

Numbers 6:22-27.

²² 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.”

The Name of the LORD is Placed on His People

1. At God's Gracious Direction

2. To Give Us Peace

The words might be spoken after a traditional or more contemporary service, read off a screen or straight out of the hymnal. The words might be spoken in a different language, in a different country, or continent, but regardless of exact form or language these words remind us of the unity that we have as believers and the blessing that our Lord gently lays upon his people so often at the conclusion of worship. It is the custom in most of our WELS churches - much like it is in other Christian churches as well - to end worship services with this blessing that God gives to his Old Testament Church. For more than a few of you this is a favorite part of the service. These words not only serve as a sign that the end of the service is near, but more importantly they serve as a warm send off after a day in God's house. These words serve as a welcome reminder of the blessings of God as we are sent back out into the world with the knowledge of God's presence and his love. It is my privilege and joy to raise my hands, to raise my voice, and speak a version of the words that the LORD himself gave to his church.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.”* On this morning upon which we consider our unity as a body of believers, it is certainly appropriate to take a closer look at these words that are so familiar to and beloved by God's children all over the world.

For thousands upon thousands of years, for people who lived before the fulfillment of the promise and those who have lived after Jesus came and lived and died in our place these words have been placed upon God's people, spoken aloud at public gatherings of worship. Why is that? Because God said so. This is his decree, this is his gracious wish and idea, and command: that his name would be placed on his people, that a simple blessing would be spoken regularly so the people would be reminded of his gracious love for his people. ²² *The LORD said to Moses, ²³ “Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites.* It was a decree of God that was to

passed down through the generations. The LORD told Moses, tell Aaron and his sons. More than mere human tradition that somehow emerged as a fan favorite, this was the LORD's continuing wish. Aaron would give this blessing. Aaron's sons, the high priests who would follow his example and would speak this threefold blessing over God's people. And the LORD has led his church today to see the continuing value of this blessing so that we continue to use it. In a time when new and fresh and different are often buzz words that grab the attention of many, this same tried and true blessing is spoken. Generation after generation of seminary students have been taught and will continue to be taught to speak this blessing with arms outstretched and hearts filled with joy, for this was the LORD's wish that his name would be placed on his people.

What a gracious privilege this is! The Almighty God, the one enthroned in splendor, robed in righteousness and perfection puts his name on that which is so terribly imperfect. The Israelites dishonored the LORD time and again. As they grumbled against him, as they broke and ignored his laws they also disrespected and abandoned the name of the LORD. As they ran after the gods and the pleasures that their neighbors waved in front of them they ignored the presence of their God and the blessings that he so freely offered. The LORD, the one true God who would reveal himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, was with them protecting them, guarding them, and blessing them, and so often the majority of the people didn't seem to care. And yet God still issued this decree. He spoke to Moses and Moses was to tell Aaron and his sons, "Bless these people and put my name on them."

In our day and age, celebrities are often asked to endorse products. If you or I were in that position, I would think that most of us would want to know and believe in what the product does. We wouldn't just put our name on anything. We certainly wouldn't want to put our name on something that doesn't live up to expectations or doesn't perform well. For we wouldn't want our name to suffer on behalf of that which is associated with and attached to our name. And yet God in his love and favor does not feel that restraint towards us sinners. Instead his desire is that his name is placed on us. As he did for the Israelites he does for us. He takes people who were guilty of numerous offenses and rebellions, who were so obviously flawed, and he puts his holy name on them. The sinner now bears the name of the LORD not by merit, but because of God's gracious direction. In our imperfection and in our sin and in our rebellion in our terrible and numerous flaws, God covers us with his grace. We should have the label of defective, broken, shamed, SINNER in large scarlet letters traced and placed on our foreheads, but he does not treat us as we deserve, instead he puts his name on us. We received it, first, in our baptism. The sign of the cross traced on the head and the heart to mark you as a redeemed child of God. The name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit spoken over us as the water ran over our forehead. The sin and guilt and punishment is washed away. His name is there instead. No letters of shame remain, but in their place we are given the gift of a lasting watermark that displays his

love. We are his prized possessions and His name is placed on us: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Washed and cleansed and made new, we belong to him, and God boasts in this fact for it pleases him. We who were broken by sin are now restored, redeemed, forgiven. Clothed with the perfection and righteousness of Christ, we are given the gift of the Spirit, we are loved by the Father.

