



Resurrection Journeys

Session 4: Kindness, mutual respect, gentleness, humility

Samuel Anoints David

1 Samuel 16

Don't be taken in by appearances. That's what Samuel was told when he is sent by God to Jesse's sons to anoint one of them to be King. Yet the writer of this passage can't resist describing David as ruddy and handsome with beautiful eyes! Of course, Samuel is given really good advice. And it's good advice for us too. Don't be superficial. Look deeper. Don't be distracted by what people look like, what they're wearing, how they smell, how they present themselves. Instead, discern the heart. But this advice is there because we do get distracted.

Let me offer a different perspective on this advice. Shift the focus. Be open to the presence of God in the people you meet. Be shaped by the values of God's Kingdom in how you respond to them. Kindness. Show mutual respect. Gentleness. Humility... Treat other people as you would have them treat you.

The ministry of anointing gives a particular expression and focuses on these values. It's a form of prayer which is deeply personal and engaging. An encounter between one person and another where holy oil holds a sense of God's holy purposes. There are different types of anointing, of course. We anoint at baptism and confirmation and ordination, a sign that we follow Jesus Christ that is, Jesus 'the anointed one.' Anointing is used in the church's

healing ministry; and with those who are dying. And we still anoint Kings: it was the holiest and most sacred part of King Charles coronation - so holy and intimate that the cameras were not allowed to intrude.

To anoint you must be up close and enter someone's personal space. Anointing is very embodied expression of prayer, and Safeguarding has to frame all that we do. And again, the values that shape us are really important here. Kindness. Mutual respect. Gentleness. Humility. Anointing engages several of our senses. I have the parents and godparents of a child being baptised smell the scented oil used in anointing. (If it's an adult candidate then they'll do this.) They're nearly always pleasantly surprised. And then there's touch - a thumb or finger stubbed into a small vessel of oil, before making the sign of the cross physically on foreheads or the palms of outstretched hands.

You may use anointing in a healing ministry: the prayers in Common Worship evoke Jesus' practice of healing, "may Christ's healing touch make you whole.' Here in Witham, we have a service with anointing during Holy Week. It's within a communion service which focuses upon reconciliation and repentance. And at one point people come forward for anointing. At the end of this part of the service a member of the congregation will anoint me - I am in as much need of this anointing as anyone. In this process of anointing and laying hands in prayer, I am always aware of something being opened up in my soul. A channel flowing freely through me.

And whenever I'm asked to anoint someone who is dying as part of the prayers at the end of life - I find that the love and tenderness that surrounds them at this point is extraordinary. It's a huge privilege to mark a holy death in this way.

We share profoundly embodied faith. Our lives as they are are met with divine grace. Rituals and patterns and practices are signs of this. But don't be distracted by the superficial appearances. Discern the heart; and let the values of the Kingdom of God flow through you.

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