

The Fourth Sunday in Lent + March 26, 2017

This is the oil of chrism.

The oil is poured for everyone to see.

This oil is blessed by the Bishop and it is used at baptism.

Once a person emerges from the water, we pray for the Holy Spirit to sustain them and then the chrism is poured upon their heads and spread across their brow and face as these words are spoken: "Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the Cross of Christ forever."

You may have noticed a rather generous use of the oil. There's good precedence for the practice. Ambrose, the 4th century bishop of Milan advised using more than a mere dab of oil. In his church, they practiced a slathering of oil so that the oil would run down one's face just as the oil ran down upon the beard of Aaron and ran down Aaron's collar and over the collar of his robes.

Aaron was anointed a priest. So were priests. And so were kings. Solomon was anointed king. Saul was anointed king. David was anointed king.

God instructs Samuel to visit Jesse and sons and to bring a horn of oil to anoint the one whom God had chosen to be king.

Everyone was surprised, I'm sure, to learn that God did not choose the sons with great stature or dazzling appearance but David, the youngest and the smallest who was out tending the sheep. Samuel pours oil on his head of David who would become a great king. At his anointing, he was infused with God's Spirit.

Queens and kings are anointed still in some places, most notably the United Kingdom.

Perhaps you've seen the new television series *The Crown*. It chronicles the life of Queen Elizabeth II from the years before the world war until the present time. One of the more powerful episodes is the one dramatizing her coronation. You can imagine the pageantry and all the pomp and circumstance surrounding such an auspicious event and what we learn is that the most important part of the entire coronation is the anointing. A canopy is brought in and placed over the soon to be queen. The Archbishop of Canterbury uses the holy oil to touch her hands, her breast, and her forehead. He seems to be trembling, struck with awe or a sense of being overwhelmed. She remembers a moment in her childhood when her father was about to become the king. He explains to his young daughter that the anointing is indeed the most important part for in receiving the holy oil he would be infused with the power of the divine.

In this moment when she is to be anointed as queen, her face is so revealing. Like the archbishop she seems struck with awe, even a bit shaken or frightened. I wonder if she felt a sense of privilege in being set apart as the royal monarch. Did she feel a sense of responsibility? Was it a tremendous joy and blessing or did it come to her as something of a burden? I suspect all these feelings were taking place at the same time.

How does it make you feel to know that you've been touched and anointed by God?

Does it bring you great joy? Do you sometimes feel as though it is a burden to bear Christ to the world? Are you awestruck in knowing that you've been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever?

Have you ever wondered to yourself, "Me? Really? God uses me?"

I'll never forget once running into an old acquaintance at the hospital. I was wearing a clerical collar and she looked at me with a demeanor of shock and asked, "Are *you* a pastor?" I replied, "I'm just as surprised as you are!"

Does it surprise you to know that you've been set apart to do the work of God in your daily lives?

I think the man born blind was surprised that he was healed. The people surrounding him were surprised too. Jesus anointed him, not with oil but with mud from the ground. He spread mud over his eyes and told him to wash in the pool of Siloam.

People are shocked and surprised and don't really know what to do with all of this. All he can say is that Jesus touched him and now he sees.

We, too, are washed and anointed at the pool of Siloam.

Here the preacher points to the font and stirs the waters.

We are touched by Jesus and washed by Jesus and we begin to see things differently. We are given new sight and new vision and a new way to live in the world.

We begin a life-long journey of seeing life and the world differently than we had before. We learn, over a lifetime, to see as God sees.

Jesse and Samuel and David's brothers were surprised by God's choice of David and we learn from that story that God sees the heart, beneath and beyond outward appearances.

Neighbors and Pharisees balk at the healing of the blind man, castigated as a beggar and an outsider and seen as a sinner. But Jesus chooses him to reveal God's glory.

I think we spend our entire baptismal journey learning to see how God sees and maybe that must always include first seeing ourselves the way God sees us – forgiven, healed, loved, made new for when you were washed and anointed you were joined to the Anointed One who is Jesus Christ.

What a wondrous thing to be anointed with the oil of gladness! And when it ever feels burdensome or confusing or a difficult journey, remember that the one who set you apart for this holy business has given you power to carry it out and it is nothing less than the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.