

Blessed

The Aaronic Benediction

By Peter Olofson

1. BLESSED IN CREATION

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his face upon you and give you peace." (Numbers 6,24-26). Amen.

Blessed in creation. Blessed in salvation. Blessed in judgment.

1500 years before and 1500 years after Jesus, this blessing came to play a special role. Of course, it also played a role in the meantime. But almost 1,500 years before Jesus, the Lord spoke to Moses and said, *"Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel:"* Hence the words have been named: "The Aaronic Benediction." These were the words with which the priests were to bless the people. The hands were raised (Leviticus 9:22) — the words said — the people blessed. It was the custom in the temple, and it became the custom in the synagogues.

At the ascension, Jesus raised his hands. He blessed the disciples, *"and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven."* (Luke 24:50-51).

1,500 years after Jesus in 1526, Luther draws up an evangelical service arrangement: The German Mass. Since then, it has been a fixed custom for the Aaronic Benediction to be given at the end of the service in the Lutheran church. The hands were raised — the words said — the congregation blessed.

The hands are raised. The people are blessed. The congregation is blessed. If I think: It does not apply to me, then the Aaronic Benediction reminds us precisely that it applies to the individual: "The Lord bless you. The Lord keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you. The Lord be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his face towards you. The Lord give you peace."

Bless — yes, the word comes from the Latin *'benedicere'* — composed of "bene" meaning 'well, good' and "dicere" meaning 'say'. When blessing, one says good or well in what we call

the Benediction. So: God wants you well when he blesses. God wants something good for you when he blesses. Blessed be you whom God will bless.

"The Lord bless you and keep you" This is the first part of the Aaronic Benediction.

God blesses all creation. When God had created the birds and the fish, he blessed them and said: *"Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth!"* At the climax of creation on the sixth day, when God created man in his image, it is said: *"In the image of God created he them, male and female created he them." And God blessed them and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth"* (Genesis 1,27-28). Not only should we, like birds and fish, become fruitful and numerous, but we men; were also to rule over all that was created.

All people encounter God's blessing on the plane of creation — all without exception. It is not only the believers that the sun shines on. It is not only the believers that the rain falls on.

Jesus reminds us of this in the Sermon on the Mount: *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."* (Matthew 5:43-45).

Believers and unbelievers alike; people who rebel against God's will and people who want to live according to God's will; both pagans and Christians have met God's blessing, God's favors. Paul must say, when there is an uprising and persecution in Lystra: *"... we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things* (that is, the idols they worshiped at the temple of Zeus) *to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness"* (Acts 14:15-17).

It may well be that they say they do not believe in God, but they rejoice when they are sitting in bed in the hospital with the newborn child they have felt grow bigger and bigger for the previous nine months; and now it is born. Their hearts are filled with joy. It may well be that they do not believe in God, but when they eat their filet of freshly caught cod, their hearts are filled with joy. There are tears of joy, when a child is born. And there are teeth; that enjoy a good meal. It tastes fantastic. In one delivery room there is a mother, where thanks go no further than to herself and her husband and then even to the midwife for good help, but in both delivery rooms they are blessed by God with a child.

In Swahili we say "kwa heri" when we say goodbye and it means 'with blessing' and where does the blessing come from? From God. It is similar to when we greet each other with the

peace of God, although it may not be so common anymore. Some of us might use it mostly as a greeting when we write letters. But just take a trip to the Medieval Center at Falster in Denmark, not too far from where we live, volunteers dress as they did in the Middle Ages and show the visitors the various pursuits and activities that people engaged in back then. They greet the visitors with a: 'God's peace', because that was the common greeting back then. In the Faroe Islands it probably corresponds to us saying: 'Jesus follow you.' It is common in English to say, "God Bless you" when someone sneezes whether you are Christian or not.

All these greetings are basically about being blessed, but they also tell us that all people are blessed by God, whether they believe or not; whether they confess God or reject Him, but God does not only want to bless us by giving us the gifts we are receiving on the material level – or in other words, what our body needs.

God's blessing aims to bring us into personal fellowship, yes, fellowship of life with Himself.

