

2 Corinthians 13

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[0 : 00] Let's bow our heads again and pray. Our God and our Heavenly Father, we do thank you that you are a God who blesses.

We thank you for the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for the love of the Father who so loved the world that he sent his only Son.

We thank you for the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, another gift, another heavenly gift that we can enjoy and cherish and cultivate.

And we pray that as we spend some time, even this morning, considering these very familiar words, you will be the one who would ensure that that consideration of these words is for our benefit, is for our instruction, is for our encouragement, and indeed for our correction.

Guide us, we pray. We pray that the Spirit would indeed be evidently amongst us, directing and guiding what we say and indeed what we hear and the manner in which we consider all that we hear.

[1 : 11] And that it would indeed be so that as we leave this place, in a few moments' time, we would do so, having been instructed by yourself through your Word.

Lord, we do pray your blessing on each and every part of our service today. We thank you that we will also have the opportunity to participate in and be witnesses of the sacrament of baptism.

And we commend to you what will take place later in the service, praying very especially for the Gutierrez family, for Vivian and Andres in particular.

And we thank you for them and pray that you will be with us in that part of our service also. Lord, we do pray at this time and would commend to your care and keeping very particularly all of your people and very particularly those who are persecuted for the faith.

We're very conscious in these days of all that is going on in northern Iraq, concentrated in the city of Mosul, where a historic Christian population has been forced to flee for their lives.

[2 : 31] And we do continue to commend them to your care. Lord, we pray that you would be with them and that you would protect them, that you would frustrate the purposes of evil and wicked men who would do violence to them.

Lord, we pray for them in particular as they have been brought very particularly to our attention. But as we pray for them, so we pray for all of your people who are suffering for their faith.

At the same time, we do thank you for those that have been granted a measure of deliverance. We think of Miriam in Sudan, for whom we prayed in the past and whose situation reached the national press.

And we thank you that she has been able to, together with her family, find safe passage out of that country. We think of the remaining Christians there, many who are not known to us and whose circumstances will not make the news, but who find themselves in great difficulties also.

We pray that you would be with them and you would protect them. Lord, we pray for all of your people the world over who gather this morning to celebrate you and your work in our favor.

[3 : 52] We pray for all who gather in this city. We thank you for the fellowship that we enjoy in the gospel. We thank you that the fellowship of the Holy Spirit that we have read of and will be considering of extends beyond a congregation, precious though it is within the context of a congregation, but that we can enjoy fellowship with believers across denominations and across congregations.

And so we do pray for your people in this city that you would bless the preaching of your word today in Aberdeen, that it would be the means of building up your people and indeed also the means of drawing men and women to the Savior, that there would be rejoicing in heaven even today over sinners who repent in this place.

Lord, we pray for the congregations of the Free Church of Scotland up and down the land and pray your blessing on them as they gather, those perhaps known to us, many of us perhaps connected in one way or another with one or other congregation for which we have a particular concern. And we do pray that you would own and bless the preaching of your word and the gathering of your people today. Lord, we pray that you would be with us as we turn to your word now. Guide us and direct us. And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. What is the most quoted Bible verse at our services here in Bon Accord?

[5 : 26] Now, I'm conscious that I'm asking the question having probably given you quite a big clue in what has gone before even in this service. But nonetheless, if you've been paying attention, that shouldn't be too difficult a question, I don't think.

Well, anyway, you might want to just think about it for a fleeting moment. What do you think the answer to that is? The most quoted Bible verse at our services here on Sundays.

Just to give you a clue, if you might think that there's a number that could be competing for that honor, if honor it is, there is one verse that wins hands down over any other.

You could think of the most famous verses in the Bible, people's favorite verses. Well, they're nowhere near as oft quoted as this verse that I have in mind. Now, given the reading and given how I introduced the reading, I imagine it's not been too challenging a question that I've posed.

The verse that I have in mind is, of course, the benediction, the blessing that we find at the end of 2 Corinthians 13 and verse 14.

[6 : 40] May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Very familiar words, pronounced, spoken at nearly every service here in Bon Accord.

