

Sacrament of Healing

What color are souls?
she said

& I said, Color isn't
that much of an issue
when you're
talking souls.

– Story People

Review

Outward signs that come from God to show God's favor.

- Ritual is a powerful tool for building community and our relationship with God.
- True presence is a self-gift, and is not the same as physical presence. The Sacraments require our true presence.

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- Today we're going to talk about the sacrament "Anointing of the Sick."
 - It is an ancient Sacrament.
 - Mark 6:13 and James 5:14
 - It got "lost" in the Middle Ages.
 - It was re-found at Vatican Council II.
 - Let's see what happened.

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- History of Anointing of the Sick
 - Anointing with olive oil is an ancient tradition.
 - Athletes anointed themselves with oil for strength.
 - Oil used as a "Band-Aid" on wounds.
 - Warriors anointed for protection before battle.
 - Anointing of kings and priests in Israel.
 - Anoint guests as a sign of respect.
 - Anoint the dead before burial.

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■ History of Anointing of the Sick

■ Why was anointing so important?

- It signified our human need for protection.
 - From illness
 - From danger
 - From evil
- Kings and priests are anointed as a sign of their role in protecting the people they are responsible for.
- In the Old Testament, Israel is waiting for a messiah – an anointed one – to save them.

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■ History of Anointing of the Sick

■ Why was anointing so important?

- Given this understanding of anointing, it is no wonder:
 - That Jesus is called the messiah
 - That the disciples would continue the tradition of anointing, but with a “fuller” experience of what this means given Christ's death and resurrection.

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■ History of Anointing of the Sick

- In early church history (first few hundred years)
 - Anointing could be done by anyone
 - However, James recommends that an elder from the church be called to anoint the sick
 - » A person was chosen to be an elder because of his/her spiritual maturity.

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■ History of Anointing of the Sick

- Later, when the priesthood was established in the church, anointing was done predominantly by bishops and priests.
- This actually caused some problems for people ...
 - It was traditional for priests to receive a stipend for services.
 - The ritual of anointing became elaborate requiring several priests.

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■ History of Anointing of the Sick

- The issue of cost and the elaborate nature of the anointing meant the people waited longer to get anointed after becoming sick.
 - This minimized cost and “saved” anointing for serious illness.
- Also, it was a common believe that once a person was anointed, he or she was no longer allowed (by church rule) to participate in business, marry, or have sex with one's spouse.

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■ History of Anointing of the Sick

- Over time, the meaning of anointing shifted to becoming a preparation for dying (“last rites” or “extreme unction”).
- This shift caused theological confusion
 - If confession and Eucharist (viaticum) were spiritual preparation for dying, what did anointing do?

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■ History of Anointing of the Sick

- At the time of the Reformation (1500s) the situation blows up.
 - The reformers reject anointing of the dying as a sacrament instituted by Christ.
 - The Catholic Church reaffirms the sacrament.
 - Nothing changes for 400 years!

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■ History of Anointing of the Sick

- At the Second Vatican Council the Church re-establishes the early church understanding of the Anointing of the Sick.
 - It can (and should) be celebrated whenever someone is seriously ill.
 - It can be repeated as often as helpful.

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- When we ask God to heal us, what are we asking for?
 - The answer is complex and begs many questions ...
 - What image of God do I have?
 - How does God act in my life?
 - Is my life predestined?
 - Does God punish me by making me sick?
 - Does God reward me by making me better?
 - What role do people play in all this?

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- Three main images of God
 - God the puppeteer
 - If I pray long and hard enough, I can make God change his mind.
 - God the watchmaker
 - God created the world and then set it free.
 - God the parent of adult children
 - God loves us and guides us.

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■ How does God act in the world?

- The puppeteer God controls everything.
 - Our only control is to get him to change his mind.
- The watchmaker God controls nothing.
 - God set the world into motion and it is our job to keep it on track.
- The parent of adult children God
 - Urges us to do what is best (loves us).
 - Leaves it up to us to accept or reject the urging (we are free to do the will of God).

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■ Does God want us to suffer?

- Here's what I think I know
 - We must die to be resurrected.
 - Thomas Keating says that death might be God's greatest gift to us.
 - Sometimes people do evil things.
 - Creation is not complete.
 - We are still in the sixth day, becoming more human, more whole, moving closer to God.
 - Sometimes suffering brings growth and new life.
 - God loves you – He does what is best for you. This may not be the same as what you want!

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■ So does God heal us?

- The answer is yes ...
 - Normally through the people who work in healing ministries
 - Spiritual healers
 - Psychological healers
 - Physical healers
 - And sometimes through miracles.
 - The point of healing is to make us whole
 - As God sees wholeness!
 - » “God is a Strange Lover”

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■ Anointing of the sick ...

- Prayer for healing has two effects:
 - We recognize the healing power of God in all its complexities
 - We celebrate that healing
- The grace of this sacrament is peace
 - Peace of presence
 - Peace of death
 - Peace of knowing that creation is ordered by God
- Through it all, God is with us.