts and practices and games and carpools and parent-teacher events and everything else, parents may have *dragged* themselves across the finish line known as the last day of school. Amid the relief felt by parents and the joy of sweet summer freedom for the students, families may not have even opened the backpacks dropped in the corner on the last day. If that's the case, I pray that there is not a leftover lunch sitting in there!

If you unpacked the backpacks already, what you found—or what you will find when you get around to it—are all sorts of items that I'd be willing to bet have kids' name or initials on them...probably written with one of these—a black Sharpie. Notebooks, binders, folders, calculators, water bottles, flash drives, articles of clothing—all sorts of stuff! All marked with names or initials so that anyone who finds them will know who they belong to.

We might graduate from Sharpie-marked school supplies, but we continue to mark the things that belong to us. Librarians and office staff used to use these a lot; I don't know if they do as much anymore—it's used with an inkpad and this one puts the name of Grace Lutheran Church on things. If you have lots of books, like I do, you might use a personalized embosser that presses your name or initials onto a page. A Dremel comes in handy for etching your name onto your garage tools. We have lots of ways to put our name on our things so that anyone can tell who they belong to.

Today we get to see how the Almighty God of heaven and earth puts his name on his things, or I should say, on his people. And he's been doing this for over 3,500 years. That's a long time for anything, don't you think? 3,500 years. That's how long these words of God given to Moses have been used week-by-week in worship by God's people. These words chosen for Trinity Sunday give us a chance to review where the words of one of our common blessings (or benedictions) comes from. In doing so, you will find that just like God did for his people going back 3,500 years, he uses this blessing to show that

YOU BELONG TO THE TRIUNE GOD

So, please take a look at those words with me again. They are on page 4 of your worship folder and they come from the Old Testament book of Numbers, chapter 6.

The LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron (the high priest) and his sons (also priests), ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: ““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.”’ “So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.”

Amazingly, God uses words spoken by pastors and priests and ministers to place his name on people! He does this every week and he has done this for three and a half millennia! Who is this God who does that? The first words make it clear. It says, **the LORD said to Moses...** You may have noticed that “LORD” is spelled with all capital letters there. That name for God is a special Hebrew word and it is different from the Hebrew word that is shown in our English Bibles when only the “L” is capitalized. This Hebrew word is in the margin of your worship folder if you want to see what it looks like. It is the one you will also find translated Yahweh or Jehovah in some translations. There is some uncertainty as to how it was originally pronounced. But there is no uncertainty as to what it means.

This is God’s name for himself, the one he announced to Moses in the Burning Bush, the proper name for God. It reveals him as the one who gives life and who is the Savior God, the God who keeps his promises. So every time you notice LORD in all capital letters, you should think of the God who promised to send a Savior from sin and who followed through on that promise by sending Jesus to pay for our sins and earn eternal life for us.

The blessing given to Aaron and the other priests to speak over God’s people uses this proper name for God repeatedly—and in that we see the mark of the one true God, the God who is three-in-one. Almost all of you—perhaps all of you—have heard this blessing at the end of a church service, but it could be that you have never looked closely at it. This Trinity Sunday is a good time to do that.

Even the construction of this blessing in Hebrew is interesting. There’s a kind of “build up” in the three phrases. The first phrase is 3 words in Hebrew, the second, 5, the third, 7—3...5...7. The first is 12 syllables, the second 14, the third 16—12...14...16. And the repetition of “the LORD” in each phrase emphasizes his name—**the LORD...the LORD...the LORD**. This was God’s way of putting his name on his people, as the last verse says. Listen again:

**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.**

In the three-time repetition of “**the LORD...the LORD...the LORD**” we perceive a reference to our triune God, who is involved with us and active in our daily lives. Our triune God is not distant—too far away to know about you, care about you, to bless you—as you can see in the blessing he wanted spoken to his people.

The LORD bless you and keep you. Because of the way the Bible speaks about God and each specific member of the Trinity, we naturally think of God the Father blessing and keeping us. The Father who created us, who knit us together in our mother’s womb, gives us blessing upon blessing. We are almost to the day at the halfway point between Thanksgiving last fall and the one coming this November, so maybe it is good to pause for just a moment and remember the way the LORD graces us with everyday blessings.

Not only do we have earthly belongings and wealth, most of us have many options in many categories. It's not a matter of putting on our set of clothes to go to church; it's deciding which clothes I want to wear from my dresser and my closet. We might have a selection of jewelry or watches. Which car will we drive to church? "What do you want to have for dinner tonight?" There are lots of choices there too.

And those are just things. Doesn't the Father bless us with people? Good Christian friends, friendly co-workers, children, spouses, decent neighbors. Money? There's that too. Many of us have enough to live on, with plenty to splurge with also. Enough to have some to give away to help other people, enough to squirrel away for vacations and retirement, enough to give generously for God's work.

