

## **“OUR TRIPLE BLESSING.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church**

**June 7, 2020, 10:30 AM**

### **Scripture Texts: II Corinthians 13:14**

**Prayer:** Holy Father, I ask you to multiply to all of us all this blessing holds out in the preaching and hearing and believing and receiving and doing of your Word for your glory and our good.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **Introduction.**

How many times in your life have you heard this benediction of Paul spoken at the end of a worship service? Countless times, times beyond number. If you are over 50 it is safe to say you have heard it and read it thousands of times.

What difference has it made in your life? What effect has it had? Are they just nice sounding words, a good thing for a pastor to pronounce before you go home? So what? Have you ever given those words a second thought, actually contemplated them. And here is a strange idea, have you ever spoken them or prayed them or wished them for someone else?

Let me tell you why I was prompted to take up this text this morning. I have had a growing burden in my heart for our flock these past three months. I have had a burden for our senior saints who have been isolated from family and friends. I have had a burden for our families, and especially moms who have had to become instant teachers and homeschool kids every day. I have had a burden for our high school seniors who have missed out on all the things that make senior year special. We have come to the end of the school year, to the start of summer and I want to speak life and hope and encouragement to all of us.

Then when I realized this was Trinity Sunday I thought this text is the perfect blessing we all need in the midst of the stress and craziness of life.

This text is a Trinitarian blessing, a triple blessing. And what could be better if I wanted to give a blessing than to give a triple blessing. Consider this a three scoop blessing, a Neapolitan. Some is good, more is better and too much is just right. Can I get an amen?

So senior saints and high school seniors, moms and stressed out parents, those of you feeling isolated, those of you bummed by all we are missing out on and all that has been canceled, those trying to do work in very different ways, those of you weary of the news, those wondering about the future, those weary of doing worship on a screen, receive God's triple blessing.

### **Context of the triple blessing.**

Let me give just a brief context for what Paul has written at the end of his letter. Paul wrote thirteen of the 27 books of the NT. In twelve of them he ends saying: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all" (7) or "Grace be with you" (5).

This one time he says something different, out of the ordinary, something arresting if you really grasp his meaning. This one time Paul references all three members of the Trinity.

Consider one other thing about this benediction. It comes at the end of a very hard hitting letter, one of Paul's strongest rebukes.

*The church at Corinth was a mess.* It a soap opera of problems, sin, disobedience, strife, conflict, disagreement, anger, party spirit, taking sides, struggles, stress, chaos.

In Corinth people were divided up into factions, one side against another. Some followed Paul, some Apollos, some Cephas. There were some who loved Paul and some who hated Paul. Some wanted him to come and some were blocking him from coming.

Some followed Trump, some Biden, some watched CNN, some Fox news.

There were pro-facemask people and facemasks are worthless people. There were people who said Inslee used too much power to lock us down, and people who said Inslee wasn't using enough power to stop the violence. Some agree with the elders, some don't.

Yet in the midst of all the stress and difficulties, this is Paul's final word to a church and a people in great turmoil and conflict. There is a lot going on in this blessing that invites our careful reflection and meditation.

### **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Grace means the unmerited favor, underserved kindness, and unconditional love. The word grace here means far more than just God's favor. Paul is using the word grace here to mean the whole Gospel, for all the blessings that are ours through redemption.

This grace runs in two directions, it is a past grace and a future grace. The past grace is the grace of our salvation. The death and resurrection of Jesus, His calling us out of sin and into repentance and faith, justifying us, rescuing us from God's just wrath. It's all grace.

The grace of the Gospel is not the end of the conversation, but the beginning. The Gospel is for every day, for daily living. Notice that little word with in this blessing. With you all now, from this point forward, as you go out into the world to face whatever you have to face.

Everything is grace. What do we have that we have not received from the hand of God? It is not yours to boast about, it is yours to give thanks for, it is yours to cause you to worship the giver.

Look at what you have and then say to God: "Look at what you enabled me to accomplish, to finish high school, to somehow homeschool these kids, to still have a job, to not be sick, to not have died, to live in this community, to be able to know you and hear your Word preached and have some time on a Sunday morning to draw back and worship."

The Woodyards are about to be flooded with grace, 13 of us sleeping under one roof.

I see God's grace in the labor of love from those who make this live stream possible. Grace for me to preach to an empty sanctuary. Grace in those who have worked diligently to keep you connected and informed. In our volunteers, our staff, our leaders who are bearing the burden of serious decisions none of us have experience in.

Our elders meet this week to discuss the ramifications of the governors new orders and our county entering into Phase 2. Pray for them.

Be prepared, we are going to need the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Things will be very different. It will require all of us being willing to do things differently, do things we don't like, maybe don't agree with, all for the sake of love for God and a desire to worship Him together.

I see the grace of God in Ken and Lisa Quehrn. They are going to record a service of worship and praise, in song and Scripture that will made available to all of us next Sunday evening at 6 pm. A special evening service. A gift.

I see the grace of God in Nicki Groen's labor of love in creating our video Scriptures. And especially in finding a way to bless our graduates. I see the grace of God in so many of you being willing and participating.

I see the grace of God in the continued generous giving from the flock. Somehow you are finding ways to send in your tithes and offerings. That is grace. There are churches that are falling behind and even failing, churches that are having to ask for government assistance.

Where have you seen grace in the past three months? Let this great and rich and undeserved grace change your outlook, your attitude, and let it be the energy behind what you do, your service, your giving, your helping, your loving.

When you feel inadequate, when you feel you can't go on, when you feel like is too much, when you feel like giving up, when you feel overwhelmed, remember grace and the source of it.