The blessing of creation collided with the fall into sin. When hands are raised today and it is said, "*The Lord bless you and keep you,*" we know that this does not mean that we will be freed from the hardships, sickness and misfortune of a fallen world.

If someone is caught in such a thought, then just take a walk at the cemetery. In the village of Vaalse, where we live, a memorial stone stands for two girls who burned inside a car when a drunk driver drove into the back of their parents' car. 20 km away in a village called Eskilstrup, a memorial stone stands for twins who died of diphtheria a few days apart at 12 1/2 years old. In several places on the Faroe Islands, there are memorial stones for those who disappeared at sea without being found again. And we could go on.

The Lord save you: In our fallen world, God will preserve His children in tribulation and sickness and misfortune. He does not deliver us from hardship, sickness and misfortune, but He will preserve us. He will make sure that we - despite all the hardships, illness and misfortune - reach the goal. The promised land. The Heavenly Goal

Time and time again during the wilderness journey, the people of Israel wished to return to the meat pots in Egypt. Time and time again, people can desire something other than God's will and plan. We are challenged, and sometimes there is good reason to be challenged, not because of how God acts, but about how people act. We want to live backwards and understand forwards, but it is true, as Søren Kierkegaard says, that we live forwards and understand backwards. History tells us though: What was decisive for the people of Israel during the desert journey was not whether they could understand everything and explain everything, but that they kept to God's promise through everything. Just as the Lord did not abandon His people in the desert on the way to the promised land, He will not abandon His children today as they experience life as a desert walk.

I don't always see, sense and feel it, but I stick to the promise. I cling to the promise:

"I lift up my eyes to the hills.

From where does my help come?

*² My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.*

*³ He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.*

*⁴ Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.*

*⁵ The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade on your right hand.*

*⁶ The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.*

*⁷ The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.*

*⁸ The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and forevermore." (Ps 121).*

God's blessing aims to bring us into personal fellowship, yes, life fellowship with Himself. In the Aaronic Benediction, one reaches further than the newborn child and the delicious dinner. What was priest Aaron's task? What was the task of the priests then and today? It is immediately after the Aaronic Benediction: "*put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them*" (Numbers 6:27).

Put my name on it.

Now the blessing spreads out from the plan of creation to salvation. In Psalm 67 it is sung:

*"May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us, Selah
that your way may be known on earth,
your saving power among all nations.*

God shall bless us;

let all the ends of the earth fear him!" (vv. 1-3, 7).

Where sin caused the personal communion with God to be destroyed, lost, God will again take you into communion with himself through the blessing. Put my name on the Israelites: God blesses the people and puts his name on the people as a testimony that this people now belong to him.

To be blessed with eternity in view is to bear God's name. Remember that — you the individual. Remember that — leaders in the church. Remember that — the leaders of the countries. Sin and evil can never be blessed, because sin and evil cannot bear God's name. Therefore, it was also said to the people of Israel: *“And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God. Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out”* (Deuteronomy 28,1-6).

If you obey the Lord, your God. The history of Israel shows us that the people who obey the Lord are a blessed people. Blessed also in tribulation. The man who obeys the Lord is a blessed man.

Blessed also in tribulation.

The leaders of Israel in the old covenant were also the leaders of the congregation — for the congregation and the people were one. It is not so in the new covenant. In the new covenant, the church is one and the people something else, with two different leaderships, but both with authority from God. Both in the old covenant and in the new covenant, it was and is crucial that the country's leaders acted and act in accordance with God's will.

Blessed is the land that has leaders who act according to the will of God both in the worldly regiment and in the spiritual regiment: God's Word says first of all about the authorities: *“For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore, one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.”* (Romans 13,3-7). Next, God's Word says about the leaders of the church: *“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you”* (Heb 13:17). Blessed is the people and the congregation that act according to this duality: The leaders in church and society follow God, and the people and congregation follow their leaders. People and the congregation can safely follow their leaders precisely because the leaders follow God's will.

What is the opposite of blessing? It's a curse.

