



Trinity Sunday  
May 30, 2010  
Isaiah 33:2 & Numbers 6:22-27

## to Our Prayer

This past Thursday evening was graduation for our Lutheran elementary school. The eighth graders picked Isaiah 33:2 as their class verse, which says, *“O LORD, be gracious to us; we long for you. Be our strength every morning, our salvation in time of distress.”* Isn’t that a beautiful prayer? Instead of letting the 8<sup>th</sup> graders claim it for themselves, I thought we all could adopt this prayer for our lives. It’s a fitting prayer, especially for this weekend.

Yes, we observe Memorial Day this weekend, but this weekend is also what’s called Trinity Sunday – a day on which we marvel at the nature of our Triune God, namely that he is three persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) and yet only one God. That’s a truth that is so mind-boggling that we stray from trying to understand or explain it. But that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t appreciate it. The fact that our God is three distinct persons, each with their own role and each with their own blessings to give, is something for us to cherish. Perhaps that is no better demonstrated than in the parting words that our Triune God speaks to us at the end of every worship service, words that you know well: *The LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD look on you with favor and give you peace.* What an awesome way to end each service! And note, these words that God instructed to be said to his people over 3000 years ago do not express a mere wish or desire. God didn’t say, “May the Lord bless you” or “The LORD might bless you.” These words convey a fact; a three-fold blessing that the LORD will give. And for our consideration today, let’s learn to appreciate how this three-fold blessing from our Triune God is a direct answer to our prayer. Our prayer again is, ***“O LORD, be gracious to us; we long for you. Be our strength every morning, our salvation in time of distress.”***

### I. BE OUR STRENGTH

Let’s focus on the middle petition first. “Be our strength.” This is a very unnatural prayer. We like to think of ourselves as strong individuals. From little on what’s one of our favorite things to do? You talk to a little guy and you say, “Show me your muscles.” And a four-year-old will flex to the point that he gets all red in the face and is just shaking, almost to the point it looks like he’s having a seizure. He wants to let you know he’s strong. And it’s on the other end of the spectrum as well. An elderly person who struggles walking refuses to have her daughter push her in a wheelchair the block to church, because she doesn’t want other people to see how weak she is. She’s strong enough to do it on her own—even though it takes her half the day to get there. Whether we’re young or old, or any stage in-between, we think we’re strong, we think we’re self-sufficient.

But we can only flex our muscles or be stubborn for so long. And we get to a point that we realize we cannot make it through this world on our own. None of us can. Even though we try, can any one of us control the affairs of this world? Can we put food on our table? Can we create air for us to breathe? Can we cause the sun to shine? Can we cause cuts to heal or illnesses to go away? Obviously not. And so we pray, “O LORD, be our strength every morning.”

But not only is that our prayer for the physical blessings of this world, it’s also your prayer for spiritual matters. As God’s law hammers at your heart, we realize that we crack under the pressure of keeping God’s law perfectly. Sin chews at our soul. At times, our faith flickers like a match in the wind. At times, the temptations before us seem as gigantic and as unconquerable as Mt. Everest. And so out of desperation we pray, “LORD, be our strength.”

What’s God’s answer to our prayer? You find it in the familiar words of the blessing: The LORD bless you and keep you. Let those words that you hear at the end of every worship – and maybe that’s a point, make sure you are in worship to hear those words – so that you are reminded that your Lord is your strength every morning. Yes, he was strong enough to create this world. But he is strong enough to preserve this world. Yes, he was strong enough to give you life, but he is strong enough to preserve your life. What comfort to know that as we go on to new phases of our lives, we have a God, a strong God, who will watch over our coming and our going and he’ll keep us.

But why stop with such nickels and dimes, pocket change when it comes to God’s strength, when he’s got tens and twenties for us. Your strong God promises to keep you spiritually as well. When your faith flickers, your strong God promises that a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. When you waver, he will uphold you with his mighty hand. When you’re in the shadow of an Everest-like temptation, your strong God promises to provide a way so that you can stand up under it. No matter your weakness, no matter your challenge, your prayer for God to be your strength, will be answered. It’s answered in these words, “The LORD bless you and keep you.”

