CHRISTIAN, YOU ARE TRULY BLESSED!

1. Blessed by the Father who cares for you
2. Blessed by the Son who smiles on you
3. Blessed by the Spirit who gives you his peace.

What do you consider a worship service to be? How would you define what you do during this hour of your week? Maybe worship for you is a chance to unwind a bit – relax, meditate on the beauty of God’s creation, the grandeur of God’s house. Maybe worship is a chance to spend quality time with your family or fellow Christians. Or maybe you see worship as an opportunity to get on God’s good side, earn a few brownie points with the Man upstairs. Or worse, worship is nothing more than a time to let your mind wander as you relive last night’s events or plan your activities for this afternoon.

Although worship can mean different things to different people, I would describe worship as a dialogue between God and his people. In worship God speaks to us through his Word in the absolution, sermon and Scripture readings. And we in turn, speak to God in our confession, prayers and hymns of praise. No matter which service we may use, you will always find these two different components. God speaks to us and we speak to God. Every component of a Lutheran worship service is designed to flow in one of those two directions.

And that is true of everything that happens in a service from the beginning to the very end. Today, let’s focus on what the pastor typically does at the very end of the service when he puts his hands up in the air and says: 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. I’m sure you are familiar with those words. You have maybe heard them hundreds of times. But have you really thought about what they mean? Do you realize what God is saying to you - what he is doing for you with those words?

This morning we want to take a little closer look at what’s commonly referred to as the Blessing or the Benediction from Numbers 6. On this Trinity Sunday, let’s consider: CHRISTIAN, YOU ARE TRULY BLESSED! Blessed by the Father who cares for you, blessed by the Son who smiles on you and blessed by the Spirit who gives you his peace.

The words spoken at the conclusion of a worship service have traditionally been called the Aaronic Benediction. The word benediction literally means good word or word of blessing. It is called the Aaronic blessing because it was Aaron who was instructed to address these words to the Children of Israel. Aaron and his sons, and the many priests who followed them throughout the history of Israel were all to include this blessing as a part of their public worship services. That tradition has continued throughout the history of the Christian church and is still being used in many Christian congregations today.

But why have these words stood the test of time for so many years? Well, there are a number of reasons. First, understand that these were the words which God gave for Aaron to speak. That means that this was not something that Aaron simply made up. It was not a compilation of different religious authors through the years. It was not a joint statement produced by some kind of ancient ecumenical council. No, it was what God told his representatives to tell his believers. God said it, so we use it.

Secondly, this blessing’s noteworthy because it offers a veiled reference to the three persons of the God-head. God says: The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you. The Lord turn his face toward you. Even though the Old Testament believers probably could not name the three persons of the God-head as Father,
Son and Holy Spirit, still they likely had an idea that God was more than one person, if for no other reason than the fact that God had said in the Garden of Eden: Let us make man in our image. Of course, in the New Testament, God offers a much more complete revelation of himself as the Triune God. How appropriate then that we, as New Testament believers, not only open our worship service in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but also close it with the blessing of that same Triune God.

Finally, let's not overlook the fact that this blessing is unique because through it God is communicating with words that we can understand. Now maybe you are thinking to yourself: Well, duh! Of course God communicates with words we can understand! But actually, that is not something we should take for granted. You see, down through the centuries, man has been trying to glean messages from God. He has looked to the wind, the clouds, the stars or his own experiences in life. In ancient times, people believed that if the sky grew dark and the thunder clapped, then God was angry with them. And if the sun was shining and birds singing, then God was happy with them.

Sometime we are tempted to think that way. When things are going well, we are tempted to think God must be must happy with us. The opposite is also true. If things are not going our way, we think God is angry with us or forgotten about us or he is somehow punishing us.

My friends, it is to counter that kind of natural, but misguided thinking that God records for us this beautiful word of blessing. With these words God is saying: Christian, you are blessed. You are blessed by a Father who cares for you. In text, God tells Aaron to say: The Lord bless you and keep you.

