

## **THE LORD BLESS YOU**

**Pastor Lance Steicke**

**“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 look upon you with favour and give you peace.” So they will put my name on the Israelites and I will bless them.”**  
**Numbers 6:22-27**

When Professor Mons Teig from the United States of America was here a number of years ago he reported a conversation with a woman who told him of her new pastor in their congregation.

'How's he going?'

'Oh, fine. You know he gives the most wonderful benedictions'.

'Strange! What do you mean? The most wonderful benedictions?'

'Well, soon after he arrived at the end of the Service one day he said to us, “I want you to look at me. I've got something very special for you, something which you need as you go out from here into next week”'.

And then he raised his hands and said, **THE LORD BLESS YOU....**

### **THE LORD BLESS YOU.**

The Lord bless you as you move forward on your spiritual journey – your spiritual journey individually and corporately as a congregation.

Make no mistake. You are on a spiritual journey.

In the time I've been here I've heard episodes and anecdotes and chapters from the journeys of some of you. I've appreciated hearing them.

Those journeys have ups and downs, highs and lows, temptations, frustrations, challenges.

The current President of the LCA, Dr Mike Semmler, was S.A. District President before being elected President of the Church. Three days after his election as S.A. President he was in hospital having a triple by-pass, unknown at the time of his election. He recovered, went home, only to finish up again in hospital with complications. Another operation. A stent. Frustration. Time. Lack of energy. Uncertainty.

On your journey you might find yourself in a similar situation.

You are hit by a sudden illness.

You are devastated by the news of a terrorist attack which shatters your well being.

You experience the tragic illness or death of a relative or close friend.

- What happens when you're thrown into confusion and chaos and far from being in control?
- What happens when something unexpected occurs leaving you in a seemingly

helpless situation?

- What happens if you have an accident which leaves you helpless, or a loved one in a similar situation?
- What happens on your journey through life at times like that?

Where is God then? Is he withholding his blessings and benediction? Is the benediction all just pious words without any meaning and which run counter to the realities of life?

The Children of Israel were on a spiritual journey. They had been enslaved in the land of Egypt, longing for rescue. At last rescue comes. Moses leads the people out of Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, to safety.

There's great rejoicing. Miriam, Moses sister, leading them in dancing and singing and celebration.

But the very next day virtually they are down in the dumps.

Why, O why, O why, on earth, is God leading them of all places out here into a wilderness, a desert, with no food, no water, no clothing? It just doesn't make sense.

And isn't that our life all over? Isn't that part of our journey? You get over one problem today and there's another looming on the horizon tomorrow. You recover from one illness today, only to have another illness tomorrow – and eventually to die of old age.

As we are on our spiritual journey we may do well to sit down and pause and reflect.

Let me ask you in this reflection: what stage are you at on your spiritual journey?

- 1 Like Israel are you in Egypt groaning under a heavy burden longing for escape and rescue? - **experiencing a spiritual low?**
- 2 Have you just escaped, just crossed your Red Sea, and life is full of celebration and thanksgiving – **a spiritual high?**
- 3 Are you floundering around in the wilderness, wondering where you're heading and what life's all about? - **a spiritual question mark.**
- 4 Are you in the wilderness, groaning and complaining against God and his dealings with you? - **a spiritual rebellion?**
- 5 Are you heading towards the Promised Land & the great blessings the Lord has in store for you? - **a spiritually bright future?**

As a congregation, you might do well also to reflect where you are at on your journey.

- 1 Still in the early stages with all the Red Seas in the world in front of you?
- 2 Crossing the Red Sea with the resultant rejoicing and celebration?
- 3 Caught in the wilderness, with life almost at a standstill, not certain where to go or what to do and which pastor to call?
- 4 Groaning against your lot with the smallness of resources, like Israel with its lack of water, lack of food and the like?

It's while Israel is on its journey in the wilderness that the Lord pronounces his benediction on them.

Just think. They were a bunch of miserable, whinging rebels. They had murmured and complained against the Lord. They had flouted his will. They had slapped him in the face. And the Lord? What does the Lord do? Blesses them. He blesses them. **THE LORD BLESS YOU.** My dear Israelites, my chosen people, my dearly beloved. **THE LORD BLESS YOU.**

Many centuries later the Apostle Paul is on a journey. His fourth missionary journey. From Jerusalem to Rome. Mostly by sea. Storms rage. Shipwreck the likely result.

The sailors want to commit suicide because of the hopelessness of the situation.

And what does Paul do?

He urges the sailors **TO TAKE SOME FOOD, FOR IT WILL HELP YOU SURVIVE.....AND AFTER HE SAID THIS, HE TOOK BREAD AND GIVING THANKS TO GOD FOR THE PRESENCE OF ALL, HE BROKE IT AND BEGAN TO EAT. THEN ALL OF THEM WERE ENCOURAGED AND TOOK FOOD FOR THEMSELVES.**

Trust in God didn't prevent Paul from facing terrifying dangers. As we journey through life, trust in God and Christian faith does not exempt us from dangers and difficulties.

