

Anointed to Follow in the Footsteps of Jesus

Bishop Monnot's Sermon from Chrism Mass 2026

Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. And we heard the scripture that Jesus read there in the synagogue at Nazareth, we just heard that in our first reading this morning from Isaiah. "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn in Zion, to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit." And we, we followers of Jesus, we believe that God did indeed anoint Jesus to do all that. And Jesus lived his life in accordance with that anointing and the world, and its systems of power and domination, simply couldn't stand it. And so they killed him.

So we are gathered here today for Chrism Mass. Chrism is one of the kinds of oil that The Episcopal Church uses in our liturgies. And it is always blessed by a bishop and specifically, chrism is used by priests in the sacrament of baptism to mark the sign of the cross on the forehead of the newly baptized person. Now, just as a quick aside, okay, there is one other kind of oil that is frequently used in The Episcopal Church also, and that's called unction, sometimes called oil of the sick. Unction can be blessed by a priest, usually during a healing service, and using unction with healing prayers is one of the seven sacraments of the church. Now, in the past, it was common practice to bless both oils at the same time. Today we are just blessing chrism, since that's the one that requires a bishop to do it.

So that's what we're doing today. And as I said, the chrism that we bless here today will be used by priests in the sacrament of baptism across the diocese, along with the words "you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own forever." And with that quick sign of the cross in chrism on the foreheads of those who are baptized, they are anointed as an integral part of the body of Christ to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. That is kind of a big deal. And guess what? All of us here who are baptized Christians are also anointed in that same way. An integral part of the body of Christ called to follow in Jesus's footsteps. And those footsteps, remember, good news to the oppressed, right? And so on. From Isaiah. I think that those can be summarized fairly easily with some of the words from our baptismal covenant: "Will you strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being? I will, with God's help."

Okay, so striving for justice and peace and respecting the dignity of every human being, these are big things, right? And the way we go about doing this work, it will vary from person to person as God calls and equips each of us as unique individuals the way we live out our baptismal anointing into the body of Christ is unique. The overall purpose, though right, is the same: justice, peace and dignity for everyone. Good news to the oppressed. The year of the Lord's favor.

But the challenge is that even as we are citizens of the Kingdom of God and members of the Body of Christ, we also live here in this world. And I'm talking about here now. Iowa 2026. This place now and not unlike ancient Israel, the secular authorities of the world around us are generally more interested in power and domination than they are in justice and peace. Right? We are seeing that at this moment as the bombs are dropping in Iran, as six American service people have been killed, and how many Iranians, including students at a girls school? This is the world we live in. And in fact, we've seen in recent weeks and months that those in authority will sometimes respond to calls for justice and peace and, they will respond violently to those calls. We've seen that. I've seen the videos, and they will trample the dignity of every human being.

And what that means, what that means is that this whole baptism thing, right, this whole anointing thing, this following Jesus thing, is not something to undertake lightly. It's not like in earlier generations when, being a good Christian was essentially equated, believed to be in lockstep with being a good citizen. Right? Those were seen as the same thing. These days, Christians have to think carefully about whether what we do is in the service of justice and peace, or in the service of the appearance of peace through oppression that squashes dissent. We have to ask ourselves if the dignity of every human being, every child of God, is being upheld, and if not, we have to ask why and work for change. And that's not easy. And it could be dangerous.

So even before the Roman authorities killed Jesus on the cross, the crowd in his hometown in Nazareth became enraged and tried to throw him off a cliff. All he was doing was telling them the truth. But that's the kind of thing that can happen when you upset the system by standing up for justice, peace, and the dignity of every human being. Good news for the oppressed. The year of the Lord's favor. But here's the thing. The crowd wasn't able to throw Jesus off the cliff. Luke tells us that he passed through the midst of them and went on his way. And even when he was finally killed by the Roman authorities, it still wasn't the end of the story. He rose again on the third day because God is stronger than death.

So I can't promise you that by living into your anointing as a member of the body of Christ, that you'll always be physically safe or psychologically safe, or financially prosperous, or any

of it because the forces of power and domination are flexing their muscles. And we see that all around us. But I can promise you that you are not alone. You carry the mark of our Savior, Jesus, on your body as you move through the world, and you are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, both those who are here in this world with us now and those who have gone before. And more than that, Christ is with you wherever you go.

So in a few moments, join together and proclaim your trust in God through the words of the Nicene Creed. And then join together in prayer as we bless the bread and wine and the oil that anoints the newly baptized. And then come forward to be fed with Christ's body and blood, and strengthened to do the work that you are called to do. And then go out into the world, anointed and marked as Christ's own forever with the spirit of the Lord upon you, just as it was upon Jesus. For you are the body of Christ. Because today this Scripture is indeed being fulfilled in your hearing through you. You are Christ's hands and feet. You are Christ's mouth and heart. You are Christ's body in the world. Today this Scripture is fulfilled through us.