Occasionally, I'll make use of an alternative benediction, but almost invariably, this will be the benediction that is employed.

And so, for that reason alone, very, very familiar to us. But as we know in regard to the Bible, indeed it's true in regard to other matters, familiarity doesn't necessarily imply or guarantee understanding.

And I wonder to what extent we do little in the matter of thinking about what is actually being said. What is the meaning of this blessing that is so familiar to us?

Well, this morning what we want to do is to spend a little time doing just that, considering this benediction or blessing and considering what it means and what we can gain from understanding it more carefully.

[8 : 04] And the way in which we are going to give consideration to the benediction is considering three matters or employing three headings under which we'll say what we want to say.

The first thing that we'll give some thought to is the God who blesses. Identifying the God who blesses. Spend a little time on that matter.

But then move on and consider the manner in which he blesses. And as we look through each of the parts of the benediction, we will be able to draw out certain truths under that heading.

But then finally also consider a people blessed to bless. And that really would have as its intention to identify the challenge that is implicit in the benediction.

And I think that is particularly important when these are words that we hear Sunday after Sunday. But I wonder to what extent we ever take them as words that constitute a challenge.

[9 : 11] They're a blessing. And even in the measure of understanding, we can maybe grasp the blessing that we receive or that is implied by the words. But there's also, I would contend, a challenge implicit in the blessing.

And we want to give a little bit of thought to that also. So first of all then, to consider this first point, the God who blesses. Or to put this in the form of a question, who is this God who blesses?

Now that is a very big question. Who is this God? If it's a big question, I imagine it's an even bigger answer to answer it.

Who is this God who blesses? And so what I want to do this morning is just highlight one, we might call it, big truth concerning this God. We're not going to endeavor to paint any kind of exhaustive picture.

It's quite beyond our capacity to do that. We're not even going to try. But we do want to highlight one big truth concerning this God. It's also worth making the point that as we move on to our second heading, the manner in which he blesses, in that we will also be being presented with the

God who blesses.

[10:32] Because the manner in which he blesses, of course, reflects who he is and what he is like. So what we say here at the beginning will be developed or enriched by what we go on to say. But as we think about the God who blesses and as we focus our attention on one particular truth, the truth that is highlighted, this one truth that is highlighted by this benediction, that I want to particularly draw attention to is that the God who blesses is a triune God.

Paul, in the blessing, makes explicit reference to three distinct persons with each blessing in a distinct or particular way, though in a very related way, but nonetheless in a distinct or particular way.

Now this is significant. It's especially significant in relation to this text because this verse is really the only place in the New Testament where the three persons of the Trinity, to use the language that the church came to use to describe this truth concerning God, it's the only place where the three are explicitly mentioned in such a blessing, in the form of a benediction.

And I imagine that in history was the reason why this, of the many benedictions that we have in the Bible, has come to be so popular.

If we can call it popular, I'm sure we can. It's attractive to use this blessing for this reason, that there is this explicit recognition of the three persons of the Trinity.

[12:16] Now, having said that, having stated that, you may be reading the verse and thinking, well, maybe you've got one or two little question marks in regard to what I've just said.

So let's just pause for a moment and ask the question, is it the case that what I've just said is actually true? Are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit mentioned in this benediction?

Well, it's just one verse. It's not difficult to have a look and see. It's certainly true that Jesus Christ is mentioned. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, so the Son, is certainly mentioned.

The benediction closes with the words and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. So the Holy Spirit is very explicitly mentioned here in the benediction.

But then we have, in the middle, God mentioned, the love of God. But not expressly, in the language that Paul chooses to use, not presented expressly as God the Father.

[13:25] Now, I wonder why that is. And given that God is not expressly presented by Paul here as God the Father, are we warranted in just assuming, as I think we generally do, that Paul does have the Father in mind when he speaks here of the love of God?

Because you have the three, it seems reasonable to make that presumption. I think it is a reasonable presumption, but it's worth asking the question, on what grounds do we consider it a reasonable presumption or assumption?

