

New Year's Eve – December 31, 2016
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

AN OLD BLESSING FOR A NEW YEAR

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."

Dear friends in Christ:

We've heard the words of our text 100's of times. Moses' brother – the first High Priest – was the first to use these words to bless God's people. That's why these words which have been used down through the centuries are known as the Aaronic blessing.

God had spoken his Law, numbered his people, divided them into tribes and specified specific duties for them before they broke camp at Mt. Sinai and headed to the land of promise. Then **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."** We use these words in much the same way. After we have heard God's words, his instructions for our lives, we are dismissed with this final blessing to give us the strength to put his will into action in our lives.

With these words, the Lord communicates his gracious feelings toward his people. God stands behind these words. That is why they offer us comfort and encouragement. Verses 22-23 remind us that these words came from God himself with the command that they should be spoken to God's people as an assurance of his blessing. **The Lord said to Moses: Tell Aaron...say to them.** This blessing is not Moses wish for God's people. It's not something Aaron and Moses cooked up together. It's the Lord's promise – a promise which he repeats to us each time those words are spoken to us at the close of a worship service or a private devotion. Tonight those words become AN OLD BLESSING FOR A NEW YEAR.

When something is as familiar to us as the words of this blessing, it becomes easy for us to gloss over them without giving them a passing thought. The old saying, "Familiarity breeds contempt," provides a warning to us not to ignore these familiar words of the Lord. It was the Lord's blessing which sustained us in the year which is drawing to a close. And it will only be the Lord's blessings which will enable us to persevere in the year to come. Therefore, let's pause and consider in greater detail those wonderful and familiar words: **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.**

What is one of the first things that strikes you as you hear these words? Is it perhaps the triple repetition of the word Lord? Or is it the double mention of the Lord's face? Perhaps you noticed that the blessing was divided into three sections and that each section contained two action words. Those six action words describe the Lord's actions and attitudes. The term "the Lord" is the name God uses to describe himself as the one who is faithful to his covenant. The one who always delivers the blessings he promises.

Something we might have noticed if we were one of the Israelites listening to Aaron speak these words in Hebrew is the fact that each of those action words or verbs expressed a continuing action. Another thing we would have noticed is that although the blessing was spoken before a group of people the blessings were intended for individuals. The word you in English can be speaking of a group or an individual. In this case it refers to an individual.

The Lord bless you as an individual. The Lord keep you as an individual. The make his face shine on you as an individual. The Lord be gracious to you as an individual. The Lord look on you as an individual with favor. The Lord give you peace as an individual. In this blessing the Lord is speaking personally to you.

Now let's consider what the Lord promises us as individuals with these words:

- a. The Lord bless you – give you power to prosper, to be successful, to be fertile

These are the blessings the Lord provides to us through his word. Psalm one reminds us:

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. 2) But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. 3) He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. 4) Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. 5) Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. 6) For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

How fitting it is for us hear this blessing at the close of our worship service after we have heard the Word of the Lord: The Lord bless you and keep you!

- b. The Lord keep you – watch over, protect, be careful to look after you or guard you

In Psalm 121 David speaks frequently of the Lord's watchful care as a source of comfort in time of need. His words help us to appreciate the promise the Lord makes to us for the year to come.

I lift up my eyes to the hills-- where does my help come from? 2) My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. 3) He will not let your foot slip-- he who watches over you will not slumber; 4) indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. 5) The LORD watches over you-- the LORD is your shade at your right hand; 6) the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. 7) The LORD will keep you from all harm-- he will watch over your life; 8) the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

In the first section of this blessing, the Lord promises prosperity and protection to you in a general sort of way. In the second section, the Lord gets a bit more specific with his blessings.

- c. The Lord make his face shine upon you.

A smile or a lack of a smile reveals the attitude of a person's heart. When a loved one walks into the room, our faces will glow or shine. God promises to smile at us revealing the attitude of his heart toward us. The next portion of this blessing makes it clear that it is not our worship which has caused him to smile. He smiles on us in spite of our sins. Keep in mind that the Lord spoke these words after the people had sinned against him by worshipping the golden calf.

- d. The Lord be gracious to you –

The record of sin is long, yet the Lord remains gracious to his OT people and to us because of Christ. The promise of a Savior for the nations was the key to the Lord's grace his undeserved love to his OT

people. Paul captures the essence of grace in **Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** Christ is the smile of the Lord toward every sinner. Because Jesus has suffered the penalty for all sin, the Lord smiles on the world. More importantly for you as this blessing reminds you he smiles on you as an individual.

e. The Lord turn his face toward you

Many times when we observe something disrespectful we shake our heads and look away. With our sins we show our disrespect for God yet for Christ's sake the Lord graciously turns his face toward us. He lifts his face up to indicate that you are the focus of his attention – you have been granted an audience with him. You are the object of his love and recognition. And as the object of his love ...

f. The Lord will give you peace

Peace – this is the Lord's ultimate blessing. Sin placed man in conflict with God. Man turned God into the enemy. (Romans 8:7) **the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.** Yet the Lord went into action to restore the peace between himself and you by sending and sacrificing his Son. The Christmas gospel speaks of this peace: (Luke 2:10-14) **But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11) Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. 12) This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." 13) Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14) "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."**

No doubt when we hear the word the Lord repeated three times we are reminded of the Holy Trinity – and the fact that God has revealed himself to us as one God comprised of three separate persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These words make it clear that already in the OT the concept of the Triune God was evident. Of course Christ and the New Testament Scriptures provides us with a more complete revelation of our wonderful and mysterious God; Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. That is why in addition to this OT blessing we also make us of a NT blessing, known as the Apostolic blessing: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you. The apostle Paul often used those words to convey the Lord's blessings to those whom the Lord called into his family through the Gospel.

Our text began with the Lord reminding Moses that the words of blessing Aaron was to speak were his own words. The text concludes with similar thoughts. **So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.** With these words, the Lord reminded the people assembled before him that he had adopted them as his sons – he places **his** name on them. They are his heirs. He has chosen to share with them his grace. Once again the Lord promises them his blessings and emphasizes that he will indeed be true to his Word and bless them.

1. The Lord has placed his name on us in baptism, claiming us as his own and giving us the blessings of his grace.
2. We do not deserve the blessing recorded here any more than the Israelites did. But God graciously allows his word to comfort and strengthen us.
3. As we enter the New Year, the Lord gives us the promise of his care, the joy of his grace and the comfort of his peace. He has spoken – these blessings are yours to count on and enjoy.

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. Amen.