# Logo  Description automatically generated7th May 2023

1 Kings 1.39-40
Matthew 26.6-13

## An Anointed King

Minister: Let the words of my mouth
**All: And the meditations of all our hearts**
Minister: Be acceptable in your sight
**All: O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen**You can’t buy Coronation Chrism oil at Boots, not, at least, the last time I looked.

Chrism oil, the sort used yesterday in Westminster Abbey, is anointing oil. And the word must have gone out from Buckingham Palace early this year that a new phyle was needed.

So, farmers at two groves situated just outside Jerusalem, on the Mount of Olives, picked some of their best olives, crushed them and blended them with aromatic spices. They brought them to the Patriarch of Jerusalem, who goes by the rather wonderful name of *His Beatitude Theophilos III* who consecrated the oil for the coronation of Charles III.

Liturgists and historians are keen to disabuse us of the idea that the crowning in yesterday’s service was the most sacred moment. No, for although that might be the one we will all remember, the most sacred part of the Westminster service was, they say, the anointing with that Chrism oil, made from olives which last year grew on the famous mount near the church where the King’s paternal grandmother, Princess Alice who became a nun, is now laid to rest.

Indeed, in the Jewish scriptures there is no crown at all when David, or Solomon became king. Instead, the storyteller spoke of Samuel or Nathan anointing them.

In 1727 Handel wrote the anthem Zadok the Priest for the Coronation of George II, and it’s been sung at every service since. The anthem’s opening lines, which come after a beautiful, if tantalizing, introduction which gives each member of the choir nightmare palpitations that they might come in too early and find themselves the only one singing, well, those opening lines go: *Zadok the Priest and Nathan the Prophet anointed Solomon King, and all the people rejoiced.*

Indeed, Shakespeare writes in Richard II: *Not all the water in the rough rude sea can wash the balm off an anointed king.*

And yet, what does it mean and why is it thought to be so important?

Well, I suspect throughout history anointing has often been regarded as empowering an individual with something so divine that it sort of makes them superhuman.

So, that Shakespeare quote is really saying there is something almost mystical and magical about an anointed king. And that’s the kind of idea, now long gone, at the centre of what was called *The Divine Right of Kings.*Yet, I wonder if that way of thinking misses the point.

Surely the real significance when Samuel anointed either Saul or David, or Nathan anoints Solomon was the realisation that these were essentially ordinary human beings who needed God’s help to fulfil their roles. Anointing them was, essentially like praying for them. Calling for God’s Spirit to rest upon them and enable them to rise to the challenge.

Saul, David, Solomon, Elizabeth, Charles – these are not super human beings, but ordinary ones. We anoint them prayerfully, seeking God to bless them as they bring their energy, their personality, their mind, compassion and will to the task of leadership and service.

Of course, Jesus, in the Christian scriptures, is also spoken of as God’s anointed one. That’s what the words Messiah or Christ literally means, someone who has the blessing, the touch, the anointing of God resting upon them.

Sometimes on Palm Sunday we might indeed sing: *Hail to the Lord’s Anointed, great David’s greater son.* An echo of the greeting given Jesus at his Jerusalem entry in Holy Week.

But does this mean we’re still on some kind of quest and if we can’t find a Superhuman in the kings and prophets maybe we’ll find that in Jesus? And is that really what anointing promises: A Super Hero?

Well, that’s not really the Jesus we encounter in the gospels.

The Birth Narrative contradicts that view. This is the Jesus born an outcast from day one, entering the world in poverty, born to anxious and worried parents.

The Wilderness Narrative contradicts this view. For when offered the miraculous, popular, or spectacular way that would surely entice or define any Superhero, Jesus says *no.* Instead, he chooses the road of integrity, however tough and challenging that will be.

The Good Friday Narrative contradicts this view. Jesus doesn’t come down from the cross, he dies upon it. And by doing so hallows all human pain and suffering.

And Paul’s Philippian Hymn Narrative contradicts this view. A poem that speaks of Jesus taking on the form of a servant and humbling himself even to death, death upon a cross.

So, what are we encountering in Jesus Christ, this anointed one?

Well, one of the joys of that gloriously impossible concept we call Trinity, is the idea of God come among us in a way we can understand. We appreciate the man Jesus. The Trinity doesn’t present us with a Superhero, anointed with superpowers, but with Jesus of Nazareth, the Man for others.

The genius idea within Trinity is that God in Jesus shows us something of himself and that a phrase like *Made in God’s Image* gives all of us such inherent and profound dignity.

The Christian scriptures talk of this revelation of God shining or whispering to us in the face of Jesus Christ, the anointed one.

And, in so many ways, we find our own faces reflected in Jesus’ face.

Outside the tomb of his friend Lazarus Jesus’ face cries – just as we shed tears when our hearts are broken.

Looking down from the cross the face of Jesus looks with love upon his mother and entrusts her to John – just as we long for good things for those we love.

And so, maybe our quest becomes somewhat circular. We start feeling the inadequacies of our humanity and so we go off in search of something, or someone more powerful. We meet with Jesus called The Christ, God’s anointed and hope we have discovered the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

Well, I truly believe we have discovered something inspiring in the person of Jesus, but not a Superhero, instead someone who showed us how to love, how to cry, laugh, care and even suffer. The anointed humanity of Jesus speaks to us so often and at so many levels. In Jesus life, in the way he lived as a human being, we find a way to live and a way to love. And so, we come full circle in our quest, back to our humanity, not a humanity to be discarded or negated but one to be explored, deepened and celebrated because we are *made in the image of God.* In this understanding God’s anointing isn’t so much about *value added,* but an affirmation of *value already within.*I don’t suppose many of us have been anointed. Unlike some other traditions it’s not something we do very often. But the experience did come my way a few years ago at a Ministers’ Meeting. One of our younger, newly ordained colleagues was hosting the morning and bravely pushed the boundaries a little. She called us into small groups to pray for one another and as we did so, to anoint each other. I think many of us found it deeply moving and uplifting. Sensing the fragrant oil upon our face heightened the experience of loving prayer.

In a non-tactile way we anoint each other simply by holding one another in prayer. We seek God’s blessing to rest upon the Elders we will soon ordain and commission. I don’t think we elected any of them because we thought them superhuman! Instead, we see in them some wonderful human qualities of commitment, dedication, patience, and compassion. And our prayer is that these wonderfully human qualities will be blessed by God and used in moulding us together as a team.

We pray for God’s anointing, God’s blessing to rest upon family, friends and neighbours so that together we might join as one in seeking to build a society of love and justice.

Superheroes – no. Just ordinary people like the disciples chosen by Jesus. And with God’s help we find our better selves and work together for a better world.

Of course, so much about this weekend has felt very special. The uniforms, the crowns, the Abbey, the music.

Yet, at it’s heart were two ordinary human beings, our new King and Queen, who dedicated themselves to God, our nation and the Commonwealth as they were anointed.

Monarchy today is not about wielding great power and sending people to the Tower, it’s about encouraging, supporting and championing the positives in our society. At its best its leading by example and including people in.

It's a big task – and that’s why our new King and Queen were anointed, a moment to prayerfully ask for, and receive, God’s blessing and strength, which when combined with those everyday qualities of love and compassion makes so much possible.

And that’s a prayer for us all, that whatever we do this week, may our lives be anointed by God, so that as we are blessed by him, we may be a blessing to others.

So, whether your crown is made of diamonds or paper, may you feel commissioned and anointed by the King of Kings. Amen.

*Ian Green Amersham 5th May 2023*