



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

www.mzluth.org

June 3, 2007

Festival of Holy Trinity

Numbers 6:22-27

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Numbers 6:22-27

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 150

Second Lesson: Romans 5:1-5

Gospel: John 16:12-15

Marked By the Name of the Lord

Why do you write your name on stuff? You children that are in school, why do you write your name on your piece of paper?—so that someone else won't get credited with that great "A" you are handing in, right? You want the teacher to know that's your incredibly good work that you are handing to them. You put your name on stuff a lot of times to mark it as belonging to you, right?

When I went away to high school, I lived in the dorms in high school and before I left, I remember my Mom wrote my name in the tag of just about everything I took along. I often thought, "I wonder if she is pretty happy that our last name only has three short letters to it." But she put it all in there so that someone wouldn't mistakenly take my stuff, I suppose; my coat, my whatever, so that it would theoretically all make it back home when the school year was over.

The words that I just read to you are very familiar. We hear them at the end of every Sunday morning worship service, but the verse that comes right after those familiar words might not be quite as familiar. When the Lord told Moses, "Tell Aaron this is how you are to bless the Israelites," he ended up with "So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them." So every time we hear the words of those blessings, God says he is marking us with his name.

As you think about that, that is a pretty neat thing. Every time you leave worship, God says, "You belong to me. I want to write my name on your forehead by having these words spoken on you so that when you leave worship you go out into the world and everyone knows you belong to the Triune God." In this blessing, he tells us a little bit of what it means to belong to the Triune God and what the blessings are that he gives us. When we are marked by the name of the Lord, we are marked with the Father's protection, the Son's grace, and the Spirit's peace—the blessings that come because we are marked with the name of the Lord.

I don't know if you have given much thought to this blessing or if you just hear it every week and think "Now I can leave" after those words are spoken, but there is a lot more than "over and out" to these words that God speaks over us. It starts out real broad with physical things. Then it gets to spiritual things that apply to all. Then in the last couplet—there are three groups of two phrases all the way through—it gets very narrow. It kind of comes down in a funnel so that it funnels all of this on individual's heads as it's all done—when the blessing is spoken.

It starts out like I said—very broad. The first phrase and then the second phrase always get a little narrower. The first one is as broad as you can get, “*The LORD bless you*” (Numbers 6:24). Everything that we have comes as a blessing from our God. But it narrows it down a little bit and tells us which blessing of our God that he wants us to focus on when it says “*and keep you*” (Numbers 6:24). Keep you, stand guard over you, watch you, defend you, make certain that you are safe are some of the thoughts that are all rolled up into that phrase *keep you*. God didn’t just create the world. He continues to take care of the world day after day after day. He gives us what we need for our body and life. That is how he keeps us. He does it in ways that quite often we take for granted or we don’t necessarily even think of as being the hand of God. The sun rises and we don’t think, “God’s been active this morning.” But it’s God who keeps the universe in its place. The rains come and the crops grow and we might not always tie it in directly to God, but it’s all a part of how God keeps us. He pours out his blessings of the things that we need for body and life on the righteous and the unrighteous alike it says. He gives this blessing to all people. He gives us what we need for body and life.

If you learned Luther’s Small Catechism when you were growing up, think of what Luther said. *He still richly and daily preserves me by giving me my body and clothes, food and drink, house, home, wife, children, land, cattle, all that I own, all that I need to keep my body and life.* There are a couple problems that we have with this at times. Sometimes our wants become bigger than our needs. Maybe we get angry at God that he gave so and so these blessings, but he has only given us these blessings that we think of as not being as great or as important. Sometimes we want God to give us what he has not promised to give us and we get frustrated when he doesn’t. That is sin. But God has never promised to give us everything we want. He has promised to give us everything we need. And he does that. He gives us what we need.

If you look around at us and if you look around at your own life, if I look around at my life, he has given me much more than I need to live on. He has blessed me abundantly with many, many incredible blessings that keep me day after day.

Another problem that we have at times is that we tend to think that this is our doing. We survey our vast domain of our kingdom, as we think of it, and think “look at what my hands have done. Look at how hard I’ve worked so that I have this and this and this. I can now run off and go here and there and chase after this toy and that toy because I have worked so hard to get them.” We tend to forget that God gives us the ability to work, the opportunity to work, he blesses our efforts, he blesses our labor and that is all a part of him keeping us.

This preservation of the world we usually speak of as the work of the Father. In this blessing, it never mentions Father, Son or Spirit yet, even in this Old Testament passage, you see the work of the Trinity being clearly described. The Father keeps us.

The second part of the blessing starts out again broad—“*the LORD make his face shine upon you*” (Numbers 6:25). Again you could say all of God’s blessings that come upon us are his face turning toward us, his face shining upon us, and bringing us blessings that we need, but he wants to direct our attention in one more narrower area. He says,

“the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you” (Numbers 6:25). So you think about what is grace? Grace is God’s undeserved love—unearned, unmerited. God loves us because he is God and that is his nature to love unconditionally.

