

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on Numbers 6:22-27 on May 22, 2016 at Victory of the Lamb.

**Series: Real-ationships Make All the Difference**  
**Today's Focus: Our Mysterious Triune God (Trinity Sunday)**

**"Blessed to See God Smile"**

In the name of Jesus Christ who once said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me" (John 14:1). Dear Friends,

For quite a while the only reaction you could have to something that was posted on Facebook was to give it a virtual thumbs-up, to "like" it. This led to years of speculation as to when Facebook would finally give people the option to "dislike" something. And for a long time nothing came along. And then finally this year Facebook gave people what they wanted...sort of. They came up with 6 "reactions" for people to express themselves {show pic}. "Like," "love," "haha," "sad," "wow," and "angry". So what do you think of Facebook's new "reactions" options? Do you like them? Do you use them? Are they helpful for building healthier relationships with other human beings?



Whether or not you're on Facebook, I want you to imagine for a moment that you just posted a new profile pic. In other words, a picture of you the way you want the world to see you, or at least...your friends. It's you looking maybe even for a little positive feedback and affirmation. And then imagine that the first reaction you get is this {show pic}: 😡

How would that make you feel? Would you think, "Are they for real?" But how would you feel if the first reaction that you got, with that angry face, was from God? What would you do? Try and un-friend him? Try and block him? But this is what some people think God's primary character trait is like—as if he's a passive aggressive, mean, or angry god sort of trolling the news feed of our lives looking to react to us with condemnation. You ever think like that? You ever feel like God is out to get you—like He's watching everything...He knows everything...He misses nothing?

And the thing is, friends, there's an element of truth to this. God is watching everything. He knows everything. He misses nothing. And while we can in a way un-friend him, there is no way to block him from being able to see the news feed of our lives. Like it or not we cannot hide anything from God. Even if we carefully craft the version of ourselves that we want the world to see, yet God sees through the facade into our hearts. He knows our thoughts. He discerns our motives. He evaluates our actions not only on the basis of whether they outwardly measure up to his commands or not but whether we're acting out of lust instead of love, selfishness instead of compassion, greed instead of generosity, anger instead of empathy, fear instead of faith.

And remember how Adam and Eve reacted after they turned their backs on God in the Garden of Eden? Their first tacit admission of guilt was that they realized they were naked. They felt exposed. Vulnerable. Ashamed. Mortal. But what did they do to deal with these feelings? They tried to cover themselves up,

quite inadequately, with fig leaves. And they tried to evade God, to hide from his presence, to avoid seeing his displeasure. And how'd that work out? Not very well. God found them easily. The fig leaves were falling off. Adam's explanation? **"I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid"** (Gen. 3:10). Human beings have been trying to hide from divine disapproval and anger, quite inadequately, ever since. And then when God gave them a chance to come clean, instead they got defensive. They got angry that he was angry! So they passed the buck. They shifted blame. They even tried throwing it back on God. Adam said to God, **"The woman you put here with me-- she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it"** (Gen. 3:12). The wonderful, beautiful, perfect relationship between Adam and Eve was broken because their wonderful, beautiful, perfect relationship with God was broken. And this is how it is in the world. Our relationships with each other stand no chance unless our relationship with God is restored.

Because the sad truth is that sin destroys first and foremost our relationship with God. And not just some sins as if there are bigger sins or worse sins. No, all sins. Because God is holy. He is righteous. All sin is rebellion against the perfect character of God who is the maker of heaven and earth. He is not like a declawed kitten—all cute and cuddly. He is more like a lion—the king of the jungle. He is Aslan in the Chronicles of Narnia—terrifying yet good. The true God is therefore not someone to trifle with. And he is not a genie in a bottle there to grant your wishes. On the contrary, when we come to worship God here at church the Bible says that should **"worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire'"** (Hebrews 12:28-29).