**II Corinthians 12:9** My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

### **The love of God our Father.**

When Scripture talks about God's love it uses expansive words, vast words, huge words.

**Exodus 34:6-7** ... abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands.

**Psalms 136:1** his steadfast love endures forever.

**Lamentations 3:22-23** The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

**Romans 5:8** God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

**John 15:13** Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

**Ephesians 2:4-5** God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

**Ephesians 3:17-19** ... being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

The love of God is seen most clearly in sending His one and only Son to reconcile the world to Himself through Christ's blood shed on the cross. What more will God not do if He loves us that much?

God's love is great, it is rich, it is lavish, it is generous beyond measure, it surpasses human knowledge. It is a love you can sink your teeth into, a love you can stake your life on, a love that enables you to endure the worst in this life for the weight of glory coming in the life to come.

You have never been loved the way you are loved by God, nor will you be. Eternity will not be long enough to fathom its depth or reach its heights. (An upcoming devotional on God's love).

**Psalm 103:10-11** He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him.

### **The fellowship (and power) of the Holy Spirit.**

**John 14:17** ... the Spirit of truth ... You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

We were created to have perfect fellowship with God, to live in perfect harmony and intimacy with Him. We destroyed that with our sin. It can be restored again by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit of God coming to us and dwelling in us.

We have plunged ourselves into misery and God in His mercy comes to us to rescue us and pull us out of that misery.

What does fellowship mean? The word is koinonia. It is a rich word full of meaning. It means fellowship, friendship, communion, intimacy, presence of God. This is the with us God.

The Holy Spirit of God in us is what enables us to have fellowship with God, the Spirit of adoption that makes us children of God, part of His family.

And it is the Spirit in us that enables us to have fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ, that enables us to love and give and forgive and serve and make allowances and die to self.

The Spirit is the means by which we are made to be children of God, the means by which we are made into one body of Christ, by which we are partakers of all the spiritual blessings and benefits of God.

You are not being blessed and sent out into the world on your own, left to depend on your own strength or smarts. You are being blessed and sent out with the power and presence of the Holy Spirit of God, in the name of the entire Trinity.

### **Be with you all.**

Paul was at the center of the controversy in Corinth. But his last words show his true heart. He extends this blessing to everyone, friends and enemies, those who are for him and those who are against him, those who like him and those who don't.

### **Our triple blessing.**

I want to give you a blessing today. Not just one blessing, but a triple blessing. Three powerful life-giving words. Do you want it? First, you have to believe it to receive it. Jesus must be your Savior and Lord. A person who doesn't believe receives no benefit from these words.

Do you know the grace of Jesus, do you know the love of God, do you know the sweet presence of the Holy Spirit in you?

Make sure the Trinity is more than an idea, more than some doctrine in the confessions, more than a name, or words the pastor says at the end of the service.

But once you believe it and receive it, then you must be willing to give it away. In other words, you have to be a river not a pond. If you just receive the blessing and keep it, you will become stagnate. You will become selfish and self-serving.

If you really want this blessing, don't just pray it over yourself, pray it over someone else. Let it flow through you and then it will bless both you and them. Pray for grace and love and fellowship for someone else, and if you really want power from this, do what Paul did and pray this even for your enemies.

A benediction is a blessing and a prayer, an expression of hope and encouragement to God's people who are about to go out and face whatever the future holds for them.

It is a reminder of how great and good God is, that He is rich and generous in mercy, grace and love, that He desires fellowship with us and has gone out of His way to make it possible.

The blessing God gives is Himself. God is the fountain from which all true blessings flow. I hold out to you all the fullness of God, all of God for all of your life.

Live your life in a Trinitarian manner, you were baptized in this name so live your life aware of that and aware of in whose name you have received every blessing and in whose name you are again being blessed and sent out today, in whose name you live and move and have your being.

You cannot be happier in this life than to have the grace of Jesus, the love of God and the communion and fellowship and power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

This blessing is a bridge that carries our worship of God out into our daily lives, out into the community beyond. The giving of God's blessing is a prayer that the blessings we receive in worship go with us worshipers and continue to be a blessing in every aspect of our daily lives.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit be with you and go with you and flow through you now as you go:

To deal with a sick child, a stubborn toddler, an angry or depressed or lazy teenager.  
As a graduate into an uncertain future in a crazy world, as you make serious decisions.  
To deal with some heartache about some circumstance or situation.  
To deal with an unhappy or unaffectionate spouse.  
To work and face the stresses and pressures; or as you go out seeking a job.  
To face the temptations of sin, of anger and lust and greed and pride and selfishness.  
To try to figure out financial problems and bills to pay.  
To deal with a conflict with someone, parents, child, friend, neighbor, co-worker.  
Try to find the right words to speak to someone you need to speak to.  
To overcome your own resistance to something you know God wants you to do.  
To wrestle with fears and anxiety about the Covid virus or the turmoil of our world, or help a family member or a friend wrestle with those fears and anxieties.  
To enable you not to take the bait and get in an argument with someone over Covid or protests or the governor or the president.

To resist all the toxic voices on the news or in social media.

To face the realities of failing health and aging.

Feeling the weight of your own spiritual poverty, lack of spiritual growth, lack of interest to grow, guilt and shame over past sin or past negligence.

This is God's promised presence and power and grace and love for you, the fullness of God in you, the fullness of God to help you and equip you and guide you.

Whatever you are dealing with, whatever you are facing, whatever you are struggling to overcome, starting now, from this point forward, the fullness of the Godhead, the fullness of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is with you and is going with you, He never leaves or forsakes those who are His, those who love Him, those who are His children.

**Philippians 4:19** God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

**II Corinthians 9:8** God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**Prayer:**

**II Thessalonians 1:11-12** To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, 12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.