All of these and more are ways that we are blessed by the Father, about whom the Bible tells us: **Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.** When this blessings says "**The Lord bless you,**" it intends to convey not only a wish that this will continue to happen but that this is a constant state for a believer. God is always blessing you and he's not going to change that because he is unchanging, constant, consistent!

And the same goes for "keeping" you. God the Father *has* and *is* and *will* keep us—and that means that he guards us, watches over us, preserves us. He protects us through those earthly gifts—keeping our bodies alive and safe. He protects us by sending his guardian angels, keeping who knows how many dangers away. And so we confess with King David in Psalm 31: **But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies...(v.14-15).** Our times are in God's hands. He is the author of life and death. And that means his almighty hands hold us and carry us through the attacks that threaten us while in this world and even through the enemy that is death. Through that too, the Father will keep us and preserve us as he delivers us to his side in heaven. **The LORD *has* and *does* and *will* bless you and keep you.**

The LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. That sounds so nice, doesn't it? And it is! But do you realize that this line of the blessing has to do with sin? At the beginning of the service, we confessed, "*I am altogether sinful from birth. In countless ways I have sinned against you and do not deserve to be called your child.*" I assume you meant that when you said it. I certainly did. The Bible has shown me that God hates sin and that I have a lot of it. And I recognize the reality that I have no business being anywhere near God and a holy God *cannot* be near me! Without the graciousness of God, there is no remedy for that situation. But the LORD's face has shined upon us and he has been gracious to us. And the way God did that was in Jesus Christ, our Savior.

The grace of Jesus is seen in his humiliation—his willingness to be born into this sinful world, to fight temptation and live innocently before the Father, and to die like a sacrificial lamb for the sins of all people. The grace of Jesus is seen in the transfer of his perfection and victory over death to sinful people. By faith in Jesus' grace our many sins are forgiven and we are blanketed with Christ so that when the Father looks at us, his face is happy toward us—it shines upon us! Just like your face beams when your child or grandchild takes their first steps, so our Father's face beams as he sees us walking in faith placed squarely in Christ and his undeserved love. **The LORD has, is and will continue to make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.**

The LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace. It is here that we consider the work of the Holy Spirit. The LORD turning his face toward you is a little different than the LORD making his face shine on you. To turn his face toward you—or look on you with favor—means that he will lift up his eyes to see you. He will gladly turn to look at you.

None of us likes to be ignored, right? It hurts. Especially when we are ignored by the ones whom we love or admire or respect the most. Imagine what Good Friday was like for Jesus. God the Father turned his back on him. Remember? **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** There was no peace, but only anguish as Jesus hung on the cross bearing our sins. And that was the plan—the Father and the Son had agreed upon it and they carried it out in love so that it would be possible for the LORD to turn his face toward you. God's grace fell upon the whole world as forgiveness and salvation were fully realized on Easter. But in order for the LORD to look with favor upon you—specifically you—it took not only the plans of the Father and the efforts of Jesus but also the work of the Holy Spirit.

To “look upon with favor” or to “turn one's face toward” means to take a particular interest in. God showed his particular interest in you perhaps when you were a tiny baby (like Atanacio, who was baptized this morning). In Baptism, the Holy Spirit works the miracle of faith through water and the Word of God. Maybe you were not baptized as a baby and for you it was a little—or a lot—later in life. But the Holy Spirit worked through the words of the Bible and you learned about Jesus. It's the Spirit that gives the miracle of faith, creating a believing heart, through the message of the gospel.

The Holy Spirit has done that for you. The LORD has looked favorably toward you, giving you faith to believe...and when that happens, there is peace with God. It is a peace that surpasses understanding, a peace that is hard to put into words maybe. But it comes from knowing that Jesus died on the cross for your sins and promises you eternal life. That changes the way a person looks at life and gives confidence about life after death with God. **The LORD has turned his face toward you and given you peace.** He is doing that even now and he will do that into eternity.

Some might question our using something that old—a 3,500 year-old blessing—as part of our service like we do. Some might say it's part of a service that is too traditional. I would disagree. It is absolutely appropriate for us to continue using this blessing because this is the one true God and we are his people and the LORD says **“So they will put my name on (them), and I will bless them.”**

When those very words of God are spoken by his representatives, God's name is stamped on his people again, declaring that we belong to him. Because the name of the only true God...the LORD...Father, Son and Holy Spirit...is placed on us, we are assured that *he has* and *he is* and *he will* bless us. This blessing is his promise!

So when the pastor says the benediction (or blessing), he doesn't do it simply because it is a long-standing tradition. And it's not a signal that it's almost time to head to the courtyard for cookies and coffee. NO! It means something and it's worth staying to the end of the service for! God doesn't use a Sharpie, a stamp, an embosser, or a Dremel. With these words, he marks us with his name and promises us his blessing. It is a reminder that YOU BELONG TO THE TRIUNE GOD! Amen.

**Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.**