The first thing to note about those words is the simple word, you. In the original language, the word is in the singular. That means that this blessing is not merely intended for a whole mass of people, but rather it is directed to each one of you as an individual. In other words, this is not the scattergun blessing - kind of a hit or miss thing. This is God's rifle. God is speaking specifically to you and you and you and you. He promises he is going to bless you and keep you.

The Hebrew word for bless literally means to bestow on you the ability to prosper, to grow, to be fertile. The Bible uses the same word when describing what God did for our first parents in the Garden of Eden. God blessed them saying, Be fruitful and increase in number. The number of children gathered here today, the number of cars in the parking lot, variety of clothes you are wearing is all ample evidence that God has indeed blessed you and me in many ways.

But God not only blesses us, he also keeps us, that i, he preserves us and protects us. Unless I am terribly mistaken, none of you were run over by train this morning, right? The roof has not collapsed on us. Is that merely good fortune? Are we all just very lucky people? No. It's evidence that God is doing what the Psalmist said: God will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. Christians, you are truly blessed because you have a Father in heaven who cares enough for you to both guard you and keep you.

Yet that is not the only way in which you are blessed. You are also blessed by a Son who smiles on you. God says: The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. When Scripture speaks of God's face, it is often a reference to the attitude God has toward man. Chances are, when you were a child, you knew how your parents felt about you just by looking at their face. If your dad's brow was furled and his eyes were flashing, that probably means that he did not appreciate your smart-aleck remark or he didn't see
the humor in you flicking that pea bean across the kitchen table. You knew exactly how your father felt about your behavior. You could see it in his face.

So it is with the face of our God in heaven. As God looks down upon our every day actions, all the things we say and think, he has every reason to be angry with us. And yet, in spite of the sins we have committed and continue to commit, God smiles on us. Not that kind of knowing smile that says: I'll let you get away with that. But rather a smile that says: I love you because my Son has taken your sins away. My friends, in Christ's perfect life and innocent death, God is smiling on you and me. In Jesus Christ, you are loved by God. In Christ you are pleasing to God. In Christ, you are truly blessed for time and eternity.

But there is still one more blessing that God has determined to bestow on you and me today. God says: The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace. Who brings peace to the hearts of Christians like you and me? Who is the one who takes what Jesus has done for the whole world and makes it your personal possession? It is the Holy Spirit. Christian, you are blessed by the Holy Spirit who gives you his peace.

What is God's peace? St Paul says it is a peace that transcends all understanding. It is a peace that is the assurance that you and I are all right with God. Peace with God means knowing beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is not holding your sins against you. It means that you are in fellowship with God. God is on your side and you are on his - not because you have been so obedient to God but because Jesus has been obedient in your place. Jesus' holiness has been credited to your account by the faith that the Holy Spirit has planted in your heart. Isn't that what Paul said in our Epistle lesson a few moments ago? Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you realize what a priceless blessing that is? To know that in Christ Jesus, you are all right with God. No matter what happens, no matter whether you are diagnosed with cancer tomorrow; no matter whether you lose your job the next day; no matter whether your child walks out of your house the following day, no matter what happens - you can know that God has not abandoned you. You are still his child. God still has a plan for your life. And he will use every trial and tribulation you face to ultimately serve your eternal good.

These are the things you can be sure of because of who God is and what he has done for you as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Contrary to what you and I might sometimes feel, contrary to what the world around us sometimes says, the fact is, you are truly blessed by God. You can be sure of that because God has given you his Word on it. A word that is repeated each and every Sunday in the words of the Aaronic Blessing.

The closing benediction is more than just a pious way of saying: The service is over now. No, it is God's way of sending us on our way with the promise of his divine care, the promise of his smile, the promise of his peace. and when you think of it, maybe that's all we really need to hear - our Father in heaven saying to each one of us: Go, my children with my blessing. Amen.

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