The people of Israel faced a choice. The country's leaders today face an election. The congregation's leaders today face a choice. God spoke to the people of Israel and said, *“See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today...”* (Deuteronomy 11:26-28).

Listen to the Lord's commands. Luther found the natural law inscribed in the hearts of men in the ten commandments, which say, among other things: *“Honor your father and your mother. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.”*

Horror of all horrors: I have met one who broke the commandments—myself. But I was also allowed to hear a heavenly voice: *“If we confess our sins, he (GOD) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* (1 Joh 1,9). *“the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin”* (1 John 1,7).

Joy of all joys: I have met someone who got a new beginning, myself, and who now knows the commandments like sweet honey, as they are described in the book of Psalms (119,102-103):

*“I do not turn aside from your rules,
for you have taught me.
How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!”*

Do you know the difference between falling and apostasy? The one who rejects God's commandments falls from God into apostasy, while the one who repents of his fall and asks for forgiveness is precisely preserved by God despite the fall. *“See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today...”*

Are you choosing today the blessing or the curse?

Do the country's leaders choose the blessing or the curse? It depends on whether they listen to God's will in the commandments or not. Do the church leaders choose the blessing or the curse? It depends on whether they are faithful. That is why Paul writes in 1 Cor 4,1-2: *“This is*

how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful."

The servant is subordinate to another, and what the servant does depends on the order he receives from his superior. This means that the congregation's leaders, council of elders, preachers, pastors are and must be part of God's plan for the world. They act by order and therefore represent the person who gave the order.

This means, when we think about the message to be delivered, that the preaching the preacher gives voice to is not and should not be his own invention. The message is given to him in advance. The preacher must not invent the message but convey it. He is a servant or a steward. At the same time, it means that the person or persons who reject the servant reject the person who gave the order to the servant.

That is why Jesus also says: "*The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.*" (Luke 10,16 & John 13,20).

It is a blessing to help and follow the one sent by Jesus.

If today we hear someone say: "It's just Paul", then it is not just Paul, but the one who sent Paul who is being refused. Whoever says no to Paul says no to Jesus. Whoever rejects what the Lord's apostle Paul says rejects what Jesus says.

Jesus speaks in several parables about who is the faithful servant or householder. A faithful servant is awake, he is ready when his master breaks up and pulls it out, then he is busy while waiting to give the servants food at the right time (Luke 12,25ff).

God's blessing includes house and home, clothes and garments, dried fish and dried meat, etc., but God's blessing also aims to bring us into personal communion with himself.

People can have house and home, clothing and garments, dried fish and dried meat and yet be lost. Blessed in creation. It is large. Blessed in salvation. That's the bigger one.

The second part of the Aaronic Benediction says: The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

The grace of God, it is what we need.

2. BLESSED IN SALVATION

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his face upon you and give you peace." (Numbers 6,24-26). Amen.

Blessed in creation. Blessed the salvation. Blessed in judgment.

The hands are raised. The people are blessed. The congregation is blessed. The Lord bless you and keep you. Thus:

Blessed with this life in mind. It is large.

The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. So: Blessed with eternal life in mind. It's bigger. Now it's about grace, and grace is the opposite of anger. The hands are raised and the blessing reads: The Lord let his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

The grace of the Lord or the wrath of the Lord?

Are you hiding your face from someone? Is there someone you don't want to look in the eye? Embarrassed by what you've been doing since your gaze averted? Do you have a guilty conscience since you look down? There is probably more than one schoolteacher who has stood with a bread-burdened student who would rather look at the toes of his shoes than at the teacher's face. The guilty conscience resulted in a lack of eye contact. The face was hidden from the teacher. There is probably more than one parent who has faced a child who avoided eye contact. Conscience bothered.

God can hide his face. And it was Israel's misfortune when the Lord hid his face:

"How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?" (Ps 13,1).

Or as the Lord said to Moses, when Joshua was to be installed as his successor: "*Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers. Then this people will rise and whore after the foreign gods among them in the land that they are entering, and they will forsake me and break my covenant that I have made with them. Then my anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide my face from them"* (Deuteronomy 31,16-17).

