

“Anointing” Sermon-Lent 4A, 4/3/2011 Fr. Hugh. St.
George. Text: John 9:1-38; 1 Sam.16:1-13; Psalm 23;

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I am sure that all of us here consider ourselves to be
decent law abiding citizens.

However, there are some interesting, indeed peculiar old
laws, some of which are still on the statutes.

For example in England there is an old law that states
that, “All English males over the age of 14 are to carry
out two hours of longbow practice a week, supervised by
the local clergy.” That could be fun.

However there is also a law that states, “You may not
shoot a Welsh person with a longbow, on Sunday, inside
the Cathedral Close.” This is probably not a great comfort
to a Welsh person on Monday in the supermarket.

Another British law states that “A bed may not be hung out of a window.” I can’t help wondering exactly who is hanging beds out of the window, and if that is also a problem here in the Villages.

And I don’t think this one would be easy to enforce: “It is illegal for a lady to eat chocolates on a public conveyance.”

However, bizarre laws are not limited to old England. Here in the USA we have our share of peculiar long standing laws on the books such as:

In Kansas it is illegal to carry bees in your hat while on city streets.

In Arizona it is illegal to permit your donkey to sleep in a bathtub.

In Chicago it is illegal to eat in an establishment that is on fire. Exactly why you would want to eat in an establishment that is on fire is a mystery to me.

In California it is illegal to ride a bicycle in a swimming pool.

Apparently that is not illegal in Florida, so you're in luck.

However, please be advised that in Florida unmarried women who parachute on Sunday are subject to arrest. So, ladies, it's just as well you chose to come to church this morning, instead of jumping out of a plane.

And also, and I know ignorance of the law is no defense, but I only just learned that here in the USA, in West Virginia, there is a law on the books that states: "No member of the clergy is allowed to tell jokes or humorous stories from the pulpit during a church service." Oh well!

In my final year at seminary I spent the summer vacation serving in a parish in South Carolina.

I was intrigued to find two groups of people in the parish who were dedicated to praying for the sick.

One group was made up of five men, all of whom were doctors. They would meet at the church one evening a week and pick one or two of their patients and go out together, just to visit them and pray with them.

In a period when many people justifiably feel that they don't get enough time to talk with their doctor, I thought that was a wonderful ministry.

I also met a group of church women who used to meet every Wednesday evening to pray for the sick.

Khara and I joined their group one evening.

They told us about a friend who they had been praying for regularly.

This friend had cancer and she had not responded favorably to the treatment and now spent most of her time in bed.

These ladies had read in the Bible about anointing people who need healing, with oil, and praying for them.

They had never seen this done and they didn't know how they were supposed to go about it, but one of them suggested that it would be worth a try. They all agreed, "Hey. What have we got to lose?"

So they went by the local grocery store, the Piggly Wiggly, no less, and bought a bottle of olive oil and together they drove over to their friend's house.

They didn't know exactly what they were going to do when they got there, or how much oil they were supposed to use.

They got to the house and their friend was in bed. One of them opened the bottle and, saying a prayer, she started to pour oil on her friend's head, looked up and asked:

“how much more oil should I use?”

Another lady said, “I don't know.”

Another said, “well maybe a bit more.”

And again: “Do you think that's enough?”

“I don't know, maybe a bit more.”

And she kept pouring and praying – and pouring.

The oil ran over her head and down the side of her face.

There was oil everywhere, on her face, in her hair, on her pillow, on the sheets, everywhere. And she kept on pouring until she had emptied out the entire bottle.

A few seconds passed and she got up. Now it is quite possible that she suddenly felt an overwhelming desire to take a shower. But it worked. Starting from that very evening, she had a remarkable recovery.

As we said in the 23rd Psalm:

“Thou hast anointed my head with oil, and my cup runneth over.”

In Bible times anointing with oil was an important, significant custom. Being anointed with oil was often used as a special welcome for honored guests.

Kings were anointed as part of the process of coronation. I don't imagine that William and Kate will be doused in oil at the Royal Wedding, but who knows?

Fathers passed on a blessing by anointing their sons. Still today countless men and women privately hope to receive their parents' blessing.

Think how important it might be to say a blessing for your son or daughter, just to communicate your affirmation, approval and unending good wishes.

Of course, you might want to hold back on the oil, if only so your children don't promptly drive you to a psychiatrist.

