

Sacred Rhythms: Anointing

Exodus 30:22-33; Genesis 1:1-2, 2:7; Psalm 23; John 12:1-3; Isaiah 61:1; 1 Peter 2:21-25; 1 John 2:27; James 5:14-18

Sacred rhythms are not just religious routines. They are invitations to remember, recenter, and realign our hearts with God's. There are key rhythms of a Christian life that serve practical and spiritual purposes: salvation, communion, baptism, sabbath, service, prayer, and today - anointing.

Anointing:

We hear 'anointing' in church circles often in relation to healing prayer, leadership commissioning, and worship moments. But Biblically, anointing is much bigger. It's about God creating connection points between heaven and earth. From Genesis to Jesus to the early church, anointing is a rhythm of presence, purpose, healing, and identity. Anointing marks a person or place as a bridge between heaven and earth.

I grew up at a church that always had a glass bottle of anointing oil sitting on the pulpit. There were so many years of that oil being used that the pulpit smelled like it and had an almost gummy feeling layer on it where our pastor had put his oil soaked hands for years.

Anointing oil was something that I had just always been a part of church life for me. It wasn't until I was an adult that I started wondering about the purpose and meaning of it. Does the oil itself hold some sort of spiritual healing power? Why was it smeared on the head of someone who was being prayed for? Why did we smear it on things like our new church van before we took it on its first trip? Where did the tradition of using oil during prayer come from, and what does it really mean?

Holy Anointing Oil:

Read Exodus 30:22-33. The recipe for anointing oil was given to Moses after 40 days on Sinai. The ingredients were myrrh, cinnamon, fragrant cane, and cassia. These are all spices that are derived from trees and plants.

Spices are still a big part of our lives today. Spice takes food from mere sustenance to a culinary experience. But in the ancient Middle East, spices were even more highly valued. Spice trade literally shaped the commerce and economy of the early world.

Then we have oil. Like spices, oil comes from the fruit of trees. Olives are nasty and bitter when picked, but once crushed, the oil from the fruit can be used for cooking, moisturising, and preserving.

Oil is 'compressed life' used to mark people and places as bearing the presence of God.

First Anointing:

The first anointing was of Creation itself. Read Genesis 1:1-2. Scripture begins with water + Spirit bringing life.

Read Genesis 2:7. Humans are made from water-soaked earth + divine breath (*Ruach* - 'wind' 'breath' or 'Spirit'). This becomes the foundation for all biblical imagery of oil, water, Spirit, and life. When you combine oil and spices, it becomes a beautiful and fragrant substance. It is like Eden in a liquid form or a symbol of Eden life.

Old Testament Anointing:

In the Bible, oil is used to anoint: the tabernacle & sacred objects, priests, and later kings. Everything that is anointed becomes a heaven-earth interface. Anointing marks people and spaces as set apart to carry divine life. It becomes an Eden-like place or person.

Oil also had practical use for shepherds. Read Psalm 23. Shepherds poured oil on sheep's heads to protect them from flies/parasites that lay eggs near the nose that can drive sheep mad, heal wounds and scratches, calm and soothe anxious sheep, and mark ownership and care. A good shepherd would keep oil to treat his flock with.

It is also said that a lamb would be selected 6 days prior to being sacrificed and brought into a home so that they could be observed to make sure that they were perfect and without blemish. Oil would be used to clean them and check their feet and legs for wounds.

Jesus Anointed:

Read John 12:1-3. Mary anoints Jesus with costly oil called Nard (spikenard). It was a highly valued oil made from a flowering herb. What Mary poured out on the feet of Jesus would have cost around a year's wages (\$40-50,000 today).

This was a prophetic act preparing Him for burial. Read Isaiah 61:1. This is the passage that Jesus reads in Luke 4:18 claiming that He is the promised Anointed One. It marks the beginning of His public ministry.

Christ (*Christos* - *Mashiach*) = 'The Anointed One':

Christ is not a name, but a title. Jesus is the human bridge between heaven and earth. Just like a shepherd used oil to mark and care for his flock, Jesus anoints us, His people. The perfect lamb was sacrificed to cover us all and in doing so, He became our good Shepherd.

Read 1 Peter 2:21-25. (Verse 22 is referencing Isaiah 53:9) He heals our wounds, gives us peace, and marks us as His own. God anoints His people to protect, heal, restore, and claim them. Jesus' anointing continues *through* His people. Through Christ, the anointing goes out to many.

In Acts 2, the Spirit comes and fills believers. Peter addresses the crowd and references the prophet Joel (2:28-32). *"I will pour out my Spirit on all people" (28) "Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days." (29) And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.* (32)

The Spirit is our anointing. We become 'little Christs' (Anointed ones = Christians).

The Rhythm of Anointing in the Early Church:

Anointing represents healing and restoration. Read James 5:14-18. James instructs readers to anoint the sick with oil + prayer = healing, forgiveness, restoration. The oil has no healing power on its own. The power is in the prayers of the faithful. The oil is symbolic of inviting the Spirit of God into that situation.

Read 1 John 2:27. This was written in a context when people were trying to lead the believers astray. This is saying, if you allow yourself to be filled with the Spirit and yield to Him, then He will give you discernment and wisdom. He will teach you what is true and what is not. You have an anointing from the Holy One. The anointing is the Spirit. The Spirit teaches, guards truth, empowers. The sacred rhythm of anointing shifts from only some (priests, kings) to everyone in Christ

The Sacred Rhythm Today:

This sacred rhythm is still alive today. We talk about the command to love God and love others. Everything we do should come back to that.

As we love God, that is when we receive the Anointing. God pours His Spirit into us. He marks us as His own and fills us with divine life. We then become little pockets of Eden in the world.

As we love others, we carry the Anointing. We become healers, intercessors, bridges for others to encounter God, bringers of good news, agents of peace restoration and hope.

Anointing is not a moment, it's a rhythm. A rhythm of receiving and giving. A rhythm of presence, healing, calling, and identity.

What Does it Mean to Live Anointed?:

- Invite the Spirit daily
 - “Fill me with your life and breath again”
- Let God heal your mind and wounds
 - Like a sheep entrusts itself to the care of its shepherd
- Stand in the gap for others
 - Pray, intercede, encourage, lift burdens
- Bring heaven to earth
 - Wherever you go - school, work, relationships - be a connection point for God's presence

The story of anointing is the story of a God who never stops wanting to share His life with His people

- From Eden - to Israel - to Jesus - to the Church - to you
 - You are anointed *because* you are loved
 - You are anointed *so you can* love others
 - You are anointed to carry heaven into the world

Reflection Questions:

- Where did the tradition of using oil during prayer come from, and what does it really mean?
- Why do you think James connects anointing with confession, forgiveness, and restoration?
- How might your daily life change if you saw every space you enter as a place to “bring heaven to earth”?