To hide one's face and to leave them are the same thing.

Have you tried knocking on a door, and when the door was opened, it was said: 'I don't want to see you before my eyes.' Then we know that something is wrong and that the fellowship with that person has gone pieces.

It hurts when the fellowship between people is broken, but it is also God's pain if the fellowship between you and him is broken and damaged. That is why hands are still raised today, and you must hear: The Lord let his face shine upon you.

The blessing is that God has not hidden or deprived His face from you. On the contrary, he lets it shine. And when he lets it shine over you, it's about life. Light and life are connected. It springs up with life in the garden, in the fields and in the forest when it is spring. Why? Yes, because the light has come, and light means life. And the opposite: If the light does not come, then there is no life.

David is happy. He sings:

*"in God I trust; I shall not be afraid.
What can man do to me?
I must perform my vows to you, O God;
I will render thank offerings to you.
For you have delivered my soul from death,
yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God
in the light of life" (Ps. 56,11-13).*

He who walks before the face of God therefore walks in the light, the light from the face of God that gives life.

Ethan sings in Psalm 89:

*"I will sing of the steadfast love of the Lord, forever;
with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations."
"The heavens are yours; the earth also is yours;
the world and all that is in it, you have founded them." ...
"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;
steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.
Blessed are the people who know the festal shout,
who walk, O Lord, in the light of your face ..." (vv. 1,12,14-15).*

What is your worst enemy? Is it sin?

Is it the devil? No

Jesus tells you that your worst enemy is God himself. Your problem is basically God's wrath: *"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mt 10,28).*

So: Your problem is basically God's anger.

We are by nature children of wrath Eph 2,3 because we are sinners, and thus we are under the wrath of God. That was what Luther struggled with: How can I stand before God? How do I get a gracious God?

In the old covenant it is said that no one can see God's face and live (Exodus 33:20). God is holy, I am a sinner, and God reacts with anger in the face of sin. Therefore no one can see God and live.

When the Aaronic Benediction is given, it is customary to draw the cross sign. Why? Because the cross makes the difference. If we meet God outside the cross, then it is the sinner who meets the holy God, and we cannot endure. But if we meet God through the cross, then God appears before us, and his face is Jesus. That is why Jesus can say: *"Whoever has seen me has seen the Father"* (John 14:9). Jesus is the face of God, and if you meet God through Jesus, then you meet God's grace. It became the revolution in Luther's life. He got a whole new life. That is why it says about Jesus in the letter to the Colossians: *"He is the image of the invisible God"* (Col 1,15) and in the letter to the Hebrews: *"He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature"* (Heb 1,3).

Jesus — the face of God.

But Jesus is precisely the face of God, because God himself hid his face from Jesus, and because God hid his face from Jesus, you can see the face of God in Jesus. In the book of Isaiah 53.3, there is a prophecy about the coming Messiah, the coming savior, and it is about Jesus: *"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces"* (v. 3). One you hide your face from. When Jesus hung on the cross, God hid his face from Jesus, because Jesus had become one with sin for your sake and mine and cried: *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* (Mk 15,33ff).

God hid his face from Jesus, that he might make his face shine upon you.

Jesus made himself one with us sinners, therefore he died on the cross for your sin. It was also what the prophecy had said: *"But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed*

for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed" (Isa 53,5). There are many things you can do in life and there are many things you can change. But can you undo the done? Can a sinner stop being a sinner? It may well be that white women in Denmark try to get darker in the sun, and black women in Tanzania, strangely enough, try to get lighter skin - but they can't change their skin. In the book of Jeremiah, we can read: "*Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil.*" (Jer 13:23). This corresponds to what Jesus says to Nicodemus: "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh*" (John 3:6). There is something that we ourselves are unable to change. But precisely the cross that is drawn for the face and chest, the cross that is drawn after the Aaronic Benediction, is the sign that Jesus died for us while we were still sinners. Paul writes: "*For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son...*" (Romans 5,10); "*And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²²he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him*" (Col 1, 21-22).