The name is placed on us in baptism, and thus we enter into his presence freely. We come before our LORD in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In one way or another, we recall our baptism as we begin our worship in his holy triune name. We are refreshed by his love, his Word, his instruction. His law cuts, rebukes, and instructs, but the Gospel swells as it restores, heals, builds us up as we grow in him. The shame is wiped away, we are surrounded by his love, we wrapped in the warmth of his grace. And as we depart the name of the LORD is spoken once more in a threefold fashion. This time, the name of the LORD, is spoken along with picture language that conveys the faithful love of our God and secures his blessings upon us as we depart. We are wrapped in the warmth of his grace like a warm coat as we go out into the cold and sinful world. We are fitted with the armor of God as we head out into a hostile world. Like a soldier might tuck a comforting picture of his family in his helmet or in his breast pocket, as he goes out to face whatever may come, the name of the LORD is placed upon us. It is placed on our heads and on our hearts to comfort, to strengthen, so that we may be ready to face whatever may come.

And as that blessing is spoken, as the minister stretches out his arms, and traces that same sign of the cross over the heads and the hearts of God's people these are the words that were once given at God's own direction. 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.”*** The LORD, the LORD, the LORD, the one true, triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit wants to bless you. He desires that his name and his blessing is placed upon you.

What a pleasure to hear those words. ***The LORD bless and keep you.*** The one who created us and sustains us is the only one who could truly bless us. He is the one who gives us all that we need to sustain us in body and soul. He provides for us physically and we can trust that he will provide all that we need. He provides for us spiritually as well. In his mercy he calls us to faith and keeps us with him in the one true faith. He saves us from sin and from death and promises to keep us by his side through this life unto life eternal. What a pleasure to hear these words. ***The LORD bless you and keep you.***

The LORD make his face shine upon you. To look upon the face of the holy God is impossible for sinners like us. If God kept a record of wrongs and treated us as our sins deserve we would be struck down in his holy presence. But in his mercy and grace he turns his face towards us and he makes his face shine upon us, not with a terrifying brilliance but with a heavenly and saving glow. To know Jesus, to see the loving face

of Christ, is to know the love of God. And his grace shines in all its saving brilliance in the blessed countenance of our Savior. His grace shines, his goodness and kindness gently falls around us. We see our holy God in the face of our loving Savior and the Holy Spirit leads us to know and believe that Father, Son, and Spirit, are all invested in our redemption and all three persons are our one loving God. ***The LORD make his face shine upon us.***

The LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace. In his mercy the LORD promises to pay attention to our needs, to care for us, and thus give us peace. The Mighty King turns his benevolent face towards us wretched beggars and extends to us his riches. In our sin the Son has turned his attention towards us and has saved us. The long night of sin and death is over and salvation has dawned for the Spirit has come to us and through Word and Sacrament has breathed into us the breath of eternal life. And now as those who saved by his grace our loving Father promises that he will respond to our needs as he turns his face towards those he has graciously declared to be his sons and daughters. In our trouble, in our pain, his does not forget those who belong to him, instead he promises us undeserved attention. As an earthly father knows and responds to the voice of his child, the LORD our God will turn his face towards us. When we cry out in pain it is as if his neck snaps in our direction and looks upon us in our distress. When we stumble and fall into temptation he comes to rebuke and he also comes to restore. In our sorrow and in our joy he looks upon his child in love, and his presence soothes and comforts and satisfies. He is there. He looks upon with loving eyes. His disposition is favorable. His gaze is one of concern and care. In this blessing he reminds us that he is there to look upon us. And how can that not give us peace?

The LORD makes this promise to those he has called to be his children. At his gracious direction the LORD who makes and keeps his promises crafts and commissions these wonderful words, and through them the LORD extends to his people peace. It is blessing that speaks of the truth that unites us, and it has become so wonderfully familiar to so many of us. As we find comfort and hope in these words of our Lord, as we rejoice together in their simple beauty and yet hearty meaning, we are also sent out with this message of comfort and hope that we will want to share with others. As we are sent on our way under this blessing, under the watchful eye of our gracious God, we gratefully take up the task of sharing the good news of salvation, the good news of God's love. And we take up this work as a body of believers each contributing as we can. We rejoice in our unity and we long for others to share in this relationship that we share not only with each other but with God. The triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, reminds us that we are indeed One in Christ as he graciously puts his name upon us. May God bless us in the knowledge of these familiar truths. May God bless us as we work together to share this good news and bring this message of peace to others. Amen.