Just to answer that briefly, or to suggest an answer to that, why is it that Paul doesn't see it as necessary to speak of, or to use the language or the terminology of God the Father?

It's often the case, as we read through the New Testament, it's often the case that New Testament writers refer to the Father simply as God. The context of what they say make it clear that they're considering, or they have in mind the Father, but they simply speak of him as God.

And the reason for this is that in the Old Testament, prior to the fuller revelation of God as triune that we find in the New Testament, the Son is presented predominantly as the promised Messiah.

[14:50] The Spirit is presented as the agent of God, active among his people. And that is the background from which we're coming in the New Testament. Writers were coming as they would speak of and teach concerning God.

And given this background, it's not surprising that though the fully divine nature of the Son and the Spirit is clearly established in the New Testament, the term God is largely used of the Father.

Not exclusively by any means, but largely used of the Father. Now, it's not our intention this morning to demonstrate what I've just stated concerning the fact that the divine nature of the Son and of the Spirit are clearly established in the New Testament.

I'm persuaded that is the case, but that's not our task this morning, to do that. I simply stated. So, that really, to clean up, perhaps that's the language I could use to clarify this contention that we do have, in fact, the three persons of the Trinity referred to here by Paul, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

So, the blessing here points to and significantly contributes to our understanding of God as triune. But there is one other matter that I want to comment on.

[16:14] And I want to do so and involve you in doing so by getting you to play in your mind a word game. What I want you to do is to imagine that you had all the individual words of verse 14.

If you've got your Bible open there, you can see all these words. And imagine, if you're teachers, this will be easy, but imagine they were all on flashcards. So, each of these words was in a flashcard, and they'd all been muddled up.

I didn't count how many words there are, but anyway, it doesn't matter. You've got all these words all on flashcards. And what you need to do is to put them in order. And you're told, well, these words, when you put them in order, they will be a blessing.

So, you're given that clue, and you need to put them in order. And in an order that you consider to be logical or predictable. There's just one other little detail, and this is a bit of a stretch in terms of your power of imagination.

You have to do so on the assumption that you're not familiar with this benediction already. Now, that's difficult because, of course, you are. But if you could just imagine that you weren't familiar with the right order, you didn't know the right order, all you've got are the words, and you've got to put them in the right order.

[17:27] I wonder what order they would be in. Well, I imagine you've kind of got an idea of where I'm going with this. Well, the order in which I would put them, and I imagine many of you also would be along these lines.

May the love of God and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. We would most naturally consider that to be the right order, if I can put that word right in adverted commas.

It's the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But in the benediction, that's not the order that Paul employs. Now, why this unexpected order employed by Paul?

Is it significant at all? I want to suggest an answer to the question why Paul employs this order. The Son, the Father, having already established that a reference to God here can reasonably be understood as a reference to the Father and then the Holy Spirit.

So I want to answer that. Why? But before suggesting an answer to why Paul employs this order, I also want to just note that the order employed, even before we deal with the question of why this is the order, the order employed by Paul is consistent with our biblically grounded conviction that the three persons of the Trinity are equal in nature and so in honor.

[18:55] So while there is what we might call a natural order on the grounds of their distinctive personalities and roles, there's no intrinsic reason why the order, as on this occasion, can't be altered.

The fact that Paul feels it legitimate to employ this order does certainly tie in with, I wouldn't say it establishes, but it's certainly consistent with our convictions regarding each of the persons being equal in their divine status.

That's just an aside, really. It still hasn't answered the question, well, why does Paul employ the order that he does? I think the most plausible reason is that Paul has in mind what we could call the order of Christian experience, or the order in which we, as God works savingly in us, experience God.

So let me just explain what I mean by that. Well, we first experience the grace of Christ. This in turn reveals to us the love of God.

And then, having been made part of God's family, we experience fellowship one with another. That's the order in which, as Christians, we experience God. And it's possible that that would explain why Paul chooses to employ the order that we have before us.

[20:26] Certainly, that explanation, or that suggestive explanation, serves to lead us into our second main point, which is the manner in which God blesses.

