

Numbers 6:22-27

Rev. Jonathan E. Scharf

Confirmation / Trinity Sunday

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Confirmation Sunday. It's a big day. It's a day that means so much, that commemorates so much. This day is the culmination of literally years of work by these four students and their parents. But it's not just something completed. Even more, it is the starting point for a life of living in the strength of God and His Word, a life of growing in the knowledge, application and living of God's grace. And it is a day for all of us to remember our promises of faithfulness to God, a day when we can review the truths we hold so dear and remember why they are so dear.

Because, really, the promises you'll be making today are adult promises. They are full of responsibility and privilege. You won't have the responsibility in every facet of your life yet, but today, you are claiming responsibility for staying in the Word and growing in it. You are responsible, no more being able to pass the buck to mom and dad. You are responsible. And I've got to tell you Mykia, Barrett, Bradley and Eric – as cool as that sounds to be the responsible one, to have freedom, there will be times when freedom is scary, when responsibility is heavy. You will long for the comfort of habit and doing what you've always done, doing what someone else decides.

As Christians, God does give you a ton of freedom, and asks you to make decisions that give him glory, but aren't always easy to make. That's what responsibility is. But thankfully, there are also some times when God just tells us what to do, because he loves us. Our text starts out with one of those. This is God speaking to Moses as he is setting up how he wants to be worshipped and how he wants the people to be fed at worship. This is Numbers 6:22-23: **The LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron and his sons, "This is how you are to bless the Israelites."** This is how it is to be done. There was no need to debate or discuss whether we should do a traditional or contemporary blessing, artistic or plain. God is about to give us the very words he wanted his priests to use as they blessed the people – words we still have the freedom to use today, 25 centuries after God gave this command - words that are still as true now as they were then because they are God's Word!

You probably know them by heart: **"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."** When you think about it, those sentences may sound a little odd. We don't talk like that. "The LORD do this and that." You see, our English language doesn't usually have what the grammar of these words is. We're looking at imperatives – commands, but not 2<sup>nd</sup> person commands "You do it" – Third person commands. In these words, what is actually happening is that, in the words God himself gave us to use – we are commanding God to do these things. Think about that – he told us to give him a command: The LORD bless and keep you.

It's probably significant that there are three sets of commands as we speak our Triune God's blessing, just like it is significant that this is the Old Testament reading on this, the Sunday in the church year known as Trinity Sunday. In this blessing we see the work of each person of the Trinity – our "Three persons in One God" God. And in each part of the blessing, we see the blessing go from general to specific. Look at the first one:

The LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD bless you – in other words – "God, we're telling you to pour out your gifts to us like you have and you have to because of your promise." And then he makes it more specific – "the LORD keep you" or "Guard you." Think about that. This blessing you hear every week of your life is actually forcing God to do something – and he told you to talk like that - holding that faithful-to-his-promises LORD God to his promises that **'never will I leave you, never will I forsake you,'** that **'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways,'** that

he will provide **'seed to the sower and bread for food.'** God the Father who made it all and as you confirmation students memorized so well - "still preserves me by richly and daily providing clotting and shoes, food and drink, property and home, spouse and children, land, cattle and all that I own and all that I need to keep my body and life" – that God has to bless you and keep you. Hold him to that. I know, it's sometimes easier to count on ourselves, or our money, or our government, or our family for all that provision and protection, because we can see those things, we can quantify them. But God says – **"Make me do it"**. And it's God so you don't have to worry about stock market crashes or political corruption or personal greed or selfishness getting in the way. Barrett, Bradley, Mykia, Eric – all of you – **Hold God to his promises.** He is the one that will bless you and keep you.

Because he goes on and says – **"the LORD light up his face (cause his face to shine) on you and be gracious to you."** It's fun to watch the parents of the confirmands during the examination. When their kid gets an answer right – they are beaming: pride, satisfaction, excitement that their children know God's Word and are better armed and promising to continually arm themselves for all the battles of the teenage years. And with all the hard work these students put in, their parents ought to be beaming. Now apply that to God. How should he be looking at us?

We could go on all day with reasons God ought not let us see his shining face. His face should be hot with wrath. His holiness should consume us for all our failures. He knows those sins you think no one else knows about: Every image of you staring at the computer screen filled with perversity or the TV covered in immorality; every slanderous word and hateful thought, every self-serving action and hypocritical smile – God sees them all, and yet he tells us to command him to make his face shine on us like the proud parent of the successful student.

Why? Because he also tells us to command him to be what he is – gracious to us. He tells us to demand his grace – his grace that sent the Son, Jesus Christ, whom you all confessed that he, "True God, begotten of the Father from eternity and also true man, born of the virgin Mary is my Lord. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sin, from death and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with his Holy precious blood and his innocent suffering and death." That is accomplished fact – so hold God to his promise to look at you in that grace. Your sins are forgiven. God's wrath is spent. The LORD is gracious to you. That's the state you live in.

So you can command the LORD to literally **"Lift up his face to you and place on you peace."** The translation we use says, **"The LORD look on you with favor and give you peace."** In seminary – Vicar can probably attest to this – those words bring one of the most intense feelings of relief imaginable. You see, as a first year student, one of the most intimidating things you'll ever face, one of the most memorable moments of your first year there is the first time you are up to conduct chapel there, in front of all your friends, all your professors, all these professional preachers – you have to lead when you've never done it before. And once you get through these words – it's done. That's relief.

But, in my class, and I've heard that mine was not the only class like this – those words were tough. You see the first 5 guys in my class couldn't make it through these words. It wasn't until the D's in the alphabet that one of us finally did it. I don't think I'll forget one of the "C"s. He was up there in front, had delivered a wonderful message, applying God's law and gospel to our lives, but then he got to the blessing, and started: "The LORD bless you and keep you" and then he froze. He regrouped and tried again, "The LORD bless you and keep you" and the hands came down a little and the head sunk. "The LORD bless you and keep you," and by now he couldn't even look up and he just said "Amen."

He couldn't look up because of shame. He couldn't remember the next line. But you know how the rest of that blessing goes. God tells us to hold him to his promises and say, **"The LORD lift up his**

**face to you, and give you peace.**” God’s face is not buried because of what we’ve done, but because he is gracious to us, because the Holy Spirit has established this happy relationship with God in our hearts – God has to lift up his face to us. How? Giving us peace. Confirmands – that is what you have for your lives – peace.

And this isn’t just a “things will be alright even though my life seems to be falling apart” kind of peace. The confidence of Romans 8:28 is because of Romans 8:29-30. You remember the promise of Romans 8:28, right? **“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him”** - in all things! But we only know that because of how certain our salvation is, which is where Romans 8:29-30 come in: **“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son..., and those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified, those he justified, he also glorified.”**

You have peace because God has given you faith, because it has actually happened just as you said, that the “Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church he daily and fully forgives all sins to me and all believers. On the last day, he will raise me and all the dead, and he will give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.” That, my friends is peace, because this is most certainly true. And God wants you to hold him to those promises he’s made.

So hold God to his promises, and not just as a group – but you, each of you, each individual. Did you realize all the times you’ve heard this blessing, that the “you” in this blessing, each time it occurs – is singular? So every week, as you hear it spoken to this group, realize that God is talking to you, not to all y’all – but you, just you, specifically you. Just like he specifically feeds you his body and blood for forgiveness in the sacrament we’re about to receive, I want you...God wants you to specifically, individually, personally receive his blessing: **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.** In Christ, Amen