

Dear friends in Christ, I'm so glad you're here on this Father's day weekend to hear about the amazing blessing your heavenly Father wants to give you.

There was a dad, whose ex-wife didn't want him to be involved in his son's life. But the dad still loved his son, so he set aside several thousand dollars per year to give to his son. When the boy graduated from high school, the father gave him this huge blessing. He said, "I've saved enough to pay your tuition at any college you choose." For years the son had his father's name, and now the father gave him a big blessing.

That reminded me of the story of God's people in the Old Testament. They were kept as slaves in Egypt for 400 years, and they knew God was real, they had his name, but they didn't hear from him very much. They felt like that son, who grew up without hearing from his father. But then God set them free from slavery, and he brought them through the Red Sea and into the desert. The word of Numbers chapter 6 is like their graduation party. After living as God's sons and daughters for a long time, God was going to give them a huge blessing with some words that he still uses today to give us blessings.

Here's how God delivers his blessing: He told his representatives, in the desert it was priests, but today it's pastors, to use words to put his name on his people. In the desert, it were Israelites, but today it's you! So we use these words almost every Sunday in worship. But sometimes we can hear the same words over and over again so much that we don't stop to think about what they mean. So today, we are going to slow down and appreciate God's blessing. I think this will sound familiar.

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.

Notice God's blessing comes in three sections. We'll take them one at a time.

First, **The Lord Bless you and keep you.**

You hear the word "bless" a lot. But in Bible contexts here's what it means: The Lord give you a successful, prosperous, productive life. "Blessing" comes from the Lord.

I had just graduated from college, and I was all excited. But I had taken out loans to pay for college and I knew I was going to have to pay those loans back starting now. That's when my dad spoke up. He said, "Your mom and I have decided to write you a check every month to help you pay for your college education. It's our graduation present to you." What a blessing! They kept their word every month for years, and earlier this year, I made my final payment, and I looked at my wife, and I said, "We did it!" You're thinking, "Who's WE?" Mom and Dad helped you do it! And you're right. I paid off the loan, but my ability to do that came from Mom and Dad. Isn't that how we treat our blessings from God sometimes? You earn a paycheck. You cook the food. You save for retirement. But don't forget your ability to do all those things comes from your Father in heaven. The Lutheran catechism has a great paragraph about this. Would you read this with me?

"I believe that God created me and all that exists, and that he gave me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my mind and all my abilities. And I believe that God still preserves me by richly and daily providing clothing and shoes, food and drink, property and home, spouse and children, land cattle, and all I own, and all I need to keep my body and life." That's how the Lord blesses you.

He also keeps you. Grandparents, if your kids asked you to keep the grandkids for a weekend, what are they asking you to do? To put them in the closet, stuff a sock in their mouth and check on them every three hours?

No! They want you to feed them and take care of them and discipline them, and love on them just like mom and dad. That's how God keeps you too. The Catechism puts it this way. Read with me.

“God also preserves me by defending me against all danger, guarding and protecting me from all evil. All this God does only because he is my good and merciful Father in heaven and not because I have earned or deserved it.”

Did you catch that last part? God doesn't bless you because you're so good. He blesses and keeps you because he's so good.

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

Make his face shine on you? What does that mean? The Hebrew language uses the word face for intense communication. And you can see why. It's easy to disagree with someone behind their back, but it's intense to say it to their face. It is nice to get a text from someone who loves you, but it's so much more meaningful face to face.

God's most intense interaction with you isn't anger. He's smiling. His face is shining!

Dad's I know that the smile is not the most comfortable shape for your face muscles to make all the time. And that's ok. But if you're walking around with an angry heart, you gotta know that it affects your kids. We've been quoting a lot of from the Lutheran Catechism today, but this is true: Dads, you are the most important theologian your kids will ever meet. You have an opportunity to form their hearts like wet cement before it dries. So if you're walking around with a grumpy heart, then this is the part of the blessing you need to hear the most. Because even if you lose your temper at your kids, the Lord is not angry with you. His face is shining on you!

Moms, dads, kids, some of you are thinking, “God's smiling on some people, but not me. You don't know how dark my heart is, Pastor. I'm a lost cause. I should be condemned.” And you're right. All of us sinners deserves to go to hell. But the next line of God's blessing changes everything.

The Lord make his face shine on you *and be gracious to you.* Grace is God's smile for people who don't deserve it, even for the grumpiest of us. Do you know how I know that? Because of Jesus. One of Jesus' followers wrote, **“God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory (But how do we see God's light!?) displayed in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6).** You want to know if God loves you, look at the face of Christ. Can you picture Jesus as he dies on the cross to take away all your failures? God gave his only son for you. You can't even imagine how much he loves you! Yeah, he's smiling on you — on lost and condemned creatures like you and me. Read with me. **“He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with his holy precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death.”**

I remember when I was little, running to find my dad screaming, “Sorry! Sorry!” And he's like, “Slow down, what are you sorry about?” Well in the back yard was a baseball mitt. Over on the garage was a painted rectangle in the shape of a strike zone. And above the strike zone was a window with a baseball size hole in it. “Sorry!” Why did I run to my dad? Because I know he loves me. I know he forgives me.

This week you're going to have “Sorry! Sorry!” moments. Take them to your heavenly Father. He's smiling on you. He's gracious to you.

A father who doesn't love his children, who abuses them verbally or physically, is not representing God's love. If that's your relationship with your father, then know that your heavenly Father would never do anything to hurt you. Today you can celebrate how much He loves you. But did you know that an inattentive or disinterested father is also failing to represent God? The last part of the blessing goes like this:

The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.

Sometimes it seems like God is an inattentive Father. When we get sick, or our relationships break down, it seems like God is busy doing something else. He's not. He says he turns his face toward you. We often think God should step into our lives with his mighty hand or with a miracle, and if he does, praise God! But often, he turns his face toward us in a different way – with his word.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit. He is fully God, all powerful and gracious, and he comes to us in our struggles not by a miracle, but by the gospel; not by taking you out of the struggle but by keeping you in the faith.

Read this with me: **"I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."** The Holy Spirit makes God's blessing your personal possession through faith. Did you know that at the end of the service when you hear God's blessing, every time you hear the word, "you" it's singular. It's not "The Lord bless all y'all" It's "The Lord bless you, and you, and you, individually." That's because he's turned his face toward you. He's paying attention to you and whatever you are going through. That's how he gives peace.

Do you see what an amazing blessing God is giving you?

I want you to live in that blessing all week long. I want you to remember how safe you are in God's hands, how gracious Jesus is to you. I want you to have peace in your struggles. So how can I make sure you have it? Should I command you to remember? "Don't forget!" That puts all the responsibility on you! God's got a better way. **"So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them."** At the end of every service, God puts his name on you. You're like Aaron Rodgers on Sundays except instead of "PACKERS" across your shirt it says, "The Lord, Father, Son, Holy Spirit." You are the people of God. You are the people of Christ. You are the CHRISTians. You are the people of grace. You are the people of peace. You are the people of God's blessing; people this world so desperately needs. Let's be who we are.

Amen.