

2 Corinthians 13:11-14 *Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. ¹²Greet one another with a holy kiss. ¹³All God's people here send their greetings. ¹⁴May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

When someone brings one part of their life to an end and starts off on a new endeavor, it's commonplace to send them off with the greeting, "Good luck!" We use that same wish for someone who is about to engage in a sporting event, take part in a play or musical or start a new job. Maybe we're tempted to say the same thing to our confirmands today as they make their promises to be faithful to their God. "Good luck!" Have you ever stopped to think about what a strange wish this is? I could understand how we might say, "Good luck!" to the person buying chips in a casino or the person buying lottery tickets in the supermarket. But how strange that to a graduate or a confirmand or a couple on their wedding day or a person going into surgery we would say, "Good luck!" Is life just one big roulette wheel? Around and around she goes and where she stops nobody knows? Is life just about happenstance where things only happen by chance?

Can you imagine the Apostle Paul closing this important letter to the Corinthians with the words, "Good luck!"? To be sure, the Greek world and the people in Corinth grew up believing that the fates or luck were more powerful than their gods. But these were Christian people living in heathen Corinth who needed a final greeting that had meaning and weight, anchored in the truths of the Christian faith. They were dealing with factions in their church, false teachings, sexual immorality, lawsuits against fellow believers, people attacking the apostleship of Paul, some abusing their Christian freedoms and trampling on the faith of some of their weaker brothers and sisters. They had a tendency to split into factions easily rather than hold together in loving unity. Paul had written very harshly in his first letter addressing some of these difficult problems. He had announced earlier in this second letter that he was coming personally to deal sharply with those who were still unrepentant. He had warned and encouraged them through these two letters. How odd if he would have finished all of that and said, "Good luck," as if they were all on their own to figure this out and the outcome left to chance.

Instead, Paul knew that luck didn't have anything to do with these Christians being able to navigate through the difficult issues that come with being God's people in a sinful world. Way better than luck are the blessings our God chooses to bestow upon his people. The same is true today. We as God's people know that luck plays no part in anything. We have just celebrated that we have a God who sits high on heaven's throne and promises to control all things for the good of his people. These young people this morning are stepping forward to confess a unity with this triune God, with each other, and with you and me that we have already confessed. Today, we celebrate not luck in them keeping their promises and remaining connected to God above but God's blessings. We celebrate the blessings brought about by our Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. How wonderful that we are **Blessed—Not Lucky!**

As Paul brought his written thoughts to the Corinthians to a conclusion, he spoke this blessing: "*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*" You've heard this blessing many times. I like to close all my classes and meetings with this blessing. It reminds us every time we use it that luck plays no part in the blessings we enjoy as the people of God. This greeting reveals a God that is very personal to us, not some impersonal spiritual force in the universe. We are blessed to know the grace that God has shown to us in Jesus. God's grace is nothing less than amazing. It is God's grace, his undeserved love for us, that led Jesus to take on human flesh, to live among us and to fulfill God's law perfectly in our place. It was his grace that led him to give his life as a ransom, to sacrifice himself in our place and take the punishment of our sins for us. This beautiful grace says to each of us: "I am your Savior! My blood covers your sin. You are my blood-bought possession now and forever. I will always be at your side and lead you through this earthly life to eternal life. May you live each day in that beautiful grace!"

Then we are blessed with the love of God. We see that bountiful love of God every day not only in sending his Son to be our Savior, but in all the daily blessings he brings to us. He not only created us but he preserves us in all our needs. He opens his hands and satisfies the desires of everything living thing. He gives us every day: clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, spouse and children and all that we own. He's given us our eyes, ears and all our members, our mind and all our abilities. Every day we live on this earth we are blessed by God's bountiful love. Every day our God says to us: "I am your God and you are my child. I created you. Though you are a sinner and walk away from me, I will never walk away from you. I forgive you in Jesus and will care for you as your Father as long as you are in this world. Trust me and be mine every day. May you live each day in this bountiful love!"

Finally, we are blessed with the fellowship given to us by the Holy Spirit. As we talked about last week, it is the work of the Holy Spirit who brought us into fellowship with God. He called us through the Means of Grace to an intimate unity not only with each other but with the Triune God. It is the Holy Spirit who brought us here today and who helps us to know the beautiful grace of Jesus and the bountiful love of God. Through this blessed fellowship he says, "I am your God and you are mine. I have given you faith to trust in me. I will be your helper, comforter and teacher. I will be your strength, your life, and your power. May you live in that blessed fellowship every single day."

We are not lucky...we are blessed! It is understanding these blessings from God that allows us to live as God's people and follow Paul's encouragement when he says, "*Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. ¹²Greet one another with a holy kiss. ¹³All God's people here*

send their greetings.” Too often we take for granted the grace and love of God and the fellowship the Holy Spirit established for us. We want to rely on our own strength and power to find our righteousness before God and to stand firm on our faith in the midst of the chaos around us. We leave the safety of God’s fellowship to see how well we can do on our own. We let petty issues divide us and disrupt the unity God has established for us through the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, all around our country today we see the sad reality that peace on earth is not possible because of sin. In a world of sin, there can never be earthly peace. There will always be division, hatred, jealousy, rivalry, and selfishness. There may be temporary peace or even false peace. But on this earth there will never be real peace. Can you imagine if it were up to luck to whether or not we would make it through life? We would never have a chance.

Thank the Lord we aren’t lucky...we are blessed! The only one who can give true peace is the God of love and peace. The only true peace there is comes from the sacrifice Jesus made for us and knowing that we are safe and secure in his hands until we join him eternally in heaven. Until then, we enjoy the blessed unity and fellowship that the Holy Spirit has established for us with him and one another. We give praise to see these young men stepping forward to confess their faith today. We send them off not with a wish of Good Luck but with the certainty of God’s blessings. These next few years for our young people will not be easy. There will be many temptations they will face. There will be many desires Satan will use to lure them away from their Lord. They will be encouraged by many to rely on themselves and their own strength and powers. They will be urged to develop their own beliefs and follow their own hearts. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to stand firm by reminding them of the unity they shared with their fellow believers when he said, “*All God’s people here send their greetings.*” To the young men who are stepping forward to be confirmed today, I say the same. Know that as you go into high school and the next stage of your lives, the saints here will be praying for you. United in spirit, we are here to support you as you face those temptations that will bombard you and cause you to question your faith. I urge you to remember the fellowship you have through the Holy Spirit with your God and with those members of God’s church. The God of love and peace will be with you. This is our certainty and this is our hope.

What a comfort for us to know that our future is not in the hands of fate or luck! What an encouragement for us to know that our future is in the hands of a gracious, loving triune God who rescued us from our sin and promised he would walk with us and keep us safe through this earthly life until we join him in heaven. It is into the hands of this God that we commit these 4 young men today, confident that he will work through Word and Sacrament to keep them strong in their faith and to stand firm in the promises they make today throughout their lives. To you we say—not Good luck, but God’s blessings! Thank the Lord we are Blessed...Not Lucky! Amen.