Sermon: Numbers 6:22-27

Dear Children of our Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:

A member forgets about the time change for church this morning. He was just following the pattern of 10:30 a.m. church. When he arrives the parking lot has a lot of cars, but no people going in. All of a sudden he realizes his mistake – the summer schedule begins today. The service is close to ending. If he comes into church, all he will hear is the benediction. Should he come in or turn around? Imagine if you were that person. What would you do?

The sermon this morning is to convince you that the benediction is such a powerful part of the worship that it would be worth driving across the country just to receive this blessing.

“This is How the Triune God Blesses You”
I. The LORD provides for you.
II. The LORD loves you.

III. The LORD calms you.

Preface: This passage from Numbers 6:24-26 records a most ancient solemn benediction which God appointed for dismissing the people at the close of the daily service of the Hebrews. The repetition of the name “Lord” or “Jehovah” three times, expresses the great mystery of the Godhead—three persons, and yet one God. The expressions in the separate clauses correspond to the respective offices of the Father, to “bless and keep us”; of the Son, to be “gracious to us”; and of the Holy Spirit, to “give us peace.” And the benediction, though pronounced by the lips of a fellow man, derived its virtue, not from the priest, but from God himself.

He was bestowing a great honor on the priests. By themselves the priests could do no more than beg a blessing. Here God uses them to speak for him. They were to be the mouth pieces of God. The words here are promises. Aaron and his sons were to announce the blessing with authority. The priests were not to invent their own words, but speak these very words from God himself.

The benediction was a picture of the Messiah coming to bless his people. The final scene of Jesus’ contact with his disciples was to bless them with up-stretched arms at the time of his ascension. Listen carefully and enjoy the full benefit of the benediction at the end of this service.

I. The LORD provides for you.

A. The LORD is our constant guard during the day
   1. We should rightly imagine that the spiritual forces of good are doing battle with the spiritual forces of evil. We ought to pray for the army of holy angels to come to our rescue especially when we feel the attack of the devil, the world and our sinful natures. Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word (Psalm 103:20).
   2. That is why God created these spiritual servants. Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation (Hebrews 1:14)?
   3. In the second lesson we see that suffering is a worm turned into a butterfly. It is suffering that is firmly in the hands of our Father in heaven. We rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope (Romans 5:4).

B. Even during the night the LORD is there constantly blessing us and keeping us.
   1. He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep (Psalm 121:3b-4).
   2. The word bless here can also mean “kneel.” Go to sleep tonight picturing the LORD himself kneeling over you bed and keeping you safe. You can be assured that the LORD will bless you and keep you.
Transition: Does this not remind us of how the LORD feels about us in the most thorough way?

II. The LORD loves you.

A. Without Jesus, God has an angry face.
1. Without a rescue plan, God must forsake us. God has nothing to do with sinners. In Jeremiah 18:17 God threatens sinners: “Like a wind from the east, I will scatter them before their enemies; I will show them my back and not my face in the day of their disaster.” God’s back indicates abandonment.
2. There might be a fear in our sinful hearts that God will leave us and forsake us. That is why there is certain fear of death in us at times. We might call it the fear of the unknown when we don’t fully understand or trust God’s promises.

B. But with Jesus, God’s face shines with love. His face illuminates.
1. Martin Luther said that God’s face shining on us means that God is at work and shows himself to us (What Luther Says, vol.2, p.811, #2515).
2. When the LORD’s face shines upon us we are illumined like turning the lights on in a stadium. We can see God who won the victory for us through our superhero, Jesus.
3. The LORD’s face shines upon us and he is gracious to us. Jesus has rescued us from our enemies. That’s why his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).

Transition: God the Father and God the Son promised to send another. He is called the Counselor, the Comforter. He is very personal member of our Triune God …

III. The LORD calms you.

1. It reminds me of the blessing that Zephaniah spoke of. The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing (Zephaniah 3:17). The LORD turns his face toward us. He keeps his eye on us and pronounces us his own dear ones, his precious children.
2. The Holy Spirit is our Comforter in Holy Scriptures. In the Gospel Reading for today we are reminded how the Father, Son, and Counselor all work together to calm us. Jesus told his disciples and tells us today, “All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you (John 16:15). The apostles in turn wrote down everything Jesus taught them and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit wrote a perfect text, the only real source that gives us solid promises – promises like that of peace.
3. We have the assurances that things will get better. We can be sure of everlasting life. In the Hebrew benediction we notice a crescendo. The first line has three Hebrew words, the second line has five Hebrew words. And the third line has five Hebrew words. An increase is indicated here. Perhaps we could illustrate this poetic blessing like this:

   The LORD bless you and keep you.

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

   The LORD turns his face toward you and give you peace.
4. In an augmented way this benediction puts the LORD’s name on people and he blesses them more and more (Numbers 6:27). He protects us from physical harm. He comes down to us in the person of Jesus Christ. And now he dwells in us and gives us peace through the working of Holy Spirit.

5. Every once in a while I’m blessed by this benediction too – by the actions of children in worship. Every once in a while there is a child in the congregation giving the blessing to me. He or she raises the hands and mouths the words as I say them. How nice! They are paying attention and they’re imitating something sacred toward me. I am blessed by that.

Conclusion:
So what do you think? Would someone be blessed even if they came just for the last part of the worship service? Don’t get me wrong, the rest of the worship is very important important too - the confession of sins – the absolution when God pronounces his forgiveness on his penitent sinners – the Scripture readings, the Sacrament. But I’m convinced that the empowering words of the benediction is worship driving from a long distance to receive this blessing because this is how our Triune God blesses you. Amen.