

Mark D. Reichert

Holy Trinity – Numbers 6:22-27 - Our God's Triune Blessing
6/8-12/22 – Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, WI

So, the Athanasian Creed... Pretty simple stuff, am I right? “We worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God, without mixing the persons or dividing the divine being.” Trinity in Unity, as we said. Elementary, of course. No big deal for folks like us! I can always tell that the one week per year when we speak this creed together.

No, this doctrine of the Trinity – that we believe in one true God who reveals himself as three distinct persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – this doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most difficult for our human minds to accept. In fact, it's impossible for us to totally grasp and understand – it's too big, too complex, too *divine* for the creatures to fully fathom their Creator.

So if God is so great that we can never totally get our minds around the triune nature of who he is, maybe it's a worthwhile question: why did he even bother to tell us at all then? Why waste the words if he knew it was too much for us? Well, God tells us not so that we can know all the facts; but so that we can know *him*, so that we can relate to him, so that we can belong to him. He tells us not because we'll get it; but so that we'll get *him* and all the goodness and blessings that come along with him. See, ours is a God who loves us, who saves us, who blesses us, and that's the whole point of our sermon text for today. The LORD reveals to us who he is most of all because he wants us to know him as the one who gives us protection, grace, and peace. That's our triune God's triune blessing, because when you have him, you have his blessings; and when you have one, you have them all.

Now there are some who would tell you that the doctrine of the Trinity has no place in the Old Testament, in fact really has no place in the Bible at all because that word “Trinity” is never used in the pages of Holy Scripture. That's true; however, these *concepts* very definitely are clearly taught throughout God's Word. There is only one true God, the LORD; and he reveals himself as three persons. Maybe that's a concept that doesn't come to total clarity until New Testament times,

but even here in our Old Testament lesson, you can see God's nature with this threefold blessing – the LORD, the LORD, the LORD.

And here's where it starts: “*The LORD bless you and keep you.*” To bless someone is to speak well of them or to actually speak good upon them, and here our Lord isn't just wishing us the best; he's promising to pour out all of his goodness upon us. After all, that's who the LORD is: he is the God of free and faithful grace, the one who is totally faithful to his promises, who is compassionate and forgiving, who will never let his people down.

And the first thing he promises to do for us is to *keep* us – that is, to guard us, watch over us, take care of us, look out for us. That's what a good father does for his children; that's also what our heavenly Father does for us. He gives us everything we have – our bodies, our minds, all our talents and abilities – and he provides us with everything we need to use them and care for them – food and drink, clothing and shelter, family and friends.

That means if you can walk and talk and breathe, the LORD blessed you with that ability. If you can see and hear and touch, the LORD blessed you that way. If you love your spouse and children, if you are thankful for your work and your play, if you have anything that makes your life better and that you don't want to have to live without, it was the LORD who blessed you with it. But the biggest way he's blessed you, this lesson says, is that he *keeps* you from harm and danger and from temptation and evil.

Now you might think to yourself, “With everything I've been through in my life and everything I've done in my life, I'd hardly say God has kept me from harm and danger and temptation and evil.” But what I mean is this: what in your life has been *truly* harmful and dangerous – not just to your body, but to your soul? Maybe you've had close calls that have threatened your physical health and safety, but your God promises to keep you in the one true faith and keep you on the path to heaven. He promises to keep temptation and evil from being too much or too long for his children to stand, and he promises to use all those things to keep you close to him and to keep you focused that much more on your heavenly goal. In the old days, castles and fortresses

often had an inner room called the “keep” that was the most secure place in the whole structure, and that’s the same way God your heavenly Father keeps you. When you are in his hands and under his protection and care and blessing, nothing can truly harm you and nothing can separate you from his love and goodness.

And the way he secured that for you is by sending his Son, Jesus Christ, to save you from your sins. That’s where the second part of this blessing comes in: “*The LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.*” The Bible says that because of our sins, we were separated from God so that he wouldn’t look at us or listen to us. In fact, none of us could ever see the face of God and live. He’s too holy! That’s the price our sins cost us. We have no rightful place in God’s presence, and we have no business receiving anything from God now but a biting sneer.

But our God wasn’t satisfied with that; he loves us too much for that. So he promises his grace, his undeserved love, to make us right with him again. And that grace came to us through the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. I’ve heard that word “grace” used as an acronym (where each letter stands for a different word), and it goes like this: God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense. The only reason God blesses us is for Christ’s sake; the only reason God is gracious to us is for Christ’s sake; the only reason God makes his face shine upon us in joy and delight now rather than judgment and disdain is for the sake of Jesus Christ our Savior, who lived for us, died for us, and rose again for us. Christ earned God’s love for us by living the perfect life as our substitute, and he took away God’s wrath against us by dying the sacrificial death that we deserved. So now God doesn’t ignore us and he doesn’t avoid us. No, he looks at us, his beloved children, and just can’t help but smile. Just as surely as the sun comes up every morning and gives light to the world, our God beams down on us with all his grace and favor and he showers us with his light of life and salvation.

And then based on the Father’s protection and the Son’s grace, God’s people also have the blessing of the Holy Spirit’s peace: “*The LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.*” You know, sometimes life can seem like God isn’t paying any attention to us. Sometimes when everything seems to go wrong, it can be like God’s looking

down on us or he can’t stand to look at us at all. But by the Lord’s own promise, things are not always as they seem. Life may often be tough, but with the Holy Spirit working on our behalf, our God promises to be attentive to our every need and prayer. He is always at our side to comfort and counsel us. The Spirit works through his Word and Sacraments to bring light and guidance to our lives, and he connects us to Christ by faith so that our God is truly now our Father who cares for us and watches out for us.

And when we know God as our Father, our Savior, and our Comforter, then we have in fullest measure the peace that only he can give. We have First Article gifts based on Second Article truths backed by Third Article assurance, and that gives us a special peace with God unlike anything else in this world. This peace is based on forgiveness and reconciliation; it’s a peace that comes from our right relationship with God that means everything is whole, tranquil, serene, just as it should be, both now and forever, because no matter what happens here, one day we’ll be with our Lord in heavenly perfection for eternity. That’s the peace that our Father created us to have; it’s the peace that his Son Jesus came here to win; and it’s the peace that the Holy Spirit came to deliver personally to each and every believing heart. This peace is the sum total of all of God’s goodness and blessings to us, because it encompasses the joy of forgiveness, the hope of salvation, and the confidence of everlasting life that can only come from our Triune God.

That sounds pretty great, doesn’t it? As mind-boggling as the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is, the blessings of knowing the Triune God really couldn’t be more clear – protection, grace, and peace. When the LORD’s name is spoken over you, you belong to him and he belongs to you, along with every good thing he’s prepared for you. By his rock-solid promise, those blessings, one and all, are yours in Holy Baptism and they’re yours again and again at the end of each worship service. So with believing hearts, hear once more our God’s triune blessing, given just for you: “*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.*” Amen.