We see this quite dramatically in the book of Numbers where our sermon text today comes from. The book of Numbers in the Old Testament is the story of a journey. It is the journey of the Israelites through the vast wilderness of the Arabian peninsula, modern day Saudi Arabia, from between the time when they left Egypt where they had been slaves until they finally crossed the Jordan River to take possession of Canaan in what is today Israel. So we see during these years of wandering in the wilderness, for example, what happened when people like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rebelled against Moses and his brother Aaron the priest. God caused the ground to open up and swallow them alive (cf. Numbers 16). We hear that when the people bitterly complained about their hardships in the wilderness, fire from the LORD burned among them and scorched the outskirts of their camp in judgment (cf. Numbers 11:1-3). When the people complained they didn't have enough meat to eat **"the anger of the LORD burned against the people, and he struck them with a severe plague"** (Numbers 11:33).

Why? Because God had to teach his people (and us) that his love is not to be trifled with, his patience is not to be tested, that sin is serious, and that the wages of sin is death. And what each of us needs to come to grips with before we die is that this is exactly also what we deserve. We deserve to have God react to our lives with his anger. We deserve to die for our sins. This would be just and right and fair. The fact that all of us right now want to push back at that and say, "Yeah, but...I'm basically a good person" proves that we're by nature hostile to the ways of God. We deserve to be cursed by God forever.

But then we hear from God himself in his Word: <sup>22</sup> **The LORD said to Moses,** <sup>23</sup> **"Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:** <sup>24</sup> **"The LORD bless you and keep you;**

Did you hear that? First of all it says the LORD—in all capital letters. This is the special name for God in Hebrew that is used when God wants us to know that he is the God who remains always true to his word, the One who does not change. That means yes, he is a just, holy God. Yes, his law points out our sins. Yes, he is always continually calling us to repentance for those sins. But he is also a God who is gracious and compassionate. He is a patient and forgiving God who longs to show mercy. He is a God who instead of a curse tells the leaders of his church to pronounce a blessing on the people.

<sup>22</sup> **The LORD said to Moses,** <sup>23</sup> **“Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:** <sup>24</sup> **““The LORD bless you... How is it, friends, that we can receive a blessing from the Almighty God? Because ultimately...God’s own Son, Jesus, was cursed in our place.**

There is an important passage in the Bible that says, **10 All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."** In other words no one can get even close to getting into heaven on the basis of trying to live a moral life or by simply trying hard to be on your best behavior. In fact this verse clearly teaches that a sure fire way to actually earn God’s anger is to think you can get God to love you by just doing religious looking things or by trying hard to be a good person and to think as if somehow this means that God owes you blessings.

**11 Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith." 12 The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them." 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." 14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. Galatians 3:10-14 (NIV 1984)**

So how is it possible for the holy God who is serious about sin to extend grace and blessings to us poor sinners? Because the sinless Son of God, Jesus Christ, willingly hung and bled and died on a cross in our place. He paid the penalty that had been decreed for our sins. The wages of sin is death. Jesus died because the wages for our sins were transferred to his account. And as the sky went dark that Good Friday afternoon when Jesus hung on that old rugged cross, that accursed tree, God the Father turned his back on Jesus so that we would never have to fear him turning his back on us. Jesus drank the cup of God’s wrath, downing in completely in one big gulp. And so the death that Jesus died as the sinless Son of God was sufficient payment for the sins of the world. He took our hell so that heaven could be our true and permanent home. And the reason we know this is true is because Jesus didn’t stay dead but on the third day he rose in victory just as he foretold. His tomb was empty because the wages of our sin were paid, the devil’s power to accuse us was dealt a fatal blow, and the face of God could forever shine with pleasure on all who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus was cursed on the cross so that by his resurrection all might be acquitted and blessed.

<sup>22</sup> **The LORD said to Moses,** <sup>23</sup> **“Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:** <sup>24</sup> **““The LORD bless you and keep you; What does this mean? Three times in this benediction we**

hear the name “the LORD”. The LORD. The LORD. The LORD. This threefold repetition makes us think about the mysterious nature of God as he reveals himself in Scripture—that our God, the one true God, is triune. This means there are 3 distinct persons of the deity, yet one God in essence. From eternity, without beginning or end, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have existed in perfect, harmonious relationship with one another.

