

Sermon for Christ Church, Spotsylvania, VA  
Proper 25, Year B, October 28, 2018  
The Rev. Bill Queen, "The Sacrament of Healing"  
Job 42:1-6, 10-17; Mark 10:46-52

today presents us with an opportunity to look at what may be the least familiar of all of the Episcopal Church's sacraments, Unction of the Sick, also often referred to just as Healing

we normally offer Healing Prayers every fourth Sunday of the month here at Christ Church for anyone who wants to stick around a few minutes after either service; today we are making it a central part of the service, and we are including the anointing with blessed oil; that's why the sacrament is called unction, which is Latin for anointing, though it may also be done without oil, by the laying on of hands; our plan is to offer this special service once a quarter, while we still continue to offer Healing Prayers after the services every fourth Sunday

you may be wondering why we use oil in the sacrament of healing; well in the ancient world, when few medicines were known, olive oil was commonly taken internally to cure internal illnesses, and rubbed on the body externally to cure external illnesses, so that connects it to healing; and it also had the symbolic power of conveying God's Holy Spirit; it is in that sense that in Baptism when, after the pouring of water over the candidate's head, the sign of the cross is made on their forehead, using a different kind of consecrated oil, and we say "you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism;" and when the familiar 23rd Psalm says "you have anointed my head with oil," this is a reference to the anointing for kingship that David received, so that the Holy Spirit would come upon him to guide the people in following God's ways; so oil has for centuries been associated both with healing and with the Holy Spirit

we see healing happening in our readings today; today ends our series of readings from Job, where we finally see him healed of all his afflictions and his life restored beyond what it was before his trials; in the gospel reading, Jesus heals the blind Bartimaeus; it is important to recognize that Jesus began the ministry of healing, sent out his disciples to do it, and expects us, his followers today, to continue it; when we offer the laying on of hands and anointing with

oil it is not the clergy or lay people who are performing the sacrament; like every other sacrament, we are just the ones who ask God to accomplish God's work through the sacrament

and this is not 'faith healing,' as you may have seen conducted by televangelists; we are not praying only for instantaneous, miraculous results; while we may pray for a cure, healing is a much larger request; remember the story about Jesus curing ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19); all ten were cured of their leprosy, but only one came back to thank him; only that one received the fullness of healing, the realignment of his life with God's larger purposes; that's the ultimate kind of healing we all seek, and we all need

so when we do the laying on of hands and anointing with oil each person stands or kneels at the altar rail and holds in their minds and hearts the particular need for healing they have, or for other people in need of healing; Margaret and I will divide the altar rail and will make a pass down the rail making the sign of the cross in oil on each person's forehead; then a member of our Prayer Team will follow; if you want to voice your prayer need aloud to the Prayer Team members you may, but you don't have to, for God knows our needs before we ask

you may want to pray for a cure for an illness of body, of mind, or of spirit; you may want to pray for a restoration of a broken relationship; you may want to pray for greater understanding of God's purpose for your life; you may want to pray for a renewed recognition of the Holy Spirit within you; you may want to pray for healing through peace, in this community, in our nation, and in the world; or you may want to pray for anything else you may feel the need to pray for; and if you choose to remain in your pew and not come forward, which is fine, do so remaining in prayer for yourself, and for all who are here, for whatever kinds of healing may be needed

my prayer is that we will all take advantage of this sacrament of Unction and so benefit from it, as individuals, and as a church, and that we all will rightly give thanks to God for this wonderful gift of healing given to us by Jesus