

June 3, 2007
Trinity Sunday

"Blessed to Know the Triune God"

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 upon 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."

I have in my hand a feather. This feather is designed specifically for flight. It is very light, yet strong. It is curved similar to the wing of an airplane so that there is a difference in the air rushing over the top and the bottom, thus creating lift. If the feather is ruffled, its individual barbules lock themselves together again so no air passes through. This "simple" feather is actually very complex. It could not have developed by random chance and selection over millions of years of time. Human reason and logic tell us that there must be a designer behind feathers, the birds, the complex cells of our human bodies, and the vast universe in which we live.

Our natural human reason can lead us to believe there must be a God, but we cannot discover who this God is or what he has planned for our lives unless God speaks to us and reveals himself to us. God reveals himself to us on the pages of the Bible. By reading the Bible we learn that God is three persons and yet one God. The Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Spirit is God. Yet there is one God. We cannot understand it, but we accept it in faith believing that God is much greater than we are. We also learn how much God loved us by giving his Son for us.

Our worship services often begin with the words, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you." We close our worship by using the words Moses and Aaron used to bless the people of their time. "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." On this Trinity Sunday, we want to see how richly blessed we are to know this Triune God.

You have a Father who provides for you and keeps you

The Lord spoke to Moses. How amazing it is that God, the creator of the universe, chose a certain time and place to speak to certain people so they could write these words down and pass them on to us. Through words given to Moses we have a way of blessing each other when we gather together as we are doing. Have you ever sneezed and had someone say to you, "God bless you?" Instead of just saying "God bless you" we bless each other with these words, "The Lord bless and keep you." "The Lord" is the name of the true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Hebrew word for bless is "baruch." It has the thought of bending down to someone and offering them a gift. We think immediately of our God as a heavenly Father blessing

us by giving us everything we need for this life. James 1 says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights who does not change like shifting shadows." Blessings don't come to us by luck or chance or some giant roulette wheel in the sky. Blessings come to us as gifts from our heavenly Father who does not change like shifting shadows, or randomly pour out his gifts to people on a whim. Jesus once talked about how our heavenly Father takes care of the birds and gives them more than enough to eat. Then he reminded us, "Are you not much more valuable than they?"

The God who blesses us also keeps us and protects us. When God created Adam and Eve he told them to keep or care for the world that he had given to them. The true God keeps you by protecting you from harm and danger, just as you might protect things that are important and special to you. How many angels watched over while you were driving this past week? Psalm 91 reminds us, "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all of your ways." In Psalm 17 the psalmist prays, "Keep me as the apple of your eye. Hide me in the shadow of your wings." The term apple of the eye refers to the tiny pupil in the eye. If you look very closely into someone's eye you will see yourself reflected in that person's eye. A more literal translation of the Hebrew would be, "Keep me as the little person in your eye." The Lord does that for us. He keeps us so close to him that we can always see ourselves reflected in his eye.

The Lord has certainly blessed us so richly with blessings we do not deserve. The other day my wife and I received a gift from our daughter who is living in Tucson. She had put together pictures from the past several years and had them published into a book form. As we looked at the pictures of family times together and visiting beautiful places in God's creation, making tamales at Christmas, celebrating Susan's dad's 90th birthday and my parents 60th wedding anniversary, the book reminded us of all the blessings that the Lord has poured out to us. Open the book of your life this past year, or the past five years, and look at how the Lord has blessed you and kept you. He even protects us by keeping us from loving his blessings so much that you start to forget him. What a powerful way we have to bless each other when we say, "The Lord bless you and keep you."

You have a Savior who causes God's face to shine on you

We further bless each other by saying, "The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you." God does not have a face similar to our faces because God is a spirit. We use words about a shining face to indicate joy and happiness that we want God to have over us every minute of our lives. It may appear that God is angry at us or that he does not care about us when troubles come to us. "Why did you let this happen to me? Don't you care about me?" We may even react momentarily the way Job did when he said, "He has blocked my way so I cannot pass; he has shrouded my paths in the darkness. He has stripped me of my honor and removed the crown from my head... His anger burns against me; he counts me among his enemies." Guilt and shame and sinful behavior can also cause us to lose sight of God's face shining upon us. David wrote of his anguish over his sin: "Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have not soundness because of my sin." Depression and other physical ailments may create a dark cloud in our lives that obscure the light and love of God's smiling and shining face.

How can I personally be sure that God's face is shining in joy and happiness as he looks at my life? I cannot look to myself to make myself acceptable. You know the evil thoughts

that can enter our hearts and minds. Scripture was not exaggerating when it tells us that the imagination of our hearts is evil from our youth. Jesus was not overstating the case against us when he said, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man unclean." My only hope of having God's face shining on me rests in what Jesus has done for me and for you. It is clear that the heavenly Father was pleased with the life that Jesus lived. He spoke from heaven at Jesus' baptism, "This is my Son in whom I am well pleased." The Father was pleased with the perfect sacrifice Jesus made as payment for our sin. That is why he raised Jesus to life again.

It was God's plan to take everything that Jesus did and offer it to you as a free gift and lead you to trust in it for your salvation. What you have in Christ Jesus and who you are in Christ changes your whole life. The heavenly Father loves you. You are reconciled to God. You are his dear child. His face shines on you because of what he sees in you that has been given to you by Jesus his Son. Have you ever seen a new father or mother beaming with joy over their little baby recently born? That's the shining face that we see in our heavenly Father that is ours in Jesus.

You have the Holy Spirit who brings you peace

There is still more in this special blessing that we are able to use with each other. "The Lord turn his face toward you and you and give you peace." Some of you grew up with the words from the King James Version of the Bible. "The Lord lift up his countenance upon you." The word "countenance" means "face." When we turn our face or lift up our face, we smile on them. We are asking the Lord to turn to us and show a smiling face toward us. You are walking in an airport and by accident you see a dear friend of yours you haven't seen for several years. Your face lights up in joy. When you have the free gift of God's love for you in Jesus, you live each day knowing that the Lord's face is lifted up in joy over having you as his dear child. That brings you peace in your life, just as an uplifted face or smiling face of someone in your family or your friends brings peace in your life.

Here is where the Holy Spirit is so helpful in our lives. Jesus described the Holy Spirit as our Comforter and the Spirit of all truth who will guide you into all truth. The Holy Spirit helps us see the peace we have with our heavenly Father through Jesus. The night of his resurrection Jesus showed the nail prints in his hands to his disciples with the words, "Peace be to you." Then it says that they were overjoyed to see the Lord. Jesus does not come to us physically and show us his hands, but he does use the Holy Spirit to make this real to us. It is the Holy Spirit who brings the peace with have in Jesus and makes it real to us. This is a peace this world cannot give.

This important work of the Holy Spirit can be seen in the second reading for today from Romans 5 where it says, "Therefore since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." This peace gives us direct access to our God and his face that shines on us. This peace is kept alive for us by the Holy Spirit. "And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given to us." God pours out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit that he gives us.

We are so blessed to have the name of the true God placed on us in our baptism. We are further blessed to have God place his name on us with this very special blessing when we gather in worship, "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." The true God who was behind the design of this simple feather is the same God who blesses you by revealing himself to you as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.