There is every reason to cast down our eyes and hide our face if we were to meet God apart from Jesus, which is actually what we are lost by. Then you stand alone with your sin and face the wrath of God and remain lost. There is every reason to look up if you meet God in Jesus, not because sin has become unimportant, but because sin has been atoned for on the cross.

Jesus is God's face that shines, so that the new life can fides, sprout and grow in you too.

Paul describes it in the speech on the Areopagus with the words: "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). God's smile meets you in Jesus. Being a Christian means: Your sin is forgiven; your life is new. In Him you live, you breathe, and you are. There is no place; there is no time, there is no activity, where you are without Jesus.

Johan Hansen from Kollafjørður, who for some years was manager of the sailors' home in Thorshavn (capital of Faroe Islands) and for many years a missionary in Denmark, says it this way in his memoirs from 2004: 'Jesus was the central figure in my childhood. Jesus was always present. He was not just brought out for Sunday use but was also there from morning to night in everyday life: "Jesus follow you!" This was always the last word we got on the road when we left home, whether it was to go to school, run errands or to go out on the fjord to fish. Jesus had not just lived many, many years ago far, far away in Israel and wandered in the cities of the Israelites and by their beaches and in their mountains. Not long ago he had sailed their boats in the storm and caused the storm and waves to calm down when they got too wild. No, Jesus was also in our village. Jesus was also at our beaches, on board our boats and with us in the mountains. We called on him in the hour of danger, just as we asked him to bless the bread and experienced the meager amounts of money we had paid off. He also blessed the

little children who were brought to him in our settlement. Yes, Jesus was with us. And it was so safe. He loved us and we loved him".

There is no place, no time, no activity where you are without Jesus.

I will not forget the day when Liz from Australia had invited us out to eat at a posh restaurant in Arusha in the north of Tanzania. Liz had been visited by an Australian who was working on a mission project in Kenya. Liz had invited and she was going to pay for all of us. So, it was her table. When the waiter brought the food, I asked Liz, as the hostess of the day: Do you want to say the table prayer, or should I? And before Liz could answer, the waiter began to say the table prayer for us. The fact that he didn't catch that it was actually Liz I was asking didn't matter. He was a servant who lived and breathed and was in Jesus, and therefore: What is more natural than to pray?

Or I think of a day in Sumbawanga in Tanzania when I had to pick up a number of volunteers at a hotel; we were going on this year's volunteer trip from Friday to Sunday to the second highest waterfall in Africa and to Lake Tanganyika. The car was filled with volunteers and a native lady stood back on the hotel steps. I asked her: Are you a Christian? And when she answered affirmatively, I asked if she would pray for our trip. And then the lady raised her hands and prayed all God's blessing upon our trip. A lady who lived and breathed and was in Jesus, and therefore: What is more natural than to pray?

To be a Christian is to have been given a new life.

I am glad to have my wife to talk with, about that which I don't want to tell so many others but having an almighty heavenly father who is with me everywhere and with whom I can talk all the time is my privilege. It is also your privilege as a Christian. I'm glad that there are some traffic rules after all, even if I can't always understand why a certain rule should be the way it was, probably most often in Tanzania, but they are there to protect and protect us, so it will be a good experience to drive, and we will arrive safely.

I remember well that it was a bit special, when I was up for my driving test in Copenhagen and stopped at the park of Tivoli, heading straight for the major road called Langebro. A car came and drove into me, and then the driver hurries to slip to the right down Tietgensgade, away from us. You must not drive into people, and certainly not when they are up for a driving test and then run away. So, the motor expert, the policeman sitting next to me, says, "Go after him" and I went after him. And when he was stuck in a traffic jam on the small road behind the Glyptoteket, the motor expert said: "Keep to the side." The run-away driver now didn't give a kind reply to the motor expert. The motor expert then pulled out his police badge, and we

ended up at the police station, where my driving instructor was also waiting. The fleeing driver was still not friendly.

The driver had tried to run away from his offense. He did not apologize and ended up having a case filed against him by the police. I later had to testify in court. When the legal work had been done at the police station, the motor expert said: "Now let us continue...", and I had to go out driving again. However, I got my driver's license.

