Anointed and Appointed

Psalm 133; Isaiah 61:1-3 Kimby Young

John 12:1-8 July 2, 2017

Throughout the Bible, anointing someone with oil was common and symbolic. A person would be anointed for one of several very specific reasons.

A person could be anointed if that person was a priest – as in the Psalm for today – which describes the priest Aaron, or a person in the line of Aaron – being anointed with oil – flowing down the beard and over the body. It was a mark of holiness and affirmation – being chosen as a servant of God to do God’s will. This abundance of oil poured over someone’s head symbolized the abundance of God’s Spirit, poured out, over and into this person. It was a special blessing for a special calling. It is reminiscent of the laying on of hands as we ordain an elder or deacon or minister in our church today. It was recognition that this person has gifts given by God to be shared for the good of the people.

Similarly a person might be anointed as king or ruler – like David or a descendent of David. This too was a mark of honor and leadership – recognizing God’s blessing and authority poured out over this person, asking for God’s affirmation of this leader to serve God and serve the people of God.

In an entirely different way oil might be used for healing. Oil could be poured over a wound – much like we would use an antiseptic or an antibiotic or an ointment or cream. In this case, again the oil marked the presence and the blessing of God, but in this case to bring about healing and to restore wholeness. The fragrance of the oil would be used as incense in worship to remind people of forgiveness and spiritual personal healing, and to call upon God to bring that healing for a person or a nation or to a difficult situation. Psalm 23 speaks of the shepherd anointing the head with oil – to soothe or heal wounds, to bless and bathe. The oil brought comfort and restoration. In a related way oil could be used for cleansing in place of soap or water, or in addition to water. Thus oil came to be used in baptism in the early church and is still used today – to mark cleansing from sin, healing from pain, forgiveness and restoration. Again, it represents the presence of God, the Spirit of God which covers, comforts, cleanses and restores.

And finally oil could be used in burial – to anoint a body – again reminding everyone by its scent of the presence of God. It served a practical purpose in transforming odors of decay, but even more it was symbolism of God’s blessing, God’s presence, God’s gift of transformation and ultimately of God’s complete healing through the experience of death and resurrection.

So today when we use anointing oil – we are recognizing all those gifts of God – healing and forgiveness, restoration and transformation, holiness and blessing, and consecration by God to a specific calling.

The scripture for today from Isaiah speaks of the anointing of God’s Spirit to bring good news, to heal and to transform, to proclaim God’s presence and to bring God’s peace. It is scripture used by Jesus in Nazareth to declare his public ministry, and a scripture picked up by disciples in the early church to express our call to follow Jesus in this way of love.

Today, in a few minutes, we will experience an anointing. We will use oil to express holiness and consecration for a purpose, to ask for healing and strength for the tasks God calls us to do, and to remember God’s presence here and wherever we go in the world. I decided to do this today because we are commissioning our youth to go out into the world to serve God as they go on their mission trip. We want them to remember God’s presence. We want them to remember our support and blessing. We want them to remember that they are called and gifted to do the tasks before them. We want them to remember that they are chosen and loved by God. Much like the chosen ones in the Bible – the prophets and priests – they serve God. They represent God in the world and we know that they will serve God well. We want to strengthen them for the journey. We are proud of them and we will pray for them as they travel and serve. They will be surrounded by God’s grace on this trip and as they serve.

In our protestant tradition we call this the priesthood of all believers. We believe every single one of us is called to represent God in the world. And we believe God gives us gifts, in fact, gives us everything we need to accomplish miracles – just like Jesus.

The more I thought about this universal calling – I realized that not only do our young people need to be anointed as they go out into the world to serve – all of us need to remember that we are anointed. All of us need to remember that we are called and gifted to serve God in the world wherever we go. When you go to work – you need to know God is with you and you have love to share. When you meet people in your neighborhood or in the ball parks or the store, you have a message of hope and healing through God’s grace. When you see a need – you are the priest called to connect people to God, you are the one set apart to bring wholeness and love. All of us need to be reminded to open ourselves to God’s presence and to point the way to God wherever we find ourselves in the world.

So in a moment we will each have the opportunity to be anointed with oil. We will each have the chance to anoint someone else. We will each be invited to renewal and transformation. We will all be blessed in the presence of God as we receive the gifts of God. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. And then as we go out into the world – remember that you are anointed by God to serve. Take up that task and be a blessing to others as you have been blessed by God.

Remember that you are holy, and be made whole by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.