



ELIZABETHTOWN  
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

PRACTICING PEACE, SERVICE AND OPENNESS TO ALL

## *Anointing*

Selected verses from James 5 and Mark 14

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You've heard the story told, that the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy, he goes and he sells all that he has and he buys that field. That treasure, when hidden, goes unrecognized and unused. There are treasures that we encounter every day, that we just don't recognize or utilize.

And perhaps that's how it is with anointing. It is a hidden treasure...one of great value, but it often goes unrecognized fully and underutilized in many ways.

Most people think of anointing as something that is done before or after surgery, or some significant health concern. I recently saw a video clip of Earle Fike, pastor here some 40 years ago. He said that he often found when he offered anointing to people, they would respond quickly "Do you really think I'm that sick?" wondering if there's something that someone ISN'T telling them. And to be sure, in many traditions, anointing is thought of as a last rite for the dying or dead. That's NOT what we're suggesting when we offer an anointing for healing. We actually take our instructions from the book of James.

### **JAMES 5.14–15**

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*Are any among you sick? Let them summon the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. Prayer offered in faith will save the sick, and the Lord will restore them.*

James' practicality provides a simple formula to guide anointing for healing. And he provides a helpful definition of that healing—he says it will "save" the sick. The Greek word here for *save* is *sōzo*—which implies so much more than physical healing. It indicates safety, protection, and healing in the sense of wholeness—body, mind and spirit. And that includes being restored to community, with

2 brothers and sisters, since in the ancient world, illness and brokenness often meant alienation from community.

An anointing for healing service is a very precious time. Often a small group gathers—a pastor, sometimes a deacon or two, perhaps family members of the person being anointed. Sometimes it takes place in the person's home, sometimes in a hospital room, sometimes here at church. It's a fairly short and simple service, including a few words of explanation, scripture, maybe a hymn. There is time for the person being anointed to share some words—perhaps fears or wishes or hopes they have.

That person is then anointed with oil on the forehead, in the shape of a cross or a circle, three times—saying something like

- for the strengthening of your faith
- for the fullness of God's presence and love to bless you
- and for your healing and wholeness according to God's grace and wisdom.

The group gathers around the person and lays on hands for a prayer and often the Lord's prayer closes the time. Although the anointing doesn't do anything to the person being anointed, it is a symbol of an openness on that individual's part to God's wholeness and blessing, whatever that may be or mean. Often anointing provides a real sense of peace and closeness to God and the faith community.

So what's the hidden treasure part, the un-mined gem? We have traditionally used the James passage, practical and simple, as a model for anointing for healing...and it is good and we will continue to practice this valuable and meaningful ordinance. But there's more...

The scriptures present a rich tapestry of meaning related to anointing with oil beyond anointing for healing. In the Hebrew scriptures, we find ceremonial consecration of both objects and people through anointing. Priests, kings and prophets were anointed, as well as the tent of meeting, the ark of the covenant and other objects used in ancient worship. I might be like us anointing the pews or the organ before worship!

And we remember the words of the well-known and well-loved 23rd Psalm, with anointing for comfort—*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. And in Psalm 133, we read, How wonderful, how beautiful, when brothers and sister get along! It's like costly anointing oil flowing down head and beard...*

And in the New Testament, we read the story of the woman who anointed Jesus:

*While he (Jesus) was eating dinner, a woman came up carrying a bottle of very expensive perfume. Opening the bottle, she poured it on his head.*

*Some of the guests became furious among themselves. "That's criminal! A sheer waste!"*

*This perfume could have been sold for well over a year's wages and handed out to the poor." They swelled up in anger, nearly bursting with indignation over her.*

*But Jesus said, "Let her alone. Why are you giving her a hard time? She has just done something wonderfully significant for me (from The Message).*

And that lavish practice carried over to the early Christian church. After the rite of baptism, the new Christian was often anointed with several different oils. Whole bottles of

4 oil were poured over the new believers, as a symbol of something wonderfully significant.

In July, many of our youth will participate in National Youth Conference, a week-long conference held in Fort Collins Colorado. Convening every four years, we had a large group who attended the 2014 conference. There they heard many fine preachers, one of whom reminded the youth, “We have been living, loving and learning together this week. Whether you know it or believe it, we all belong here...Tonight I invite you,” she said, “claim your part in the story. You are a blessed and called child of the Living God. Don’t let anyone tell you don’t belong. You belong. You belong. You belong.”

In a moving worship service, held in Mobey Arena on the campus of Colorado State University, something wonderfully significant happened—thousands of youth chose anointing, something they will remember forever. “That night after worship,” shares one of our youth, “we ended up creating a huge circle with our arms wrapped around each other...we were all there for each other, all there together for one purpose, and all experiencing the same feeling after being anointed, being made new and connecting with God on a new level.” And another shared: “I was feeling empty and lost after my grandpa had passed. I was anointed at NYC and instantly I felt loved...by my fellow church friends, my family, my grandfather, and most importantly, God. This made me thankful for life.”

Treasures shouldn’t be buried—unrecognized and underutilized. We believe that God continually invites us to renewal, refreshment, rededication, to wholeness—to God’s Shalom. God, in God’s lavish and extravagant abundance, in God grace and blessing, invites us to “something wonderfully significant.”

- Maybe you, too, are feeling empty and grieving a loss in your life. Maybe the tragic events of this week have left you asking “How long, O Lord?”
- Perhaps you are facing a tough week ahead, one filled with challenges.
- Maybe there’s someone you know you should talk to, but haven’t gotten the energy...or the nerve.
- Maybe you are weary, bored or lonely.
- Maybe you’ve been asked to take on a new responsibility, and you are seeking wisdom for discernment.
- Perhaps you’d like to show a little more kindness and consideration at home, and you want a fresh start.
- Perhaps you want to begin living more sustainably, and you need a jump start.
- Possibly you feel like you’re on the cusp of something new, feeling God’s presence in a new and exciting way, and you want to grow!
- Perhaps you, or someone you love, is hurting and your heart aches.
- Maybe it’s a combination of these things or others...
- Maybe you long to hear the words...You belong. You belong. You belong.

Josh and I will be here at the front to anoint with oil. We invite you to come as you feel called. If mobility is an issue, be sure to signal to us and we will come to you.