There are actually some people who get annoyed by traffic rules, but without them it doesn't work. Traffic rules are only man-made, so let us discuss changes so that they serve the purpose as best as possible.

The commandments are not man-made but given to us by God. We need traffic rules because we live in a fallen world. In the garden of paradise there was no need for them, and on the new earth there is no need for them. But in this world, we need them.

It is true that time and again we see that people, authorities, rulers, etc. are irritated by God's traffic rules, yes, some go so far as to put man-made laws above God's laws. It is human pride that is responsible for the fall.

How completely different it feels when the face of God — Jesus Christ — shines and is allowed to shine. Then we know what the psalmist writes:

*"Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.
Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me.
I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation.
I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts.
I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word.
I do not turn aside from your rules, for you have taught me.
How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.
Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (Ps. 119, 97–105).*

When the law of God says, "*Honor your father and your mother.*" these words are now sweet honey in the mouth of a Christian. The commandment is good taste, and following the commandment gives good taste. Sweet honey. When God's law says, "*You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.*" then these words are now sweet honey in the mouth of a Christian. The commandment is good taste, and following the commandment gives good taste. Sweet honey. Such is my new life as a Christian under the shining face of God and his grace.

With an image, we can say: If I end up driving into someone else, and I do, then I know that there is no help in becoming a getaway driver. I will probably be found and brought to justice. That is, before God's court. I stay at the scene of the accident; I confess my sin; and for Jesus' sake, God allows grace to prevail. I am forgiven. That's what it's like to be a Christian. I have a place to go with all my mistakes and failures. I have a place where I am allowed to start over again and again. I have a place of forgiveness where God smiles at me in Jesus.

In this place of forgiveness, God wants to smile on you, yes smile on people of all tribes and tongues people from Turkey, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Mongolia, Denmark and the Faroe Islands, yes from all peoples — therefore Jesus says: " Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

3. BLESSED IN JUDGMENT

Blessed in creation – everyone is.

Blessed in salvation – it is precisely the saved.

Blessed in judgment.

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his face upon you and give you peace." (Numbers 6,24-26). Amen.

Blessed in creation. Blessed in salvation. Blessed in judgment.

The hands are raised, the blessing reads: The Lord lift up his face towards you and give you peace. The Lord lift up his face to you. He looks at you. And what does he see? A beloved child. The cross is drawn on your forehead and chest as a testimony that you belong to the crucified Jesus Christ. Anyone who belongs to Jesus Christ is a child of God.

God looks at you with a loving gaze. He says to you: You are *"God's chosen ones, holy and beloved"* (Col 3:12) and to the congregation: You are my chosen, holy and beloved. It may be that I think I am not worth loving, but I am loved. It may well be that you think you are not worth loving, but you are loved. You live and breathe and are in that love in every place; at any time and in everything you do. It is not the case that if you think a wrong thought, you are suddenly out of that love, and when you have asked for forgiveness, you slip right into God's love again. In, out, in, out. No, you live, breathe and are in that love always. That's what it's like to be a Christian.

If you suddenly start saying that it's okay to think wrong thoughts. No, you don't, because love educates you into something else. And if anyone were to misunderstand the message in that direction, the opposite is emphasized over and over again in the Bible. Paul writes in the letter of Titus that the grace of God *"has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works"* (Titus 2,11-14).

Deeds mean something.

There is a difference between doing evil and doing good. There is a difference between following God's commandments and rejecting God's commandments. No one escapes responsibility. That's to say, every person must respond to — give an answer — that is, give an account. God will call you to account, and you must answer.

For all people there will come a day of reckoning or a day of judgment, precisely because there is a difference between good and bad. That's why Paul writes in 2 Cor 5.10: *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil"*. It is about Heaven and Hell, because there is a difference between good and bad. It is about salvation and perdition, because there is a difference between good and bad.

Hell is living under the wrath of God for eternity. Heaven is living in God's love for eternity. Hell is the place of perdition. Heaven, the new earth, is the place of salvation.