**The LORD bless you and keep you;** The first time we hear the name of the LORD here we think of God the Father who provides us with all that we need for life here on earth and who protects us from untold harm and danger. It’s easy to complain about what we don’t have or to fret about what we think is going to happen in the world or in our lives. But then we are forgetting like the Israelites of old that it is God who blesses us and “keeps” us even while we sleep. The word “keep” in Hebrew literally means to guard, to watch over, to keep safe. It’s the same word used in one of my favorite Psalms which says **“The LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore”** (Psalm 121:8).

<sup>25</sup> **the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;** What does this mean? Here we think of God the Son, our Savior Jesus, who satisfied God’s anger by showing us undeserved love, pure grace in dying on the cross. The picture is that because of Jesus, God the Father now actually approves of us. In fact he takes pleasure in us and pays attention to us. Like a parent whose face lights up at seeing their newborn child, so God’s face shines upon us for Jesus’ sake.

<sup>26</sup> **the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.”** What does this mean? We think of the Holy Spirit who through God’s Word and Sacraments comes to us and gives us the gift of faith so that we receive as our permanent possession the peace that Jesus won—the peace of a clear conscience through the forgiveness of our sins, the peace that now the door to eternal life is now open, the peace of knowing that God sees all things, knows all things, misses nothing in our life but this isn’t terrifying anymore. It’s comforting. We are blessed to see God smile!

<sup>27</sup> **“So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.”** I learned something studying the Hebrews text of this benediction this past week. It’s something simple but profound. When it starts out God tells Moses and Aaron, **This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them...** and so it says they are to speak this blessing to the Israelites, to them. Plural. But then when God actually gives the blessing that he wants them to speak he says **“The LORD bless you and keep you (singular); <sup>25</sup> the LORD make his face shine on you (singular) and be gracious to you (singular); <sup>26</sup> the LORD turn his face toward you (singular) and give you (singular) peace.”** Do you get what God is telling us here?

Every Sunday I conclude our worship service by speaking the words of this blessing. But at the end of each Sunday’s service you may be tempted to hear me speak these familiar words and check out. Or you might think I’m just talking about people in general. But what God wants to communicate is a blessing not just to people in general, but to individuals in particular. To you. To you. To you. **“The LORD bless you and keep you; <sup>25</sup> the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; <sup>26</sup> the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.”**

When Facebook rolled out their new “reactions” in February, initially there was one more emoji that they tried out for just a little while in a few countries. Ultimately, however, it didn’t make the cut. You know what it was? You can see it here {show pic}. It was called “Yay”.



“Yay” didn’t make it because people apparently didn’t understand it. Maybe it was too similar to other emotions like “love.” But you know what? I think this is true for a lot of people when it comes to God. They can’t believe that God could actually love them.

Or sometimes maybe we believe that God is loving in theory, but that God would actually love me, that he is actually happy with me, that in a way of speaking he actually smiles upon the facets of my life that flow from faith, that he might even react with a “Yay” in my life...how often do you think like that? But friends, it’s true! God loves you and wants to have a personal relationships with you and if your faith in is Jesus Christ, he looks at your life and his reaction is “Yay!” It was “Yay!” at your baptism when God himself placed his name upon you and adopted you into his family to bless you. It is “Yay!” every time you hear these words spoken in blessing at the end of the service. This isn’t just a prayer. It’s a promise.

**““The LORD bless you and keep you; <sup>25</sup> the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; <sup>26</sup> the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.” Amen.**

### Take Home and Apply

**Think:** Jesus took away our shame by taking upon himself all our sins so that we can receive God’s smile.

**Share:** 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." 14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit (Galatians 3:13-14).

**Challenge:** Write the words of the “Aaronic Benediction” (Numbers 6:24-26) on a note card. Speak it over your children when you tuck them into bed. If single or alone, speak these words out loud before bed and remember what happened at your baptism: God put his name on you and adopted you into his family. You are blessed to see God smile!