

Preacher: Rev. Eric Heinekamp
Date: September 8, 2020
Place: Blackhawk Presbytery Assembly
Scripture: Numbers 6:24-26
Title: The Lord Bless You

1. Many of you probably know the hymn “The Lord Bless You” arranged by John Rutter
 - a) We heard the virtual choir of Abilene Christian University sing this tune at the beginning of worship
 - b) This song is quite familiar
 - c) Perhaps you’ve sung this in your congregation
 - d) If you listen to K-Love radio, there’s a great new version by Kari Jobe and Cody Carnes
 - The video on You Tube has had more than 27 million views
2. The scripture the song uses is a familiar blessing many of us use regularly in church settings
 - a) The words are powerful and reassuring
 - b) This morning I want to give just a little background on the text and consider how we, as Blackhawk Presbytery, can use this message
3. The Bible passage comes near the beginning of the Book of Numbers, in chapter 6
 - a) The setting is the base of Mount Sinai
 - After being set free as slaves in Egypt, the Israelites first make camp near the famous mountain as they planned their long journey
 - They have settled near Mt Sinai for about one year as Moses received the 10 commandments and constructed the tabernacle tent for God
 - b) But now, they are about to leave this temporary home as they venture on to the promised land, land of milk and honey
 - c) God tells Moses to have Aaron give a blessing to the people as they prepare to leave
 - God dictates the text and it is Aaron who delivers the message
 - d) It is interesting that churches frequently use this prayer as a parting blessing at the end of a service
 - But it’s not meant as a closing
 - It’s a sending promise
 - A beginning, not an end
 - e) Let me ask, how can we use this blessing today?
4. It goes without saying that we’re in unusual times for the church
 - a) Pastors and church leaders are working hard to create worship and church programs in new ways
 - We’ve picked up new skills on videography, the use of Zoom and social media, and rules about disinfecting spaces and social distancing
 - Pastors are preaching on-line, under tents or from the back of pick-up trucks
 - I preached for 16 weeks from my living room using an iPhone
 - b) This is not what we learned in seminary
 - Would you have ever thought you’d be asking members to reserve spots for worship or consider how to do contact tracing?
 - Things changed just months ago and it seems we’re in a season of change with no end
 - This is new to us, but we can do it through the grace of God, the light of Jesus, and the leading of the Holy Spirit

- c) Like those ancient Israelites, we're all on a journey with no clear destination in sight
 - d) We've leaned into the notion that church is not the building, yet we hear lament from members who deeply miss personal fellowship
 - There is lament today from those who wonder if we'll have the traditional fall programs, will we be able to have our traditional candlelight Christmas services this year, how will we attract new members?
 - We recall how those ancient Jews murmured and grumbled as they too longed for the past
 - e) Friends, our journey is not over as we walk this land between
 - f) As we travel together, leave what's familiar, and continue into the unknown, it's never too late to hear this blessing from Aaron
 - g) Because there is great promise for the future
5. The Lord bless you and keep you
- a) The blessing is rich in its simplicity and it feels personal
 - b) God is the one doing all of the six actions
 - The recipient in each of these phrases, you, is in the singular - meaning the blessing is for each of us individually
 - c) To bless means to give favor, provide a divine gift, and God seeks nothing in return
 - d) To keep means God will watch over each of us and give protection on the journey
 - We really need to hear that now
 - e) The Lord makes his face shine upon you and be gracious to you
 - f) The Lord turn his face toward you
 - These three actions help us to know that God is with us, God is not hidden during these strange times
 - g) And finally, the Lord will give you peace
 - Shalom, happiness, friendship, well-being
 - We are finding new ways to find peace
6. I was called to be your transformational general presbyter at our last assembly meeting
- a) My job description says I am to provide spiritual leadership, personal connection to pastors and congregations, and support to commissions and committees
 - That means visioning, pastoring, and resourcing
 - b) To do that I'm living into the definition of leadership Tod Bolsinger suggests in the book we started studying called *Canoeing the Mountain*
 - Leadership, Bolsinger says, is energizing a community of people toward their own transformation in order to accomplish a shared mission in the face of a changing world
 - While this is a modern definition, it certainly applies to the leadership shown by Moses and Aaron as they helped the ancient Israelites live into their future
 - And it begins with a blessing
7. I commend to you that we should all be using this blessing on a regular basis
- a) Write it on your whiteboards, make it your screen saver, put it on your Facebook page, quote it in your church newsletter
 - b) Preach on it, though it's not part of the lectionary
 - c) Most importantly, know that God has a plan for you for this journey that includes blessing, and keeping, and peace.
 - d) May the Lord bless you and keep you
 - e) Amen