That is why Jesus warns: *"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell"* (Mt 10,28). There is one who can let us be lost in Hell, says Jesus. It is God.

Can you imagine your house on fire? Can you imagine if your family/children were inside the house? What would you like me to say and do? Should I nicely stand at a distance, observe the fire and soberly note that the combustion process was proceeding as it should? Or should I warn them in the house by shouting fire, fire, fire — get out.

I wanted to shout fire — even if some people might get a little annoyed that I shouted a little loudly.

After all, it is about life and death, salvation and perdition, heaven and hell. This is probably also why such strong words are spoken so clearly and used in the Augsburg Confession, which is the most important confessional document for the Lutheran church from the Reformation era, here - among other things in the folk church, which is, after all, an Evangelical Lutheran church.

Here we can read: ***"Also they (the Lutherans) teach that at the Consummation of the World Christ will appear for judgment, and will raise up all the dead; He will give to the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys, but ungodly men and the devils He will condemn to be tormented without end!"***

You and I are sinners, and what are the wages of sin? *"The wages of sin is death"* (Rom 6,23).

The only fair and just thing for you and me is that we die; that is, that you and I are lost and condemned to endless torment, as the Augsburg Confession puts it. It is fair that we get paid as owed. No one can accuse anyone, when we are getting paid as owed. And if God chooses to save just one man, then no one, not even you, can accuse God of being unjust. If I choose to give US\$ 100, I am not being unfair to everyone else. I have the freedom to give a gift to just

one single person. And who would have the right to blame me for that? No-one. It is fair if no one gets US\$ 100, and it is pure grace if I give a single person US\$ 100.

You and I don't really have a choice. What can you do to save your father and mother? What can you do to save your children? What can you do to save your siblings? Nothing. You can witness to them, but not save them. If it was up to you and me, all were lost.

Wretched sinners, drunkards, adulterers, cheats and impostors, slanderers, haughty, murderers, etc. No, it's true that it doesn't look pretty at all. If you compare a President/Governor with the man who vomited outside the pub on Saturday night, the latter did not look very nice.

But there is no doubt left when we have listened a little to the Bible's talk about sin: There is a fine, beautiful sin seen with human eyes that sits behind the suit, and there are gross forms of sin that make it turn around in many people. What is a human being worth? What is the President/Governor worth? What is he worth who vomits outside the pub on Saturday night? Now I'm not asking you how people think about man, because it is time and time again deeply disturbing how some people think about other people.

But what is this banknote worth? US\$ 200!? If I now crumple it, what is it worth? US\$ 200. If I now throw it on the floor and step on it, what is it worth? US\$ 200. And if I spit on it, what then? US\$ 200

As incomprehensible as it is, this is how God sees us sinners. The US\$ 200 note is still worth US\$ 200. A person is a person regardless of how they are and what they do. Through all the spit and vomit and cheating and fraud and the whore and the curse and all the refined sin, God sees a man; a man he created in his image. A person he loves. A person he loves, despite everything he sees.

But he can't ignore what he sees. We humans try to excuse our children. We humans try to explain away what we ourselves did. We deny, we are silent, we close our eyes — especially when it concerns ourselves and our loved ones. God does not. He is angry at sin, but he sees beyond sin, he sees the man he has created, who is lost and on his way to Hell.

God does not close his eyes.

For he who loves does not close his eyes to the state of things and does not deny the facts. God loves: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). It says: Not to be lost. That is the starting point. We are lost, and it is only fair that we all remain lost.

But — and this is important — for you and for me — God could give Jesus as salvation for one single man, and none of us would be able to accuse God of showing grace and mercy to that

man. But now it is not written that Jesus was given for one single man, but for the world, i.e. God shows grace and mercy to all people — to you and me and everyone else.

We have no claim to that. We can only do one thing and that is to say thank you. You have no right to get a 100 dollar-note from me, but if you did, you probably said: Thank you.

