

Anointed
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First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
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Psalm 45:1-2, 6-9

¹ My heart overflows with a goodly theme;
I address my verses to the king;
my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe.

² You are the most handsome of men;
grace is poured upon your lips;
therefore God has blessed you for ever.

⁶ Your throne, O God, endures for ever and ever.

Your royal scepter is a scepter of equity;

⁷ you love righteousness and hate wickedness.

Therefore God, your God, has anointed you
with the oil of gladness beyond your companions;

⁸ your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia.

From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad;

⁹ daughters of kings are among your ladies of honor;
at your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ophir.

Pray with me: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, Our Rock and Our Redeemer. Amen.

Today's psalm is believed to have been written on the occasion of a royal wedding. The psalmist goes from speaking of the king to speaking of God back to speaking of the king, admittedly confusing. If you've been in any Bible study or confirmation class with me, you might remember that I have said that sometimes in our lives, certain scriptures will speak to us; some, not so much or not at that moment in our lives. Well, this psalm is one of those for me, with the not-so-much. I read it over and over and over again and, while admittedly distracted this week, I couldn't figure out what might help us all connect to it and see it in our own worlds. So, I began with the question of "what can we learn from this?"

In the ancient Near East, where our psalm is set, kings in cultures of the time were ascribed the power of the gods of their people or the region over which they were king, or at least linked to them. Here's where some of the scholarly thought is especially helpful. Professor Patricia D. Ahearne-Kroll explains three important features of this psalm that are very contextual. She writes:

"When addressing the king, the psalmist praises his **handsome appearance, military prowess, and just leadership**. The description of a ruler as physically attractive was common in the ancient world, and ancient Israel portrayed leaders in a similar way. The political landscape of the ancient Near East also consisted of frequent military skirmishes between local parties of any given region, as well as more technologically advanced battles that were executed by larger forces. Ancient Israelite history consistently involved

conflicts over territorial control. For this reason, the appeal of a leader was partly related to his success in warfare. Kings in the ancient world also advertised their rule as ‘just,’ and a sovereign’s responsibility was sometimes perceived to include the stabilization of the social order, which included the protection of widows and orphans. When the psalmist declares that the king...wields a ‘scepter of equity,’ the psalmist refers to this standard of just rule, which was not necessarily demonstrated by kings but was nonetheless ascribed to their leadership.”¹ [emphasis mine]

A king whom the psalm would praise would logically have these qualities praised. And, if we connect, if we link, this king to the God of the Israelite people, we get language like “Therefore, God has blessed you for ever” and “Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.”

We can imagine what it might mean for the king to be blessed but what might not be so apparent is what it means to be anointed. The Rev. Tim Cargal describes anointing, saying that “Most important in the biblical traditions was anointing with oil so as to set apart, or consecrate, an object or person to God...In the case of the anointing of kings and prophets...the symbolism of the physical act seems to have gone beyond simply setting the person apart from others. In such cases the anointing also served to convey power and ability to perform the function for which one was being anointed. It further designated that the person had been chosen by God, and so kings in particular could be referred to as ‘the Lord’s anointed.’”² What we read in English as God’s anointed, or the Anointed One, comes from the biblical Hebrew word “מָשִׁיחַ” (mashiach or messiah). In biblical Greek this word is “Χριστός” (Christós), from “χρίω” (chrio), which means to anoint with olive oil.

Being set apart or consecrated to God, having power and ability conveyed upon him, these qualities of a messiah are what the Hebrew people of Jesus’ day were searching for, were what they so frequently assigned to people in whom they saw a glimmer of hope for salvation. This explains why there were so many called the “Messiah” in Jesus’ day and why people weren’t sure whether they should be looking to John the Baptist, Jesus, or another as God’s Anointed One. We have the benefit of distance in time to know that the true Anointed One, the true Christ, the true Messiah, was Jesus – Jesus whose royal scepter is a scepter of equity and who loves righteousness and hates wickedness. In the time of our psalm, though, Jesus was not a consideration to the Hebrew people and they believed this king, in a line of kings, was set apart or consecrated, and thus anointed by God. Even today, while acknowledging Jesus as God’s Anointed One, capital “A” Anointed, capital “O” One, it is not inappropriate to understand others as anointed by God.

¹ *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 4*, pp. 9, 11.

² David Noel Freedman, editor, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* [Grand Rapids, MI: William J. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000] pp. 65-6.

We are welcomed as God's anointed ones, and not just in a figurative sense. Most notably, in our *Book of Common Worship*, which is the resource for a variety of services of worship within the PC(USA), there is language around physical anointing connected to a service for wholeness, both for a congregation and for individuals. It reads like this: "Gracious God, source of all healing, in Jesus Christ you heal the sick and mend the broken. We bless you for this oil pressed from the fruits of the earth, given to us as a sign of healing and forgiveness, and of the fullness of life you give. By your Spirit, come upon all who are anointed with this oil that they may receive your healing touch and be made whole, to the glory of Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen."³

These occasions of anointing might seem disparate at first read – anointing as a king and anointing for wholeness – but for God's anointed they are intimately connected. That we should consider oil to be a sign of healing and forgiveness is appropriately also what God's anointed, king or commoner or Christ, are consecrated to do and be part of. If we were to carry a scepter, it should be a scepter of equity. Scepter or not, we are to love righteousness and hate wickedness. Healing. Forgiveness. If there is to be a connection point between the psalm and us, it is in this being anointed. Our physical attractiveness and military prowess are no longer indicators of being set apart for God but justice, the seeking and the doing, remains. May we both receive and offer God's healing touch and so may it be for you and for me.

Let us pray: By your Spirit, O God, come upon us that we might give glory to you and to Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

³ *Book of Common Worship*, pp. 1011-12.