I'm just taking out my mobile here because that clock isn't working. And just 30 seconds ago, I looked at it and I got a terrible shock because it said something that it shouldn't have said. And that's because it's not working.

So I shall try and maintain some order in terms of time with the help of this little gadget. So the second thing I want to look at is the manner in which God pleases.

And the beautiful thing about this is that a triune God blesses in a triune way. The plurality in God is wonderfully reflected in the plurality of blessings granted and experienced by God's people.

Our text is divided into three distinct clauses, each of which highlights a particular, though related and connected, blessing. And we can look at each in turn.

[21 : 31] So first of all, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. What can we say about the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ? That's a bit like the question we had at the beginning.

You know, who is the God who blesses? Where to start or what to highlight is really the question we need to grapple with. Well, in a blessing, this blessing, the benediction at the end of the letter, in a blessing that closes this letter to the Corinthians, a letter that ought to be read and understood as a coherent whole, we can best be guided as to what we should say about the grace of Jesus Christ. There would be so much to say. But we can be guided about what would be most appropriate to say by the manner in which, in this very letter, grace is pictured or illustrated or explained in a very visual manner.

And what I have in mind there is the verse that we've already read in the same letter in chapter 8 and in verse 9. And we're going to allow this verse, verse 9 of chapter 8, to guide us as we consider the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And what does that verse say? Let's just remind ourselves what it says. So 2 Corinthians 8 and verse 9. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

[23 : 02] Paul says to the Corinthians, you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. I don't need to teach you this for the first time.

You know this. I'm reminding you. This is your conception. This is your understanding of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. I'm not saying that Paul said that what follows is the exhaustive understanding of the Corinthians, but this is something that the Corinthians knew concerning the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so I think it's reasonable, given the way that Paul expresses himself here, that when we move forward to the benediction, and there's a reference to the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, I think it's reasonable to conclude that the Corinthians, in hearing that expression, would have been drawn to what Paul has said here about, you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, what did they know? What did they know concerning the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ?

What is this knowledge concerning the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that would have informed, at the very least informed, the Corinthians' understanding of this expression in the benediction?

Well, what are we told? You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

[24 : 28] These simple words encapsulate, if not exhaustively, certainly profoundly and revealingly, the grace of Jesus Christ. What do they tell us about grace?

Well, they point to the price of grace and to the purpose of grace. Certainly these two things are presented to us in this verse in chapter 8.

The price and the purpose of grace. Grace is free, but it's not cheap. Jesus Christ, we're told, was rich, and this speaks of his preexistent status as the Son of God in heaven, of his enjoyment of all the divine prerogatives.

It speaks also of the eternal and uninterrupted fellowship enjoyed within the three persons of the Godhead. The Son was rich in triune fellowship or communion.

He was rich, but we're told he became poor. And this, of course, speaks, as Paul does so more exhaustively in Philippians, it speaks of the incarnation of the eternal Son of God.

[25 : 36] It speaks of the incarnation in its totality, his humiliation, to use the theological language that is sometimes used. And this not only includes, but finds its ultimate expression at Calvary.

It is at Calvary that we find the eternal Son of God exposed to or experiencing his most abject poverty, to use the language or the picture employed here by Paul.

At Calvary, the one who was rich, deprived even of fellowship with his Father as he was made sin for us, to use language that Paul uses in this very letter.

The price of grace. But grace also wonderfully has a purpose because what does the verse say in chapter 8 and verse 9? Yes, Jesus, though he was rich, became poor.

But then it goes on to say, so that you, through his poverty, might become rich. He did this. He who was rich, he became poor.

[26 : 47] Poor even to the extent of dying on the cross. He became poor for you. He did this for you. He paid this price so that you might become rich.

Rich in all the benefits that flow from Christ's saving work on your behalf. This is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that Paul prays might be with the church.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. But then he also speaks of the love of God. The love of God, as already suggested, the order is the order of Christian experience.

The grace of Jesus Christ demonstrated most powerfully at Calvary, in turn, reveals to us the love of God the Father. How do we know that God loves us?

