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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington
15 June 2025

Sermon on Numbers 6:22-27

Worship Theme:

THE MAJESTY AND MYSTERY OF OUR GOD

At the top of the list of things worthy of our undivided attention: God. This doesn't mean if we focus long and hard enough, we will understand everything about God. But there is still plenty about God's majesty that we can understand. We can understand that God provides for us as a loving Father. We can understand how much God loves us, as proven in the sacrifice of God the Son. We can understand that every time we gather in the name of our Triune God, the Holy Spirit grants us the greatest of blessings. These truths are worthy of our undivided attention!

Sermon Theme: "The Triune God Blesses"

1. Far Beyond What We Deserve
2. For Time and for Eternity

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is hard. The fact that God is one singular being and also three separate distinct persons with individual characteristics and responsibilities is completely clear in Scripture. The greatest theologians, most bare-bones Christians, and everyone in between wrestle with this teaching of the Bible. And it still doesn't make sense. People have written endlessly trying to reasonably explain how God can be both three unique persons and one undivided God. Yet still we are overwhelmed by the majesty and mystery of our God.

So there's a two-part danger today. The first is that we treat this doctrine about God as nothing more than an academic exercise. We turn the Bible into a textbook and we turn church into a classroom as we search for the answer to our questions. But we won't find it. Nowhere in the Bible does God explain how this apparent mathematical mistake is actually perfectly rational or showing how "three and one are equal" in a way that makes sense to us.

And the second danger is even worse. Worse than treating God and his holy Word as nothing more than an academic exercise is refusing to believe just because we can't understand. And if we refuse to believe in God because we can't perfectly understand everything about him, then we might as well throw away our Bibles, quit the church, and stop wasting our time. Because we will never fully understand God – we can't! He is infinitely greater than we are and always will be. His three-in-one nature is just one of many teachings about God beyond our understanding, and therefore it might be tempting to just throw in the towel and walk away.

But two important things we all need to know just might keep us from doing that. First, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is not something that can be understood; it can only be believed, through the faith God himself puts into our hearts – it's not a head exercise, it's an exercise of faith. Second, God doesn't explain this to us in an academic setting, so to treat it that way would be inappropriate. Instead, God explains who he is by showing what he does: The Triune God Blesses.

The words of Numbers chapter 6 are incredibly familiar to us. We hear them at the end of worship nearly every week! And I hope that we never go through them too quickly without stopping to think about what they're saying and what they mean. Because when we slow down and consider what all these words really say to us and about us, we quickly realize **we don't deserve them.**

The people of God in the Old Testament knew that too. They frequently turned away from him, disobeyed his commands, and worshiped false gods they themselves had made – worthless objects made BY people and yet worshiped as superior to humanity! There were even times in Israel's history when the Word of God had not been heard for so long that they rediscovered the Scriptures tucked away in a long-forgotten place. When they read them, the people had never heard such words in their lifetimes. Read 2 Kings chapter 22 sometime. It's a fascinating and heartbreaking account. We might think, "How could people have treated God's Word with such disregard that they didn't even know where it was?! They didn't even deserve to be God's people anymore!"

But I wonder...how many of us don't remember exactly where our Bibles are right now either? Have you placed it on a shelf somewhere or stuck it in a box and forgotten all about it? Or maybe that's not you; maybe you know exactly where your Bible is right now and you see it there all the time. But how many of those Bibles have a layer of dust on them? How many haven't been cracked open and read in months or even years? Or maybe that's not you either. Maybe you read your Bible every day, more than once even! If so, that's wonderful and I'm so happy to hear that. But regardless of how often we use or don't use our Bibles, do we believe what it says? When it tells us all these amazing and wonderful things about who our God is and what he does, do we believe it? Or do we look instead for any opportunity we can to disprove it or to question God and his actions?

God is the most majestic and mysterious of all – nothing in the entire universe or throughout time and history beats God. He is perfect and holy. He never makes mistakes. He rules over everything with power and might, yet is filled with mercy and love. He is present everywhere at every moment. There is not a single thing God does not know. He always has existed and always will exist, and he is always the same – he does not change. He is the most good and always works for the eternal good of his people. And even just this small list of things (far from everything there is to know about God!) can make our heads hurt and make us question him and wonder how anyone could possibly ever be like this. We might even wonder if the Christian faith makes sense at all or if it's something we should leave behind and make fun of for being so incredibly out there in its claims.

