

May 18, 2008
Trinity Sunday

"Good Luck or God Be with You"

2 CORINTHIANS 13:11-14

Finally, brothers, good-by. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. ¹² Greet one another with a holy kiss. ¹³ All the saints send their greetings. ¹⁴ May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

We are at that time of the year when students are graduating from high school and college. The graduates often hear such greetings as "Congratulations" or "Have a great future" or "Good luck."

"Good luck." What a strange wish that is! Oh, I can understand how they say, "Good luck" to the person buying chips in Las Vegas, or the person buying lottery tickets in the supermarket. But why would we say "Good luck" to a graduate, or to a couple on their wedding day, or to someone going into important surgery. Is life a giant roulette wheel? "Around and around she goes and where she stops nobody knows."

Can you imagine the Apostle Paul closing this important letter to the Corinthians with the words, "Good luck and the peace of the Lord be with you?" Oh, to be sure, the Greek world and the people in Corinth grew up believing that the Fates or luck were more powerful than their gods. But these were Christian people living in heathen Corinth who needed a final greeting that has meaning and weight, anchored in the truths of the Christian faith. So Paul speaks this blessing to them, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you."

This morning we want to speak to you about greeting each other as Christians with a mutual understanding of the blessings we have in our Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We greet each other with many blessings

Listen again to the final words of Paul to the Corinthians "Finally, brothers, good-by. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of peace will be with you." Paul writes, "Good-by." The Greek word actually means "Rejoice" or be happy. Jesus used that word when he greeted the women on the morning of his resurrection from the dead. It might seem cruel to ask someone to rejoice and be happy when they are going through huge problems in life, until you realize that the blessings we have in Jesus far outweigh any problems in life.

It is good to encourage each other to rejoice in these blessings as we do when we come together for worship, or as we greet each other with the dawning of new day. How blessed are we? Psalm 103 gives us the answer when it says, Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his

benefits--who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion."

Paul also reminds them to "Aim for perfection." A better translation would be, "Be perfect." He is asking these people to be what they already were in Christ. The word for "be perfect" was used to describe how the fishermen mended nets when Jesus called them to be his disciples. Romans 5 says, "Therefore being justified through faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Being justified means that we are declared perfect. The advertising slogan of the US Army is "Be all that you can be." The slogan for the life of every Christian is always "Be what you already are."

Paul pleads with these Christians to be of one mind. We might say, "Get on the same page." That's what we do when we come to worship together. We leave all our pages behind from the previous week, all the scripts that Satan and the world want to write for our lives. We get together on the pages of blessings we have in Christ. We sing hymns that encourage us to see the glory of our God and the greatness of his love for us. We listen to the word and prayer the prayers and we see the unity and oneness we have in Christ.

Then Paul encourages them to live in peace. The night of his resurrection Jesus appeared to the disciples and said, "Peace be to you." Then he showed them his hands and the disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Jesus has a peace that this world cannot give. Colossians 3 tells us to "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace."

Have you ever heard someone say, "I can thank my lucky stars!" Lucky stars or luck have nothing to do with the blessings you are privileged to celebrate as you greet each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul writes, "The God of love and peace will be with you." This true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the true source of all our blessings such as love and peace.

Two retirees were talking one day and the one woman said to the other, "You sure are blessed!" She responded, "Blessed, what do you mean blessed, I earned all that I have on my own." Another person might say more humbly, "I guess I am just lucky." But you know the source of your blessings come from this God of love and peace.

A college professor once called one of his students about an assignment. He was rather surprised by the message, "You have reached Beth's voicemail. I'm not available. Please leave a message. And the force be with you." The professor wondered if he should have responded, "And also with you." This past week a letter from Albert Einstein was sold at an auction for over \$400,000. In the letter he said that the Bible is product of human weakness, filled with childish legends. Einstein rejected the God of Bible, the Triune God, and believed God was just a spiritual force in the universe. The God who gives us all our blessings is not a nebulous force in the universe, but a very personal God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We greet each other blessed to know the true God

We see how personal our God is from this well known greeting from Paul. "May the grace

of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Note how this familiar greeting that we use in our worship reveals a God to us that is very personal, not an impersonal spiritual force in the universe. Early in this letter Paul has written about the grace of our Lord Jesus with these memorable words, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that through his poverty you might become rich." When we think of Jesus leaving the glory he had with the Father from all eternity, and then coming into our world to be punished for our sin, it helps us see every day how blessed we are. Or listen to another verse where Paul uses this beautiful word "Grace" to describe how the Lord took care of him when he suffered from a thorn in the flesh. "Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." My grace is sufficient for you.

Grace is always amazing. It is always amazing grace because we live each day on this earth very aware of how we do not deserve God's love and kindness. The Lord asks us to put him first in our lives and love him with our whole heart, soul and mind. How often we fail to measure up to what God expects. He asks us to love our neighbor as ourselves, and again we fail to measure up in the simplest most basic of human relationships in our families. We need the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to come into the world, die the perfect death for us and live the perfect life for us. That is something that is very personal that is found in no other religion in the world.

Then there is the love of God that is with us every day. The Greek word for "love" is a very special word, the word *agape*. In fact while I was typing this word into the computer in MS Word the spell check does not ask me to change the spelling of the word. This is a word that has a unique meaning in the New Testament. The Greek world had nothing to measure up to the sacrificial love that our God has for us when he gave us his Son. We stand in awe of the greatness of our God as we confess, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." Or listen to what Romans 5 says of this love, "But God demonstrates his love to us in this: While we were sinners Christ died for us." This past week I talked with a young man who said his girl friend had a small tattoo put on her body with the words, 1 John 3:1. It says, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God!"

Nothing, absolutely nothing, is more important to us in life than being loved. We look forward to coming home in the afternoon to be greeted by our dog who missed us during the day. We long to see the faces of those who love us, and interact with them, and feel their love close to us, or talk with them on the phone. To think that through Jesus, we have a heavenly Father who loves us with an intense personal love, even when disasters come to us, the love of the Father is always the same. As one of our hymns says, "Behind a frowning countenance, he hides a smiling face."

Then there is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The word fellowship is the Greek word *koinonia*. It can be translated closeness, or participation or sharing. It is used to describe how the bread we receive in Holy Communion is physical sharing of the body of Christ. It is used to describe how the wine we drink is a sharing of the very body of Christ. We call it a Holy Communion, or holy sharing. The Holy Spirit is intensely close and real to you, because it is the Holy Spirit who has given you new life in Christ. This new person inside of

you that believes in Jesus is closely connected to Jesus. According to Romans 8, the Holy Spirit keeps witnessing to us that we are children of our Heavenly Father. The Holy Spirit constantly helps us see Jesus our Savior more clearly. Last Sunday we sang the hymn by Martin Luther that had these words, "Shine in our hearts, O most precious Light, That we Jesus Christ may know aright, Clinging to our Savior, whose blood has bought us, Who again to our homeland has brought us. Lord, have mercy!" The Holy Spirit takes the deep things of God including the mystery of the Holy Trinity and makes them real to you even if you cannot understand it. The Holy Spirit constantly makes the future glory that is waiting for you more real than the problems of this present life that constantly surround you.

We are not lucky, we are blessed. We are so blessed to know the blessings the Lord gives and to know the Lord who gives them. Amen.