How do we know that God is love? We know because of Jesus. We know because of what God has done in and through Jesus. The love of God.

[27 : 56] Jesus, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, reveals the God who is love. And in touching on this matter, it's important to be clear that in the New Testament, God's love is not simply one aspect of his character.

It is the very heart, the essence of who God is. Indeed, hence the language of the Bible. God is love. And grace, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, is God's love incarnate.

God's love enfleshed. God's love, if you wish, in action. Grace is God's love in action. And it's through an appreciation of grace, or perhaps more accurately, through the experience of the grace of Christ, that we can know and discover the love of God.

And if we just follow this train of thought, we can say something further. To know or discover through grace the love of God is to know or experience God himself.

As we've just said, God is love. And so to know the love of God is to know God. And so when Paul here says, as he closes his letter, may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God be with you.

[29 : 17] And he speaks of the love of God. He's speaking of them having a greater appreciation of that love that found expression in the giving of Jesus Christ. Indeed, he's speaking of his desire that they would know God, the God who is love, and that they would know him ever more closely and ever more deeply and ever more richly.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. This expression, this final clause or expression in the benediction, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, as a stand-alone expression, could be understood in one of two ways.

It could be referring to the fellowship that the believer enjoys with the Holy Spirit. We know in the light of the rest of the teaching of the New Testament in particular concerning the experience of the believer with regard to the Holy Spirit, that the Holy Spirit indwells the believer.

And there is a very real sense in which the believer enjoys fellowship with the Holy Spirit. And it's possible that there could be a reference to that, or that could be what Paul has in mind when he speaks of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

But I think the other way in which it can be understood, and in the context, I think is much more likely to be what Paul has in mind, is the fellowship granted by the Holy Spirit.

[30 : 46] The fellowship that is enjoyed by believers within the body of Christ, one with another. And that this is the fellowship that Paul particularly has in mind. Both are true.

It is true that the believer enjoys fellowship with the Holy Spirit. It's certainly true that we enjoy fellowship with one another. What Paul has in mind, it's possible he has both things in mind.

But I think what he particularly has in mind is the second of those two possibilities. Especially when we think of the context of the letter. Paul is writing this letter. He's closing the letter that he's written to a fellowship in Corinth that is sadly characterized by divisions, very fractured, many unresolved problems that he's seeking to resolve or help to resolve through the letter.

We haven't had time to think about that this morning. And so in that context, it makes perfect sense to imagine that what Paul's great concern is, is that the believers in Corinth would experience the harmony, the unity given by, granted by, the Holy Spirit.

At the very heart of our Trinitarian blessing, if we want to call it that, is our place within the fellowship of God's people and our relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

[32 : 13] And to just pause for a moment on the significance of that, to despise the fellowship of God's people. Despise is a very strong word.

To be unenthusiastic about the fellowship of God's people is to be unenthusiastic about the blessing of God. What we mustn't do is we mustn't place these three blessings.

We want to think of them as three blessings here in the benediction. We mustn't place them, even unconsciously, in some kind of league table in terms of the order of importance.

I don't think any of you would suggest that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is more important than the love of God, or vice versa. You would say, well, you can't say that.

And of course, you can't say that. But it would be equally incoherent to imagine that the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is less important or precious than the grace of Jesus or the love of God.

[33 : 11] These are blessings that come together. They're all part of God's purpose for us, and it's not for us to pick in Jews and say, well, I quite like the love of God. I'll have a bit of that.

But the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and, oh, being with other Christians and, oh, that's just very messy. I'll just do my own thing. No, we can't do that. That is to despise the one who is giving us these gifts.

Notice in that regard the two telling words with which the benediction ends. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Be with you all. That Paul would so deliberately finish his letter with these two words, with you all. Even that last word. He could have just said, be with you.

And nothing would have been lost, perhaps, in terms of the meaning, the fundamental meaning. But he deliberately says, be with you all. Yes, even you Corinthians who are dismissive of me and who are seeking to undermine me and who won't listen to me.