You and I at times love because someone has earned our trust or earned our favor and we love because in some way, shape or form, they have earned our friendship. God loved us when we were unlovable, when we were completely and absolutely lost in sin, when we had nothing that we could offer to him that would make him sit up and notice us or say “Wow! I wish they were on my team”—that isn’t the case. His grace reached out to us when we were completely and absolutely lost and condemned creatures.

His grace—if you want to see what God’s grace looks like, look no further than Jesus Christ. As we talked about this morning in our Bible study, he, being in very nature God, true God from all eternity, left the glory of heaven, took on the form of a servant, became human. He humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on the cross. Here is grace. The punishment you and I deserve because we give ourselves too much credit for what we have, because we haven’t always given God the credit, the sins that we have committed of pride, of arrogance, the sins we have committed of envy, the sins we have committed of angry words, hateful words, hurtful words, the sins we have committed of disobedience against our parents, our teachers, others in authority, the sins we have committed even in our thoughts and any of those areas—Christ carried them all to the cross. We should have been separated from God. We should have cried out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” for all of eternity because that is what our sins deserve.

But this is grace—Jesus piles them on his shoulders, lives perfectly in our place because God still demands perfection of you and me, and then he dies in our place so that our sins are punished so that we ourselves won’t be punished. This is grace. It’s unfair. The wrong person was punished, but it is the reason you and I rejoice to be called Christians, because Christ has taken away our sins. That is what our God has done for us. That is his grace. I don’t care if the sun is shining or not, if we stop and contemplate grace, it warms our face and our hearts because this blessing of our God shines upon us.

So again, it doesn’t say Son, it doesn’t say Jesus, but the second person of the Trinity is clearly where we see God’s grace revealed. So he goes from physical blessings to spiritual blessings and now he goes in the last couplet of this blessing to applying it to us individually. It says, *“the LORD turn his face toward you”* (Numbers 6:26). I think that is just a neat phrase. “The Lord turn his face toward you or look on you with favor” we say in our Benediction, but literally it’s “turn his face toward you.”

When I was in high school, I think it was my Sophomore year, I don’t remember what course, Biology or something like that, I don’t remember what it was, but we had one of those first aid films where they show you how to set broken bones and all that if you are out wandering in the wilderness and you happen to trip and fall, like the guy did on the video, and you fall down and break your leg so that the bone is sticking out—when that part of the video came up, my face turned away real quick. Then my body went vertical as I hit the floor because I passed out. That stuff is not for me. So when I hear that

phrase “turn his face toward you,” by all means God—he hates sin more than I dislike gore—he should turn his face away from us. He should never look toward us because he hates sin and that’s what we are. Yet he turns his face toward us. He looks on us with favor. He does what we don’t deserve. His natural inclination as a Holy God is not to look upon sin. But because of his love, he looks upon us, turns his face toward us with favor and, more specifically, gives us peace. What this means is not the ending of a war, but the ending of enmity between God and us—a reconciliation between God and us. Peace is made between God and us. Jesus did that for the whole world through his life and death. But it comes to us personally when we are brought to faith. The One that Scripture speaks of as the One who brings us to faith is the Holy Spirit.

That whole major festival of the church year that we had last week, the third major festival of the church year, deals with the work of the Holy Spirit. That is what we looked at last week, remember? What he does—how he takes what Christ has done for the world and makes it our own personally. We saw it happen this morning in a baptism—God clothes the person with Jesus’ righteousness. So now that God looks at us, he doesn’t see our sins. He sees Jesus’ perfection. There is now peace between us and God through Baptism, through the Word, through the Lord’s Supper. The Holy Spirit creates that peace between us and strengthens us in that faith day after day after day. That is the work of the Holy Spirit and why we have a major festival of the church year that deals specifically and directly with it.

What a wonderful blessing it is that God has worked in our hearts so that we know that it isn’t just for someone else but it is for us individually that our sins have been taken away. It is us individually who have been marked with the name of the Lord so that we know these blessings are not something we might possibly have, but that we have for a certainty God’s protection, God’s grace and God’s peace. That is the word of the Holy Trinity.

The Bible may never use the word “Trinity” and it does not use the word “Triune” or “Triune.” It is a word that men have used to explain what the Scriptures speak of. The Bible says there is one God. The Bible says baptize in the name of God; in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—three persons, one God. I can’t explain to you how that is, but if you look at every single one of our readings today, you see all three persons of the Trinity active and what they do for us.

That is why we rejoice—because the Trinity is active in bringing us these incredible blessings that move us to rejoice and that move us to live for him and to his glory.