In the midst of the storm, Paul was confident, a confidence dependent on the Lord. The soldiers had no confidence even though they had the swords. But the swords gave them no defence against the storm.

What's the response of the church and its people in such times, in times of danger and difficulty, discouragement and despair? What's your response? What's the response of pastors, of church leaders? What's our response in the face of danger and difficulty? Why, we take bread and eat. We take wine and drink.

What good will that do, the world may well ask. And Christians for 2,000 years have continued to do it and, in doing it, have been given the strength to continue the journey.

You are here as a congregation which does nothing else than speak a word of hope and then continues to break bread and drink wine in the midst of storms.

You have no swords and guns.

You have no police force or law enforcement agencies at your disposal.

There's no agenda item at your AGM's or other meetings asking you to establish an army of soldiers to fight your battles for you.

You have only a message, a message of love and forgiveness centred in a crucified man on a cross.

A message recorded in a book, your basic tool of trade, your basic weapon.

And you have the body and blood of Jesus with the bread and wine.

And the water of baptism.

And the promise of the Lord to bless you and keep you.

I was serving in Woden, Canberra in September 2001 when news of the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York, America, came to us. There were a number of Americans in the congregation. What did we do? We gathered together, heard the word, and took bread and drank wine. And in doing so, we identified with millions of Christians down through the centuries who have done precisely that in the face of the storms of life. And we identified with millions of Christians around the world in the days following September 11 2001 who did precisely that – and some of it was reported in the media.

And as we did so we received blessing, the blessing of the Lord.

**THE LORD BLESS YOU AND KEEP YOU; THE LORD MAKE HIS FACE SHINE UPON YOU AND BE GRACIOUS TO YOU.**

The benediction may have been given a long time before Christ, but we can only see it from a New Testament perspective – from a Trinitarian perspective and especially from a Christocentric perspective – a Christ-centred perspective.

The God who blesses us is the God who has made himself known to us in Jesus Christ.

You see, God made his presence felt, his face to shine on us, in very ordinary ways. His eternal Son appeared on a far-off corner of civilization, on an obscure page of history. He came when the cry of a baby was heard in a stable. God made his face to shine on us in that very ordinary birth at Bethlehem.

He grew up and was crucified.. A tragic event. Yet hidden in that event are all the blessings of God's face shining on us. It's the final answer to the woes of all people. Rammmed between the sharp nails of the cross is the infinite divine love, the countenance of God lifted upon us in redemption and forgiveness.

If you really want to know that God's face is upon you, look at Jesus, the Christ.

When Jesus revealed the heart of God, he revealed a God who is for us. For us. Not against us. For us. God is for us.

If you had a permanent pastor here, and he was sitting in front of me as I was preaching as guest preacher, I could say, God is for you, Pastor X, as you proclaim his word, tell the wonderful good news of Jesus and his love and forgiveness. God is for you, not against you.

God is for you, Elders and leaders of the congregation. For you. Not against you.

God is for you, members of this congregation, as you as a congregation share the word, witness to Jesus, administer the sacraments and care for the people entrusted to you.

God is for you, as equipped by this word and by the ministry of your congregation, you go out as salt and light and leaven that you are called to be. God is for you and with you – not against you.

God is for us.

God for us is a well-known Lutheran clique and distinctive. But its more than a clique; it's a reality.

God is for us. He would have every right to be against us. He would have every right not to let his face shine on us and to turn his countenance, his face, away and present a scowling countenance. He would have every right to punish us and give us our just desserts. Because like Israel of old we've gone our own way with an attitude that says, 'to hang with God. I'm, going to do it my way'.

But Jesus has revealed a God who is for us.

People of God, gathered here today, the face of God is upon you. The face of God that is on you is the face of love and compassion and forgiveness. We know that because it's revealed in Jesus Christ.

O man, just think.

Whatever tasks he assigns you

Whatever difficulties you encounter

Whatever circumstances come your way, as you take a firm stand on the word of God, as you live out your life in a time when great issues and challenges face us and our world, his face is upon you, shining on you. **THE LORD MAKE HIS FACE SHINE ON YOU.**

Not a scowling countenance but a shining countenance, a shining face. God's face shine on you, beams with pride over you – because when he looks at you he sees Jesus.

And because that happens **THE LORD LOOK UPON YOU WITH FAVOUR AND GIVE YOU PEACE.**

It should stagger us. It does stagger us.

Go out and continue your journey

- with the favour of God looking on you
- the face of God shining on you
- the peace of God given to you
- and the overarching blessing and providence of God always there with and for you.

**THE LORD BLESS YOU**, as you move forward on your journey in the name of Jesus.  
Amen.