[34 : 14] Even you Corinthians who are guilty of gross sin and I'm calling you to repentance. Yes, even you. Even you. I would have you know and experience the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the very fellowship that you are instrumental in seeking to attack and undermine.

Even you. I would have you experience this blessing from God. But then finally, we have a people blessed to bless.

A people blessed to bless. Just have a quick time check because there it still says it's ten to something. Well, it says ten to five, but anyway. A people blessed to bless. Now this is what we might call, as I introduced it, I suggested, this is what we might call and understand as the challenge of the benediction.

As we've already noticed in previous benedictions, we are not, as believers, to be passive in the matter of being blessed. We don't simply sit back and wait for God to bless us.

Blessing accompanies our trusting in God. It accompanies our following Christ. To just make fleeting reference to what we've seen before. But also, as here, we can identify our response to blessing.

[35 : 34] We are blessed in order that we might bless others. And we can identify two elements to this, or two things that we need to do as those who are blessed.

Firstly, we need to experience and enjoy God's blessing. If we think of the matter of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we've already noticed how this grace has as its purpose that we might become rich.

As we refer this benediction to what Paul says in chapter 8 and verse 9, that is the purpose of grace, that we might become rich. And when Paul speaks then in the benediction of this grace being with you, he is speaking of the believers discovering and appropriating and experiencing and enjoying all the manifold riches that accompany and flow from Christ's saving work.

And that is something we can spend eternity doing, experiencing and enjoying all that God has secured for us in and through the saving work of Christ.

Similarly, with regard to the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, we could, which each of these, consider how we are to experience and enjoy them. We're not going to do that now for reasons of time.

[36 : 57] But that's the first thing we need to do. We need to experience the blessing ourselves. It's intended for us. We'll let us experience it and enjoy it. But the second thing we need to do is that as we experience and enjoy God's blessing, we must bless others.

And in this regard, we can turn again to the matter of grace as illustrated in the verse in chapter 8, chapter 8 and verse 9.

We've read the passage, we've read the preceding verses, and in the light of that, I pose the question, in what context does Paul point the believers to the grace of Christ? It's a beautiful verse describing the grace of Christ, and all by itself, we can draw out so much from it.

But when does he say that? In what context does he say to the believers in Corinth, look at Jesus. Consider the grace of Jesus Christ. In what context does he do that?

Well, he does so in the very practical context, in the very mundane matter, if you wish, of encouraging the church in Corinth to complete their collection, their monetary collection, for the believers in Jerusalem.

[38 : 09] The believers in Jerusalem were in need, were in financial, material need. The believers in Corinth had the opportunity to contribute to that, and Paul is encouraging them to complete what they had begun.

And it is in that context, he says, look at Jesus. Consider the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so there we see that when in the benediction we're told, may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you, we're not simply to sit back and say, well, isn't it wonderful all that Jesus has done for me?

Isn't it wonderful all these blessings that are mine because of what Jesus has done? We're to say, well, having been so blessed, then it is my challenge and opportunity to bless others.

As I receive grace, so to act with grace in and for, or for others. We are to be like Jesus.

He became poor that we might become rich. And so we also, in far lesser measure, must be willing to become poor that others might become rich.

[39 : 17] We are the objects of the grace of Christ, and we are to show and extend that grace to others. We are granted the privilege of experiencing the love of God and of knowing God.

We are to show and demonstrate that love to others. We are blessed by the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Well, we are to extend that fellowship to others as we invite them to join with us in that God-given, and even, we might say, God-shaped fellowship.

Well, may it be so that as we listen to these words, today, next Sunday, and following Sundays, that as we do so, we would be able to do so with a measure of greater understanding as to what they mean, but also, perhaps very particularly, that we would receive them not only as nice words with which to lead, but as a challenge with which to go and to serve the one who so blesses us.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. We thank you that you are indeed a God who blesses. We thank you for the manifold ways in which you bless us, and we pray that as we more fully understand and appreciate and experience your blessing, so our response might be, our reasonable and grateful response might be to seek to bless others, to be useful in your service, to become poor, that others who know nothing of your grace might become rich as they discover it for themselves.

And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.