

## Sermon for October 16, 2011.

May only the truth be spoken, and only the truth be heard,  
This I pray in Jesus' name.

This morning, as you can see, I have in my hands two slender jars. Each jar contains some holy oil that we will be using during our services today. Each jar contains a distinct oil. Their two names are *chrism* and *unction*. We will be using these holy oils at our services for two reasons:

- At 8 am, we will be using *unction* for the ministry of healing;
- and at 10:15 am we will be using *chrism* for baptism and *unction* for healing.

You see, the Anglican Church throughout the world uses two distinct oils in its liturgical practice. Both are the best quality olive oil, and this is how you can tell them apart:

- *unction* is lighter in colour,
- and *chrism* is darker and made fragrant with perfume.

Anointing with oil has many religious uses in the Old Testament, late Judaism, primitive Christianity, and the early church. The practice of anointing took place at:

- the coronation of kings
- the ordination of a priest
- the installation of a prophet
- the consecration of objects of cult
- the care of wounds
- the healing the sick and
- the embalming of a body.

In the ancient mediterranean world, oil was used for cooking and eating. It provided illumination for lamps. It was a cleansing substance in bathing similar to soap today. Oil was also used as a cosmetic.

*Chrism*, the oil we use for baptism, is a kind of sacred perfume, rich in symbolism—at baptism we are conformed to Christ, the anointed one, and become Christians (anointed ones).

Oil was also used as a healing medicine. The oil for this purpose is called *unction*. For example, in the story of the good Samaritan, we are told that the Samaritan went to the man who had been stripped, beaten and left half dead on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho, and bandaged his wounds, having first poured oil and wine on them.

There are two passages in the new testament that have to do with the religious use of oil in anointing the sick:

In Matthew 9, verse 35 we learn of the apostles ministry of healing:

“And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity.”

Jesus entrusted this healing ministry to the twelve:

“and he called to his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease  
And every infirmity.”

The Gospel of Mark is unique in its mention of *anointing*:

“and they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them.”

In the Epistle of James, chapter 5, verses 13-16 we read:

“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; and the prayer of the faith will save the sick, and the lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.”

In the Letter of James, the subject of the anointing is *a complete sick person*, a psychosomatic unity, and the expected result is a restoration of the whole person.

The earliest text relating unmistakably to the anointing of the sick is the blessing of oil found in the apostolic tradition of Hippolytus of Rome around 215 CE. The oil was presented by the faithful. The blessing took place during the eucharist conducted by the bishop. The blessing recalled the use of oil in salvation history (anointing of kings, priests, and prophets) and invokes the power of God upon the oils.

We continue this early tradition in the Anglican Diocese of Toronto when, each holy week, Archbishop Colin Johnson consecrates these holy oils to be used in every parish in our diocese for a year. Thus, these two containers of consecrated oil are for our use here at St Leonard's:

- *chrism*, for the sacrament of baptism and
- *unction*, for the ministry of healing.

At this service this morning, you have the opportunity at the time of communion to be anointed with *unction* and to receive the benefit of *prayers for healing and restoration to wholeness of body, mind and spirit* for yourself or for someone who you bring before God at the time.

May God bless us in this true act of faith.

Amen.