

## Anointed

(Sermon by Rev. John Dieterly, February 7, 2010)

Jeremiah 1:4-10 <sup>4</sup>Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,  
<sup>5</sup> “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”  
<sup>6</sup>Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.”  
<sup>7</sup>But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. <sup>8</sup> Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD.”  
<sup>9</sup>Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, “Now I have put my words in your mouth. <sup>10</sup> See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”

I Corinthians 13:1-13 <sup>1</sup>If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup>And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup>If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

<sup>4</sup>Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant <sup>5</sup>or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup>it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. <sup>7</sup>It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

<sup>8</sup>Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. <sup>9</sup>For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; <sup>10</sup>but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. <sup>11</sup>When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. <sup>12</sup>For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. <sup>13</sup>And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Luke 4:14-30 <sup>14</sup>Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. <sup>15</sup>He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. <sup>16</sup>When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup>and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: <sup>18</sup> **“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”**

<sup>20</sup>And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup>Then he began to say to them, **“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”** <sup>22</sup>All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” <sup>23</sup>He said to them, **“Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’”** <sup>24</sup>And he said, **“Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. <sup>25</sup>But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; <sup>26</sup>yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. <sup>27</sup>There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.”** <sup>28</sup>When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. <sup>29</sup>They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. <sup>30</sup>But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

We don’t use the word “anoint” very often in our modern world. If we think about anointing we think of it as a ritual practiced by Roman Catholics where the most common use of anointing is for healing, or in last rites as a preparation for dying. This is why Rosina and I thought that we would include an anointing of the children as part of the children’s message this morning. We wanted to pull some of the mystery and morbidity out of the practice of anointing.

Anointing occurs frequently in Scripture, sometimes for kings and prophets, and for others as well. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm has the phrase, “You anoint my head with oil,” which would mean every one of us, but most people probably have very little idea of what that means. That phrase precedes the phrase, “my cup runneth over” so the best we can make of both these phrases is that they symbolize somehow that God is giving us abundant blessings. The dictionary gives the definition of anointing as in last rites for the dying and also mentions “smearing oil” as a way to consecrate a person. That just makes anointing sounds messy, and in most churches, anointing a person seems rather morbid, as in preparation for death. But the practice of the Old Testament is much more dynamic. Anointing symbolized the presence of God, or a

calling from God, for the anointed one to represent God or to take on some God-appointed task. In the Gospel lesson this morning, Jesus is reading from the prophet Isaiah, and he reads where it was written, **the spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has ANOINTED me to bring good news to the poor, to PROCLAIM release to the captives, and to PROCLAIM the acceptable year of the Lord.** Anointing here has nothing to do with death, but far more powerfully, with actions, and especially with words.

Jeremiah does not speak about being anointed, but the words translated “appointed” and “consecrated” convey the same sense as the words from Isaiah that Jesus quoted in our Gospel lesson. Both words are used to convey the message that Jeremiah was chosen, by God, for the purpose of **PROCLAIMING** God’s word. But the one who is chosen by God must beware. It isn’t an easy assignment. And the cost may be very high before the reward is received. Jeremiah didn’t want the job. His reaction was just like some folks when they are asked to serve on Consistory and boards of the church. “Not now, God,” or maybe just “no, not me.” Jeremiah’s reaction was, specifically, “I am too young. I am just a child.” We don’t know how old Jeremiah actually was – he may well have been 18 or 20 years old. That could be old enough to begin a career as a prophet or a pastor, but Jeremiah didn’t want the job – not yet. Maybe his thinking was a little like the famous Christian holy man of the fourth century, Augustine. If you ever study Church History and all the wonderful writings of this holy man, you have to be impressed with how pious he was. And yet, Augustine confessed that one of his early prayers as a young man was, Dear God, grant me chastity and self restraint in my encounters with those of the opposite sex – but not yet. Maybe that isn’t your prayer, but how often have you said, “not yet” when asked to give of your time to the church. Jeremiah’s actual age isn’t important, nor are his feeble attempts at saying no to God. What is important is who was doing the asking. It is a lot easier to say no to a person from the nominating committee here at the church than it is to say no to God. Maybe Jeremiah was just a little shy. Maybe he didn’t want to talk about his faith, especially in front of the leaders of Israel or the temple priests. We can identify with that. Many of us don’t find it easy to talk about our faith. We consider it a personal matter, and we don’t even like when others bring it up outside the church. But God does not accept any excuses and he doesn’t accept no for an answer, as he said to Jeremiah, **Do not say, “I am only a boy” for you SHALL go to all to whom I send you, and you SHALL speak whatever I command you.** Not much opportunity in those words for Jeremiah to decline the invitation. And then God anoints Jeremiah in a special way. Since Jeremiah is being called to speak, it is God’s hand that touches him directly. Through God’s touch, Jeremiah is appointed and God’s words are in his mouth.

When Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah, in a profound sense he proclaimed his own anointing. When he proclaimed that this passage from Isaiah was “today, fulfilled in your hearing” he accepted the office of prophet, he accepted his role to proclaim good news to the poor, release to the captives, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. Not that it won him a lot of friends. In fact, the congregation became so angry that they tried to take him away and throw him over a cliff. This whole story is in some ways a foreshadowing of the life of Jesus. How eagerly he was received. How anxious the people were to have God serve them. Teach us, heal us, restore our sight, cure our leprosy, God, do this for me, God, meet my expectations. But when Jesus did not meet their expectations they turned on him, and eventually they did kill him.

Only 12 were called, anointed, if you will, to become Apostles. One fell away and betrayed Jesus. The disciples thought there should be 12, so they chose another. But God made a different choice. God chose Saul, and changed his name to Paul, and anointed him to preach to the Gentiles, and it is his words that are still recorded for us in so many letters of the New Testament. But being chosen didn’t give Paul an easy street either. He was whipped, he was shipwrecked, he was thrown in prison, and we have no idea of his ultimate end.

Jeremiah, Jesus and Paul were all anointed to a life of proclaiming God’s word. Others, such as Amos, Ezekiel and Jonah were anointed for just a short period of time, perhaps just one message to a selected audience. But for almost all of these people, their being chosen was not what they wanted. It was God’s choosing. God gave the message and God gave the means to proclaim the message. As a disciple of Jesus Christ – or if I may put this in other words, as a member of the church, you too are anointed, not for healing or death, but for action, to serve God. You are anointed, set apart for holy service. Are you open to receive God’s message? Are you willing to accept your anointing as a disciple of Jesus Christ? Are you willing to take action, work in the church and speak God’s word in the world? I can almost hear some of you react – oh, I’m not a speaker. Don’t ask me to preach – I can’t even stand up front and do the announcements. That’s OK – maybe you are not anointed to be the preacher here, or even to make the announcements. But I believe that every Christian is anointed to speak God’s word in the world, maybe not as a sermon, but as a kind word, a word in action, and even more important, a **WORD** from God!

What might that word be? It is surely a word of love. Even if you have the gift of prophesy, faith and even tongues, without the gift of love, these others are nothing. God’s greatest gift to us all is his love. Receive God’s love. Let God’s love anoint you, so that you might proclaim his love to others. You are anointed, by God, for special service. Go and serve God. Amen.