*Sing “Almighty Father, Strong to Save”*

## II. BE GRACIOUS TO US

Have you ever seen the look in a groom's eyes when he sees his bride coming down the aisle? Or how about the look on a mother's face as she cradles her newborn in her arms? Those are positive looks. There's negative looks, too. How about the look that you get from your boss when you tell him that you lost the business deal, or the look you got from your mother when you had grass stains on your dress clothes? Or how about the look that you get from the other shoppers when your child throws a tantrum in the aisles at Target?

As human beings, we are often concerned about how others look at us. But no look is more important than the Lord's. And that can be scary. Because you know how you look, exposed before the mirror of God's law. When you take an honest look at yourself, when you peel off the façade and take an honest look at yourself, you see your stains and blemishes. The Lord sees deeper than even we do. We have become so callous to some sins that we don't even realize that they're sins anymore – but Jesus still sees them. He sees all of our sins. He sees the loveless words that fall so naturally from our lips. He sees the dust that is building up on our Bibles. He sees us flirt with temptation instead of running away from it. He sees how we're all too often concerned about how we look in the eyes of others instead of in the eyes of the Lord.

And so we fittingly pray, "O Lord, be gracious to us. Lord, don't look upon me in my sinfulness." And that's what he did. Yes, initially when the Lord looked at you, his eyes burned with righteous anger. Wrath consumed his look as he gazed upon your sin. But when he sent his Son, his eyes that burned with righteous anger turned away from you and toward Jesus. And when Jesus satisfied that anger with his innocent death and the Lord looked at you again, this time it was not with a look glowing with wrath, but with a face shining with love. Because of Jesus, you can be assured that your prayer, "Be gracious to us," has been answered. The answer is found in this blessing, "The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you."

*Congregation sings "In Christ Alone"*

## III. BE OUR SALVATION

Now we have one more part to our prayer. The closing petition says, "Be our salvation." Now that sounds very similar to the second segment where we prayed, "Be gracious to us." And yes, normally that would be the case. Grace and salvation are so intertwined. But it's important to look at the whole verse. In this case, our prayer is not specifically looking for salvation from sin – rather, we're looking for salvation from distress. Salvation from the things that put pressure on us

What things cause you distress? It'd be interesting to take a quick poll of the people here this morning. I think our eyes would be opened to the varied ways our own people – your brothers and sisters in the faith -- are distressed. There'd be financial distress... people who have filed for bankruptcy. There'd be the distress of guilt – people wondering if it's too late for them since they seemed to have walked away from God years ago and now they're just trying out this church thing again. There'd be family distress – how do you deal with a daughter that disowns you? There'd be the distress brought on by a low self-esteem. There'd be health-related distress. And many, many more. Our congregation is not immune to distress. And again, it's not contained to one generation. Just because a kid doesn't have a mortgage payment, that doesn't mean they don't have distress. And just because a retired person doesn't have to answer to a boss anymore, that doesn't mean they don't have distress. Distress knows no boundaries. And so this prayer is a universal prayer, "Lord, be our salvation – salvage us, save us – from distress."

And the Lord answers that prayer. He answers it this way, "The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace." When the Holy Spirit made you one of God's children through the waters of baptism, when the Holy Spirit nurtures your faith through his Word, he gives you a peace that assures you that you have a loving Lord who knows what you can and cannot handle. Through the Holy Spirit you have a peace in knowing that even the hardships in your life will work out for your good. Through the Holy Spirit you have a peace that surpasses all understanding. And ultimately, through faith which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, you have a peace to know and believe that when you step out of this life, he will take you to heaven. And ultimately, it doesn't get any more peaceful than that. Cherish that peace.

*Congregation Sings "Go, My Children" verses 1-3*