God our Father wants to bless us all with the anointing, with the outpouring of His Holy Spirit and to signal us out as people with a God-given sense of purpose in life.

This was precisely the case when the prophet Samuel went to anoint the young boy David as the next king of Israel. Remember that David was the youngest and the smallest and logically the least likely candidate of all his brothers.

Now, being five foot seven myself, I think there's a very important Bible verse in there, which everyone should memorize: "God does not judge a man by his height."

Then we are told that the prophet Samuel took the oil and anointed David, and from that day the Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power.

Jesus said about himself: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me.” In fact his very name the ‘Christ’, means ‘The Anointed One’.

Think about this - It’s important to understand that when the Son of God took on human form He intentionally divested Himself of His infinite spiritual power.

He deliberately accepted the limitations of being human, so as to identify completely with us.

Then, in order for Him to do His life’s work it was necessary that, as a human being, He was anointed and filled with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus, as a man, became anointed and filled with the Holy Spirit, so that we, men and women, could also be anointed and filled with the Holy Spirit.

Being anointed is an outward visible sign of the inward invisible blessing of the Holy Spirit.

Think of the gospel story we just heard of Jesus healing the blind man. Can you imagine this man, blind since his birth, getting up that morning, with no idea that this day was going to be any different from every other ordinary day, with nothing for him to do, but beg for enough to eat?

And what was about to happen to him would be a revelation to him, and to everyone who witnessed it that day, and to the people who would hear about it later, including us today.

Jesus demonstrated His faith in His Father's love and the healing power of the Holy Spirit, working through Him. He expressed His love in a very physical way.

People often avoid human contact, and sometimes are afraid to touch the sick or wounded - the very people who need it most. That's one of the things that makes nurses so great, is that they touch their patients and make real contact with the people they're caring for.

Jesus knew how important it was for that man to have that real contact, so that he would actually be able to feel the loving touch of God.

Jesus improvised and made an ointment out of mud, and with His fingers gently spread it over the man's eyes. Notice the similarity between the word 'ointment' and the word 'anointing.'

Through this outer, physical application of a simple ointment, Jesus gave him the inner healing anointing of His Holy Spirit. Then He told the man to go to the pool and wash, which he did.

His eyes immediately opened and he could see.

Then he said three very simple, yet very powerful words:

“Lord, I believe.”

Jesus’ healing ministry and the anointing of His Holy Spirit are every bit as important today as they were 2000 years ago.

Every Wednesday here at St. George, there is a healing service where we seek God’s healing touch; We have prayers and anointing with oil.

There are several people in our congregation who would gladly tell you what God has done for them, or for someone they prayed for.

(- 10:00 service -) Also every Sunday we offer Holy Unction, during Communion, for anyone who wants to come for a special healing blessing, whether it's for yourself, or for someone you love.

At times we may feel tired and exhausted, or we may feel sick, or depressed. We may feel hopeless or helpless.

But we can always call on the power of God, and bring to mind the truth that the anointing power of the Holy Spirit is available to heal us, to help us and to strengthen us.

Indeed God wants us to pray and to draw on the power of the Holy Spirit, because when we do so, we are trusting in Him, not just in our selves alone.

The anointing of God's Spirit breathes new life and energy into our tired and aching bodies.

The anointing of God's Spirit breathes new life into our hearts and minds.

Jesus said that He expected His followers to also pray for healing. And He sent His Holy Spirit to help and strengthen anyone who believes.

Throughout the centuries believers have initiated healings through praying with faith.

Jesus said: “Anyone who has Faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in My name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.”

But, do we ask with Faith?

Or, do we pay lip service to the power of prayer, but fail to ask with positive Faith in the outcome; or perhaps just don't ask at all, for fear that it's not going to work anyway, so what's the point?

But a person who doesn't pray with faith doesn't take advantage of the available power of God.

Something happens when we pray with Faith.

We can offer God's healing touch through praying for one another. When, with faith, we ask for His healing touch, and maybe just hold someone's hand, or put our arm around their shoulder, we pass God's spiritual love and power on to the person we are praying for.

There is a change in the air these days.

More people are hungry to really know God and to actually experience His healing power.

Through the Holy Spirit people are transformed spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically.

Let us be increasingly open to the infinite possibilities of the all-loving, all-powerful God at work among us.