

2015_01_01 Name of Jesus
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
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Words that Speak a Blessing into Being

Numbers 6:22-27

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Grace and peace to you from God our Father, our help in ages past and hope for years to come; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Numbers 6:22–27

²² And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ²³ “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, ‘This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them:

²⁴ “The Lord bless you and keep you;

*²⁵ The Lord make His face shine upon you,
And be gracious to you;*

*²⁶ The Lord lift up His countenance upon you,
And give you peace.” ’*

²⁷ “So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them.”

Let us pray, O Father, bless us for Jesus sake. Amen.

In the only name under heaven, by which we are saved, in the name of Jesus, dear fellow children of God,

Actions speak louder than words, right? Usually, this is true. We much prefer action to words. Words are nice – good poetry, a well written song, kind words to a person in need – these are pleasant; but they rarely do much for us in the long run. They are words; and there are times when words are not enough and we need action.

Sometimes words are thrown around so uselessly that they become meaningless or doomed to failure. How many New Year resolutions will actually amount to action? How many people the world over will come up with some great resolution, a commitment to some drastic change in their life, only to see another year pass by and realize nothing has changed – words wasted in the whims of the world. Actions speak louder than words, right?

Well, not always. There are some words which truly do accomplish something. For example, when a captain smashes a bottle of champagne over the bow and say, “I

christen this ship” his words are doing what he is saying. Or when a king taps a sword on the shoulder of a brave knight and says, “I dub thee.” Or when a marriage official looks upon the bride and groom and says, “I now pronounce you husband and wife.” — These are performative words. Words that accomplish what they say. So also, in a much greater way, when a minister raises his hands over the congregation his words do something; and he says,

24 *“The Lord bless you and keep you;*
25 *The Lord make His face shine upon you,*
 And be gracious to you;
26 *The Lord lift up His countenance upon you,*
 And give you peace.” ’

Words that speak action. This is the word of the Lord. A performative statement. That is to say, when God speaks it is more than good poetry or a kind word; it is more than a New Year resolution tossed about carelessly; it is more than a word wasted in the whims of the world. When God speaks the words perform. When God tells Aaron to speak to bless the children of Israel and place his name upon them, the word carries with it the power to accomplish what God has promised. These are words that speak a blessing into being.

Consider first your name. Your name is a special thing. It is what identifies you. But how many of you know the meaning behind your name? Some parents choose a name for their child has nothing to do with the significance of the name, but the sound of it. Others choose a name which honors a family member, a grandfather or relative. But still farther back it was common practice to name your child for another reason.

In the days of Jesus, children were named for the circumstances into which they were born. Dating back to the beginning of the Old Testament you see children being named for what was happening or who they would become. So “Adam” means “earth,” because he was created from the dirt of the earth. So God changed Abram’s name to Abraham, meaning “Father of many” because of the Messianic promise of many descendants. These were names which meant something.

Jesus had a name which meant something. It represented God’s resolution. For the name Jesus means, “the LORD is salvation.” And Jesus would represent God’s resolution to save us. By this name, a blessing was spoken into being.

Jesus has come to save us from failed resolutions and empty words. Unlike God’s resolution, our resolutions fail. We imagine that this year will be different. This month

I am committed. Today I will change. We think that if we can just change things on the outside – find the right house; find the right person; find the right job; get up a little earlier; keep my house clean; stick to a budget; not talk to that person any more; stop smoking; stop drinking; if I can just accomplish a few of things here and there, I can straighten my life out; then I will be blessed; then God will bring me His blessing. But our words are wasted on the whims of the world.

These are empty words. They simply don't deal with the true problem. And that is that we are cursed. Our words are cursed. Our resolutions are cursed. Without Christ we are nothing more than flesh. Our old name is doomed. And as much as we might be able to change things here and there on the outside, we cannot change what is within. We cannot stop lusting; we cannot stop hating; we cannot stop being bitter; we cannot stop wanting to gossip; we cannot stop being unsatisfied with God; we cannot stop wasting time on ourselves. And before we know it, another year passes by, and nothing has really changed. We still go by the old name, Adam, for we are just dirt.

