

Sermon given at the National Meeting of St Luke the Physician in New Zealand by
Archbishop David Moxon
St Andrew's Church Cambridge, August, 2008

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, o Christ our strength and our redemption.

It is a privilege to share some thoughts with you as you meet to pray for the ministry of healing through the work of the Order of St Luke the Physician.

The Order of St Luke has a crucial and respected place in the life of the churches because it offers maturity, experience and balance to our theology and practice of the laying on of hands and of anointing with oil for healing. The Order focuses and commends the right use of prayer as we call on the healing graces of God.

I would like to focus particularly today on the ministry of healing as it is offered through this Order, by way of anointing with oil. Here in this town of Cambridge the local chemist Mr. Boyce and his father before him prepare oil for anointing using the three thousand year old recipe we find in the book of Exodus, as follows:

The Lord spoke to Moses: Take the finest spices: of liquid myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet-smelling cinnamon half as much, that is, two hundred fifty, and two hundred fifty of aromatic cane, and five hundred of cassia – measured by the sanctuary shekel – and a hin of olive oil; and you shall make of these a sacred anointing oil as by the perfumer it shall be a holy anointing oil. Exodus 30:22-25

This recipe was especially used in the consecration of holy things; but later came to be used in the consecration of people, including high priests and kings and queens. This is where we get the word Messiah, meaning a leader who is anointed by God for a royal role, a servant of God for and with the people. The teachings of Jesus tell us that we are both a royal priesthood, a holy nation and our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit. So the church with its new covenantal understanding now anoints people with oil for baptism, as entry into a royal priesthood, for healing as recipients of the graces of Christ and for burial as preparation for eternity. The most common use is for healing.

The ingredients in this recipe are not accidental and imply the special qualities that the anointing brings.

The Myrrh came from a bushy tree with plum like fruit, and a fragrant gum. The tree flowered freely and became a symbol of self giving love, even beyond the grave. People were anointed with oil to prepare them for death as a sign of love. Myrrh was sometimes associated with bitterness becoming sweet, as a sign of the transforming power of the love of God, even over death. When David Watson, leader of the English Anglican Charismatic Renewal, was interviewed after he had been diagnosed with terminal cancer, he was asked why he himself seemed to be suffering unto death, when he had been the instrument of so many peoples physical healing himself. He replied that he had received the laying on of hands and the anointing with oil for healing and that he had been healed: healed of some memories, healed in some relationships, and healed in spirit. Even though his body was coming to an end he was about to experience the greatest healing of all which is to be embraced by the divine love for ever.

The cinnamon came from a 30' high tree with, yellow white flowers, and a fragrant bark. It came to be associated with zeal, attitude and strength from God, because it had a strong scent which had an edge to it. Sometimes the anointing with oil for healing gives us a new confidence and hope which can have a physical effect also. The chemist who makes the holy oil here in Cambridge sometimes uses a little more cinnamon than usual and so the oil has quite a distinctive scent, so different from the more gentle scents of aromatherapy! This can be a sign that anointing with oil does convey to, as an outward and visible sign, the inward and spiritual gumption that you need to rise up and walk.

The calamus or sugar cane reed yielded its scent even when crushed and came to be associated with endurance through suffering. The bruised reed could still remain standing tall and retain its scent. Whatever sickness you experience, mental, physical or spiritual, God is present, bidden or not, felt or not: God is always there and the suffering is never wasted or completely meaningless. Suffering can always be integrated into a redemptive purpose even if it seems senseless or cruel which it sometimes can be.

The cassia scent in the oil comes from the bark of the cassia tree and it was associated with the worship of God, with humility and obedience and the presence of God. When you both use or receive anointing you are engaged in the consecrating action of God which

conveys to you the fruits and gifts of God's spirit. This is an occasion for great thanksgiving, humility and joy.

And so the four scents were blended in olive oil. In fact we get the word 'oil' from the word 'olive'. The olive oil became the means or instrument by which the four scents were combined and carried and then used. In this way the oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit of God as the instrument of God's Grace, the active agent which brings the fruits and gifts of the spirit of God to us.

This brings us to the healing of the blind man at the pool of Siloam in John's Gospel chapter 9, verses 1 through 41. Jesus mixes some clay with some spittle and spreads the mud on the man's eyes saying to him "Go and wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means scent). The man went and washed and came back able to see. Like the anointing, Jesus uses ordinary ingredients from the earth as a means, as an outward sign of God's grace and power. After all we are made from the dust of the earth itself, from the clay, which is the meaning of the word Adam. We are redeemed through immersion in water, which is our initiation into Christ the new Adam. So this man is being reminded through the outward invisible sign of clay and water of the life giving and saving power which God gives him and which enlightens him literally and which calls him into a new world of insight and seeing. This is a parable of healing of the body the mind and the spirit all together in a holistic vision of a new creation which is personal to every human being and which is offered to all the world. This transforming vision does not depend upon the difficulties and sin of our past, as Jesus says in this Gospel, but is always an opportunity for the glory of God to shine through.

As you rededicate yourselves to the ministry of healing under the principles of the Order of St Luke the Physician, may you be anointed yourselves with the grace of God and the light of God, so that you may be more and more instruments of hope.