

Chrism Eucharist 2015



In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

So here are some of the things I think about when I think about the sacred oils.

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God;
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed...*

These lines of Gerard Manley Hopkins are the first thing I think about. And the oil in the vessels, the ooze of oil crushed, one of the richest materials known in the Bible's time, but in the olive it's no use, the olive must be crushed.

And thinking of this I think of you and of your ministry, and the cost of your ministry to you, of being there for people, and open to people, and facing the pain and injustice of the world with your people, and so I think of these oils and I think of you crushed, and of the crushed people of Palestine from where these oils came, and of the wonder of the world God loves so much and yet it's broken, and of your choice to give your lives, to stand in the place where your heart is bruised and crushed.

And I think of a guy I knew in my last Diocese, he is a farmer, his family has farmed the land there since the thirteenth century, he is a gentleman farmer and a Deputy Lieutenant but Jesus had captured his heart and so he got ordained as a self-supporting minister and each week he travels down the way to Stevenage and he serves the people of Stevenage in their poverty and their brokenness and worships with them each week and visits and loves them, he's over 70 now, and he serves as curate there to a vicar who is a socialist and a union man, and between them in their diversity and their unity they speak of the Kingdom for the poor, and they spend their life so it shouts with the Gospel, anyway this guy's name is Teddy, and thinking of Teddy whom I know I think of you whom I'm coming to know.

Then I think about the Bible, about the scriptures we heard.

So in the epistle I remember that the God who said "Let light shine out of darkness" has shone in our dark hearts. And that we're always carrying in the body the death of Jesus. And that it's a kingdom conferred on the little ones.

And I long for and pray for a bigger church that makes a bigger difference, more people knowing Jesus, more justice in the world, and as I slowly come to know you, I see it coming to be, I see what you can do in every place to work with the Spirit of God so that our dark world may indeed be transformed, by this Church holding the most precious treasure in clay jars, the light of Christ shining through our brokenness and our cracked glory.

And then I think of a licensing when I was a curate in Newcastle, an inner-city parish, the church was packed and it felt very good and we all felt strong but then a stone was thrown against the window and I thought, "we're not very strong without God, there are not many of us here". But we sang confidently nonetheless, because we were not without God.

So I think of ministry and the spending of lives, and I think of you and I think of our God who spoke this word of hope.

And then I think of these three vessels of oil.

So I think of **the oil for the anointing of the sick and dying.**

I think of distributing olive oil to Christians in Body Shop bottles in my parishes, working class parishes, in a furniture town, and in an overspill town. So that our people could take them home and use them informally to pray for the sick. I think of these believers and what John Wimber said when he was told that his teaching was too basic, all milk and no meat, he said "The meat is on the street". And of St John when he said that those who do God's will shall know the doctrine¹.

I used to say to our ministry teams that the only qualification was that they should know God and like people. Know God a bit, I said, and like people a lot.

One of the team in our church near Southampton was called Mike, he was a rough man, I've spoken of him before to some of you, a musician and a pastor, a rough man crippled with arthritis and anger, but people would invite him into their homes when he visited them and when he prayed in church he would always say "Thank you Lord for life. It's so good to be alive".

Anyway he died quite suddenly, of a heart attack, and I went to the hospital in the middle of the night with my sacred oil, to pray with his family and to pray with his body and to say goodbye, to anoint his body for burial.

I think of him now free from all pain. And what sort of a church we might be if all the people of God, all who know God a bit and like people a lot, might be

¹ John 7.17

praying for the sick and seeing God bring healing, not all the time, of course not, but still if you don't do it you never see it. A bigger church full of those who will one day be healed, bringing healing in the meantime to those around them, doing it so they might see it, I think of that.

And then I think of **the oil for the signing with the cross at baptism.**

I think of my niece and her partner, both women, and their firstborn child. They had a civil partnership and then they had a baby. Having a baby made them think again about things and they wanted to know God and to have their child blessed, and they went to their local church, it was a Church of England church and they were warmly welcomed and it was my privilege to baptise the boy there and anoint him, and the parish laid on a great spread afterwards. And then they moved north and the local church of England church would not welcome them because they were gay and unashamed, so they went elsewhere and it was the local Roman Catholic church that welcomed them and there they are still, living out the promise of that anointing in the growing life of their sons, God not leaving them without a welcome in His body.

And then I think of **the oil of chrism.**

I think of a Confirmation a couple of weeks ago in Wigan Parish Church, with Bishop Cyril, a huge Confirmation with lots and lots of candidates, the church heaving with people, and I was confirming with the left hand and anointing with the right and there were so many, no matter how much we tried to dry my hand with a cloth I got more oil on me than on the candidates, it was running under my sleeve and to my elbow, running like the oil on Aaron in the psalm², no matter how much blessing you try to give, more flows on you in return, the gift of ministry to the minister, messy church, liquid church, fragrant church, runny church.

These are some of the things I think about when I think about the sacred oils.

And I think too of what we can do when we're afraid, there are not very many of us here, so easy to be afraid when fear comes like a stone against the window. So easy to take oil and use it to cool and harden or to heat and hate.

So easy then to turn away from healing and welcoming and blessing and to go for lubricating oil, to become technicians of the machine of the church, making things run smoothly, dodging the truth, living in a dream and in a fog, letting people's disagreements slip past each other, no friction, no warmth, a cold slick machine, we should say no to that, that's not what we're for, there's a new commandment.

² Psalm 133

So easy too to turn away from healing and welcoming and blessing and to go for boiling oil, taking this rich truth and using it to hurt others, defensive, pouring out anger so as to wound, no communication, no love, a hot furious righteousness, let's say no to that too, that's not what we're for, there's a new commandment.

And so again I think of us, God's ministers here, baptised, authorised, ordained. Surprised, broken, little ones. Responding to the extraordinary call to take this richness and to use it for healing, welcoming and blessing. Promising once again today to be devoted. Promising once again to be filled with zeal for his house. Witnessing to life beyond all disappointment. Committing ourselves today.

And at the end I think of Jesus. Jesus who it says in Hebrews³ was "anointed with the oil of gladness beyond his companions". Gladness, exultant joy, ἀγαλλίασις, the joy of John the Baptist in the womb in Luke 1, the joy of the disciples in Acts 2, eating together with glad and sincere hearts. That was his mark.

Jesus, who this week we remember heavy laden and crucified, who was a man of sorrows but who never preached sorrow, because with him the watchword was always "do not be afraid". At the end I think of him.

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³ Hebrews 1:9

Scripture passages for the Chrism Eucharist:

2 Corinthians 3

17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 4

1 Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. 2 We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God. 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. 6 For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

7 But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. 11 For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. 12 So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Luke 22

24 A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. 25 But he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. 26 But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. 27 For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

28 "You are those who have stood by me in my trials; 29 and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, 30 so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.