

Grace, Mercy, and Peace are your in abundance. Amen.

The LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: “‘The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.’” “So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.” This is God’s Word.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The words of our text were given to God’s people almost 3500 years ago. These words have been used throughout the centuries as part of worship for both the Old Testament Children of Israel and also the New Testament Christian Church. Sometimes, when we hear words repeated over and over again, in the same way and same setting, we get used to them – we don’t really think about what those words mean. I’m sure that for many, when they hear these words, it is a signal that the worship service is just about over, but God gave us this blessing for a specific purpose. It not only signals the end of our worship, but it also gives us strength as we go out and live our lives.

As we end another year of God’s grace and begin a new year, let us see through these words, that the **“Lord Gives us Something to Take Home.”** He gives us **“The Promise of His Care,” “The Joy of His Grace,”** and **“The Comfort of His Peace.”**

I. When God was talking to Moses, He could have told Moses, “I want Aaron to bless the people in my name,” and let Moses and Aaron come up with the exact wording, but this was something important. This was something that God wanted to do for his people – a specific blessing for them and so he commanded Moses to tell Aaron, “I want you to bless the people and here are the specific words I want you to use.”

“The Lord Bless You and Keep you.” God’s promise that he will care for us. As we approach a new year, it is the custom to look back and reflect on the old year. How has the Lord blessed you this past year? Blessings come in many different forms. Sometimes in the way of prosperity or success. Have you been able to purchase a home this past year or moved into a different one? Maybe you have been blessed at work with a raise or a job promotion or the fact your company is still in business and you have a job. Maybe you have been blessed to find work when jobs are hard to come by.

As you look back on this past year, maybe you have been blessed with a new child or grandchild. Blessings also come through friendship. Maybe you have made some new friends or are thankful you are able to rely on your old friends. We might have seen special blessings through our family. Helping each other or just having that common bond. The Lord blesses us in so many different ways.

Not only through prosperity and success and children and family, but also taking care of our physical needs. So often we take our food, clothing, and shelter for granted but Martin Luther points out 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.” God blesses us by giving us the ability to work and providing for all of our physical needs. The Lord not only blesses us but he also “Keeps us.”

To “Keep Us” is not the same as to bless us. To keep us is to protect us, to watch over us, to look after us. Psalm 91 tells us, **“For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways,”** this is one way God Keeps us. As you look back over this past year, are there times when you can say God was watching over you? I am sure there were times where you might have been in danger and didn’t even realize it, because God was watching over you and keeping you safe. Even during those times when you may have been in a car accident or a deer jumped out in front of your car, the Lord was still watching over you, maybe keeping an accident from turning to tragedy. The Lord continues to watch over us and keep us, not only physically, but also spiritually.

Just think of the Lord’s Prayer – in the 6th petition we pray, **“And lead us not into temptation,”** and in this way **we are asking that the Lord keep us safe spiritually by not allowing temptations to come into our lives which we are unable to resist.** Paul in his letter to the Corinthians talks about the temptations that come our way when he wrote, **“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”** Our Lord promises to limit the activity of Satan in our lives and to keep us safe spiritually through His Word.

The Promise of God’s care is a promise that is very easy to take for granted, just as we take for granted the fact that it will rain, and crops will grow, and we will have a place to live. But when you hear the words, **“The Lord Bless and keep You,”** take a minute to think about everything that includes – how God has blessed you spiritually and physically and continues to bless you spiritually and physically. As we enjoy these blessings of God, we also feel the **“Joy of His Grace.”**

II. The next part of our text is, **“The LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;”** Have you ever seen the face of a mother as she holds her newborn child in her arms shortly after it is born. Her face is a picture of joy and love. It’s almost as if it her face shines and radiates the joy and love she is feeling in her heart. In the same way, these words, **“The Lord make his face shine upon you,”** are words inviting us to see the attitude of God’s heart towards us. To see the radiance of God’s love and mercy for His people – for believers. That love and mercy – that attitude of God’s heart becomes evident in the 2nd part of this sentence which tells us that the Lord’s face not only shines upon us but is also gracious to us.

Our record of sins is long. There are many times when we have failed to do God’s will and yet our God has been gracious to us. Paul in his letter to the Romans tells us, **“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** Jesus paid for the sins of the world – he paid for our sins even before we were born, not because of anything we have done, but because of God’s grace.

Luther put it best in his explanation to the 2nd article of the Apostle's Creed, **“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.”**

The radiance of God's love and mercy are evident in the innocent suffering and death of Jesus, God's Son, for the sins of the world. We see that radiance of God's love and mercy for us through faith in Jesus our Savior. That is the Joy of Grace conveyed in the 2nd part of God's blessing for his people.

III. Which takes us to the 3rd part of God's blessing. In this part The Lord gives us the Comfort of Peace. He conveys it through the words, **“The LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.”** The Lord turns his face towards us in his word and sacraments. As the Lord turns his face to us we see the light of salvation. The Holy Spirit works through the Word and sacraments to open our eyes to salvation.

The opposite of this blessing would be for the Lord to turn his face away from us. Then we would have none of the blessings mentioned earlier. We would not have God in our lives. Could you imagine your life without God? Life without the blessings that God gives us? I can't and so I thank God for turning his face towards me and giving me the peace that only God can give.

The peace the angels sang about on Christmas Eve when they announced the birth of the Savior. The peace Jesus proclaimed in the Gospel of John when he said, **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.”** The peace that we proclaim at the end of our sermons when we recite Philippians 4:7, **“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”** The peace that can only come through faith in Jesus as our Savior.

The peace that can only come through the forgiveness of sins because when all is said and done, when one's time of grace ends on this earth, it doesn't make any difference how much money you had, or what kind of job you had, or whether people loved you or hated you – when your life on this earth is over, all that matters is faith in Jesus and that faith will carry you home to eternal peace in heaven. That is the peace God wants us to have through his blessing.

God ends this portion of scripture by pointing out that he will bless the Children of Israel because he has put his name on them. God has also put his name on us. When we were baptized into the Christian faith he marked us as one of his children and so these words of blessing are for us also – they come to us through faith.

I know as I consider this past year I certainly see God's hand in my life and the life of my family and I hope as you consider this past year you can see God's hand in your life. For he has been there, taking care of your physical needs and He has been there taking care of your spiritual needs. **He has been there to bless your life this past year and he promises that he will continue to be with you and bless you.**

When you hear the words of our text at the end of our service today, and not only today, but every time you hear the words of our text in the coming year, don't look at it as a sign that the worship service is over, but rather take comfort in the promises God gives you through these words – **“The Promise of His Care,” “The Joy of His Grace,” and “The Comfort of His Peace.” Amen!**