So here we find again the unchanging importance of God's Word. In his Word, God gives us everything we need to know about him and then uses that very Word to create faith within us to believe that it's true. Every time we open his Word and every time we come to church, we hear again that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit – the Holy Triune God! – does life-changing things for us! What does he do? **The Triune God Blesses.** In spite of every sinful thing we've ever done, God blesses us – **Far Beyond What We Deserve!**

That's what God did for the Old Testament Israelites too. *The LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites.'*" Isn't that shocking? The God who knows all things, sees all things, hears all things, is fully aware of everything everyone has ever done...does not condemn us for it. He could, and should! But doesn't. Instead, he says, "This is the way you will BLESS them." Not once, not twice, but over and over and over again.

Say this to my people: "*The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.*" When you saw this reading earlier in the bulletin, did you notice who is doing all the doing? *The LORD*. But not just any lord. We're very familiar with the title "Lord" and we often use it for God. But you noticed that here it's written in a very special way, a way we often talk about in Bible Classes and confirmation class because it's always worth discussing again.

This is God's holy name for himself. At the burning bush (Ex. 3), this is the name God revealed so that Moses could tell the Israelites who sent him to lead them. This is the God whose name simply is "I AM WHO I AM." It's both incredibly profound and frustratingly vague and doesn't tell us nearly everything we want to know about God. So throughout Scripture, God continues revealing. In Exodus 34, he adds: *The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin.* Who is the LORD? He is compassionate, gracious, patient, loving, faithful, and forgiving, a God who is so good.

And this good God wants this blessing spoken on his people. Not just his Old Testament people a very long time ago, no – on you too. *The LORD bless you and keep you.* What does it mean, "to bless?" It's to bestow something truly special on someone and to look on them favorably. Our sin should make that impossible; but nothing is impossible for the LORD. He blesses us and looks on us with love. And our sin should make us detestable to God and cause him to throw us out like pieces of trash, but instead God looks at you and me and loves us so deeply that he chooses to keep us and wants nothing more than to have us as his own forever.

The LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. What does that mean? A shining face? Well, we know that God's face shines with his glory, and we know what that glory should do to anyone who sees it. In Exodus 33, God said, "*you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.*" His glory is too much for us to handle, because he is too holy and we are too sinful. We should instantly die if we ever come anywhere near God's face – we're not worthy!

But then God shows us how he makes us worthy: his grace. Grace is the undeserved love God has for sinners. The Apostle Paul in Romans 5 today talks about how we are "justified by grace through faith." This has eternal importance for us. It means we are declared 'not guilty' because of God's undeserved love for sinners like us. This comes through believing that Jesus is our Savior, and that belief (or "faith") comes to us as a free gift from God the Holy Spirit. There's not a single thing WE do there. It's all done by God our Savior who is so gracious that he allows us to see his face and bask in the profound love that shines forth from it.

The LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace. How terrible it would be if this weren't true. Because of our sin, God should hate us and kill us and condemn us to hell. But instead he turns his face toward us, and he doesn't turn away. God does not turn his back on us or reject us or throw us out of his presence; he willingly keeps looking. He keeps looking at you and me and, in spite of everything we might expect, God pronounces peace. That peace is won for us by Jesus and it's a peace like nothing else we've ever experienced, *a peace beyond all understanding, which guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus*. [Philippians 4]

This blessing is packed with eternally important things to think about, and we could spend so much more time on it! But here's the beautiful bottom line: God mercifully and lovingly insists that this blessing be spoken on his people. And so that we never forget who it is that blesses us so richly, three times we hear it: "*The LORD, the LORD, the LORD*" – this is the Triune God! What does he want done with his name? *So they will put my name on the Israelites*. We put our name on things to let people know they are ours – anything that we have and want to keep.

So God says, "*Put my name on my people*." That's us! And it changes literally everything about us. We spend a lot of time and effort figuring out who we are and discovering our identity in life. Then we label ourselves with things of this world such as, "I am parent, child, friend. I am employer, employee. I am a sinner, he a murderer, she an addict, he an adulterer, she a liar," and on and on we label ourselves and others and think that's just the way it is. But regardless of what we and anyone else call us in this world, only one label truly matters for time and eternity. So who are you? You are a dearly loved child who bears the name of your God everywhere you go. Every single morning, we wake up and all day long, day after day, we wear the name of our Savior God who perfectly unceasingly blesses us, **for time and for eternity**.

As long as we live in this world, we will never understand how three persons and one God can be the same exact thing, and maybe we won't even understand it in heaven! But that's perfectly fine. We don't have to understand God. This is not a class where we need to know the information and successfully pass the test; no, this is a life which **The Triune God Blesses**. It doesn't mean there will never be hard days where it's tough to see these blessings. But our God's blessing does get us through those hard days and also promises us that a perfect eternal life in his presence is waiting for us. God clearly shows us who he is by what he does – **The Triune God Blesses Far Beyond What We Deserve for Time and for Eternity**. Nothing academic about it – just a beautiful truth we get to believe. So to this Holy Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – be unending praise, now and forever. Amen!

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.