But on the eighth day, God had a resolution. It was on the eighth day when Joseph spoke the name given to the child. *And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. (Luke 2:21).*

This circumcision was God's New Year resolution. It was a resolution on the part of God to bring you into a New Day, to take you out of the old way of the world and make you a part of His holy people, to bless you and keep you, to make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you and give you peace. It was a mark of God's promise – that through the loins of Abraham would come the blessing to all the families of the earth; through Abraham and his circumcised descendants would come a Son, and his name was called Jesus, because as the angel said, "He will save His people from their sins."

On the eighth day, God speaks a blessing into being. He names a newly born child and everything changes. He cuts off the flesh of that child and marks Him as a son of Abraham. God makes a resolution to become flesh and bleed for us. He resolves to come under the law that He Himself gave to Abraham and He determines to usher in a New Year for all the world. He sheds His holy precious blood and on the cross looks down upon us with the countenance of God. There His actions did speak louder than words and there His word of forgiveness speaks a blessing into being.

So through Jesus, God has opened up the blessing of Abraham to all people. He has fulfilled all that the covenant with Abraham represented, so that there would need to be no more circumcisions. No longer would God physically bring us into the fellowship of His people, for now it would be a spiritual circumcision through the washing of rebirth and renewing of the Holy Spirit.

As Paul writes in Galatians – 26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

So we are members of God's holy covenant, the new covenant, a New Year in God's kingdom. But it isn't through our commitment or resolve in 2015, it is through the word blessing that is spoken. It is through the word that baptism has brought us into the fellowship of God's kingdom, and granted us the forgiveness of all of our sins. It is through the Word that God has placed the name of Jesus upon us, and marked us as sons of God. There in the water the face of God shines upon us and gives us peace. Even as it was spoken at baptism, so God renews this blessing day by day, in each service of the Word, He lifts up His good favor upon us and gives us peace.

27 "So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them."

I remember my pastor saying, "Its never too late to come to church." And what he meant was, no matter how late you are to the service on Sunday, it is still worth coming. Even if you arrive at 9:45 and the congregation is just finishing up the Lord's Prayer, you are still not too late for it. Perhaps the greatest part of the service is left for last: the blessing. Its never too late; as long as you breathe, to come and receive what God has promised.

The word benediction is Latin for "blessing." And this event in the service is more than just saying "the end." It is more than just words. These words actually do something. These words speak actions. They speak and they do. When the pastor says the benediction God truly gives us something – His promise, His Son, His grace and peace; It is a send off into 2015 with God's face looking with favor upon you. By these words God renews your baptismal covenant; He places His name upon You.

This is why gathering regularly throughout the year is so important. We know we are yet again going to fail to live up to our own resolutions. We continually set unrealistic expectations and goals for ourselves. And sometimes we do so to our own spiritual

danger. We imagine a better life, a better Christian that we could be if just... But these are our words and not Gods. So enter into the New Year with this resolve: to come here and get God's blessing as much as you can. Because here God keeps us. He protects us. Here He speaks a blessing into being.

- ²⁴ *"The Lord bless you and keep you;*
²⁵ *The Lord make His face shine upon you,*
And be gracious to you;
²⁶ *The Lord lift up His countenance upon you,*
And give you peace."

Actions speak louder than words, right? God has done more here than written a good lyric or spoken well wishes for you this year. He has done something for you in the long run. This is the word of the Lord. A performative statement. He will not waste His word on the whims of the world. When God speaks the words perform. He did it in the naming of Jesus. He does it in your naming in baptism. And He does it again and again in when your pastor lifts his hands and speaks the Aaronic benediction. That is a blessing to take with you into the New Year. For that is a word that speaks a blessing into being. Take God's word for it. Amen.