And then you could sit and wonder why the person sitting next to you said no thanks to also receiving US\$ 100. Yes, this is how Christians have time and again had to wonder: Why on earth did this person reject God's gift in Jesus? Not only have Christians wondered, but it has pained them. They have wept over parents and siblings and children and family and friends who have heard of God's gift, and they have wept over all those who have never heard of God's gift.

If anyone should be challenged by the fact that people are lost, say to this person: Hurry, go to these lost people. Tell them that God loves them, and that Jesus died for them. Tell them also of his resurrection, yes, of his victory over sin, death and the Devil. Just as God sent Jesus to atone for our sin, to pay for our sin, so he sends people with messages about this to all people on earth. Go. God does not want anyone to perish, therefore Jesus died for all.

How will a person fare on the day of reckoning—the day of judgment? How will you fare on the day of reckoning — on the day of judgment?

I have no doubt how I would fare if it were up to me. Are you in doubt — not about me — but about yourself — if it was up to you?

And then I hear Jesus talking about the judgment of the world in Matthew chapter 25, and Jesus tells; that when the Son of Man, that is Jesus himself, comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will take his seat on the throne of his glory.

And all the nations shall be gathered before him, and he shall separate them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; he shall put the sheep on his right side and the goats on his left. We imagine the great crowd, and it is about people, after all - not the sheep on the Faroe Islands' mountains or the goats; I had in Tanzania. We imagine the king on his throne — the hour has come — the accounts must be settled — the sentence passed! And then the king says: "Come, you who are blessed by my father."

There is man who is blessed in judgment.

Blessed in creation, not bad.

Blessed in salvation, it is incomprehensible that you were allowed to get and receive that gift, but you, who have received and received this gift, are blessed in judgment. Then you will be happy!

"Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

And then it is told about a lot of good things they have done: "*For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.*"

When we hear about all the good things they have done, we can start asking ourselves: Well, have they never done anything wrong? And the answer is: They are judged on the basis of the gospel, and therefore it is completely, completely impossible to find a single wrong action. All their sin is thrown into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:9), i.e. it is forgiven. Furthermore, we can ask: Well, when all the good things they have done are mentioned, is it because of them that they are saved, and the answer is: No, precisely because they are not saved because of their good works, they have kept no account of them, yea, they do not even know of them: when did we do it, they ask. The answer is: They did blessed deeds, because they were already blessed. Blessed in Jesus Christ. Faith bears fruit.

And when we later hear Jesus enumerate all that the lost should have done, but did not do, it is because they are precisely lost because of their sin.

There are no good works to be mentioned that could make them deserve to be saved. For no one can be saved by works, but we can, as we hear, perish by our works.

"*For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink.*" Jesus tells you this briefly in the judgment of the world: The lost are left with their sin, they are judged according to the law and are therefore lost. The saved have had their sin forgiven, they are judged according to the gospel and are therefore acquitted in the judgment. "*Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels": "Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world".*"

The Lord lift up his face upon you and give you peace.

You will find peace in Jesus. Jesus said to his disciples: "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you.*" (John 14:27). Jesus is the Prince of Peace (Is 9.6). He is "*their peace*" (Micah 5:5). So is Jesus because he won that peace by giving his life. Jesus is exactly the one the prophecy spoke of: "*upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace*" (Is 53.5). And therefore, Paul can proclaim with great boldness: "*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" (Romans 5:1).

Who is it that sits on the throne as a judge and must judge? It is Jesus.

Who is it that has given his life, taken the penalty, so that the sentenced could go free? It is Jesus.

That is why a Christian sings, and Christians are sung about:

***No more do you fear doomsday,
for know, your judge has concluded your case
and from himself it won.***

(verse 4 in Danish version of psalm by Grundtvig: "Lift up thy head, O Christendom")

If you are a Christian, you are blessed in the judgment, you are called to inherit blessing (1 Pet 3,9). If you are not a Christian, turn and you will be blessed in the judgment and inherit blessing.

About the new earth John has been revealed and tells you: "*No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever*" (Rev. 22,3-5).

Blessed in creation. Blessed in salvation. Blessed in judgment.

The Lord lift up his face upon you and give you peace. Amen.