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Lent 5 C – April 3, 2022

“OIL”

Read: Luke 10: 25 - 37/ Memorize Luke 10: 33 – 34

What’s your relationship to God? If you are a follower of Jesus, you are a child of God. If you got baptized here you were even anointed with oil and these words were spoken: “You are a child of God, sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.” There is no question about to whom you belong or your relationship. One the perks we get is that God says when we pray to Him, He’ll listen and answer.

In James 5 we hear some advice: “Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord Jesus.” He goes on to say “that the prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.”

I suspect that you have experience powerful and effective prayer, but I also know you may have had the opposite, where you felt your prayer was not answered. The former we understand. The later sometimes causes us difficulty. Let me affirm: God always answers prayer. We’ll talk more about that in a moment.

One thing we want to remember. God is not a vending machine who dispenses solutions to our prayers. Prayer is our way to communicate with God and He with us. To have a down to earth, heart to heart talk with our Father. There is nothing too trivial we can bring Him or anything too heavy that we ought not to bring to Him.

When people say they don’t know how to pray, I always ask if they can talk to another person. When they say, “Yes,” I respond, “Then you know how to pray.” Prayer is talking with God. There are no special words or phrases you need to have to pray to God.

Jill has a great line in one of her prayers, “Help us for just a few moments today to embrace the gift of prayer, of talking honestly with you, pouring out our hearts in praise and pain. In your mercy, hear our prayers. Amen.”

God hears our prayers and responds to all of them. Sometimes His answer is yes. He will heal us, help us to extricate ourselves from a situation. He will strengthen us or direct us. At other times He tells us no. What we’re asking for, He knows is not the best for us. It may even hurt or harm. The direction we have chosen will mislead us.

Finally, God’s answer to prayer sometimes is not yet. Waiting is sometimes the best answer for a prayer for it challenges us to trust God. It tells us we’re not ready for whatever it is we’re asking for. That is perhaps the most difficult answer in our world of instant answers, think Google, texts and emails.

God wants us to ask, but also reminds us of the prayer of the faithful. Jesus gives us the formula: “Thy will be done.” Prayer helps to bring us into alignment with God’s will. When we do that we commend ourselves and all our heart and desires to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. When we approach it in that way we will always find it effective because we will come to the acceptance that God’s will is most important.

Oil was used in many ways in the Bible. Along with wine, it was used as a healing salve. We hear about that in the story of the Good Samaritan. A man was doing a foolish thing, traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho on his own. No one should travel it alone, but he did.

He was mugged, beaten and left to die. Others came upon him and passed him by. They didn’t want to risk their lives. They didn’t want to get their hands dirty. One man was different. He got physically involved. He went to the man; poured wine and oil to tend his wounds; then took him to a place of safety and arranged for his care.

Jesus told this story to a lawyer who Luke tells us, “wanted to justify himself.” As he heard about the compassion this Samaritan had, he had no choice when Jesus asked him, “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” And his unequivocal answer was: “The one who showed him mercy.”

There are a lot of people who need our mercy. Often I hear people talk about wanting to be useful. We have faced this issue about helping Ukraine. We can and are praying for them, but we want our prayer to lead us to being useful. As I hear about millions upon millions of dollars being donated I know there is a danger. Some will take advantage of this.

We want to make sure those who receive the funds we give are good stewards. That's one of the reasons that Lutheran World Relief was recommended for our contributions. There will be no question about whether they will be used properly because the people who supervise those funds have at their heart, the desire to be the hands and feet of Jesus. In partnership, through our financial gifts we join our hands and feet to theirs to serve Jesus. Even though we are not there in person, our agents help us to fulfill the promise of God that He will take care of them.

So what does oil have to do with all of that? When we were baptized, when significant events happen in our lives, the church has services that involve placing oil on us, frequently on the forehead, as a sign that we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ.

When the waters of baptism flow over us and the oil is placed on our foreheads, we become part of the priesthood of all believers. It was interesting to hear Pastor Bode respond to how our members lived out that priesthood. I've talked about it before but I think it's really important that we hold that up. That we are a people of prayer.

All the praying was done by people in our congregation rather than me. You are the ministers of this congregation and part of that ministry is a ministry of prayer. But our ministry does not stop at prayer. Each time we serve God, we are taking that consecration that happened in our baptisms and putting it into action.

When our actions flow out of our focus on Jesus we are making sacred ground all around us. You don't have to be a pastor to do that. As Jill says, "Right focus equals holy wisdom.

As Lutherans we talk about vocation. It is your calling into ministry. Some do it in schools, others do it in hospitals or at a fire. Those are not the only ways. Caring for family, neighbors, strangers and the needy, all make us and our time and talents useful because they reveal and share our love for Jesus.

Luther reminds us that there is no job too menial, no job insignificant, when we do it to the Glory of God. Everything we do, every dollar we offer, every prayer we speak, is done to fulfill the good order that God wants us to bring to this world.

Every decision we make is part of that vocation. That baptism consecration informs us as we decide how we should give. When we offer our gifts to God first; then set our goals for our use of the rest of His blessings we have kept the focus on Jesus?

What about our time? Can we consecrate that to the Lord? As we gather with family can we make that a time of consecration, a place where we make it sacred as we gather together? There may not be any oil involved with it. It may simply be that we pay attention to people, who need it. It may be that we look out for our neighbor, write a card, especially when we know that they are sad so that we can anoint them with the oil of gladness.

May we ask God to help us make all our relationships sacred, so that they may be cherished. We all need to hear the Good News that Jesus has loved us, given Himself for us and will one day come to take us home to be with Him.

Oil reminds us that we are the anointed of God, the chosen. As Jill reminds us, **“The priesthood of all believers calls us to be used and useful for the sake of God’s good plan for the world.”** When we do that we are the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

Question is still to be determined.