

## Gifts and Fruit

In a few minutes time there will be the opportunity for each one of us to be anointed with the oil of chrism. This is one of three kinds of oil used in the church: the other two are for healing and in preparation for baptism respectively. The oil of chrism is something quite different. In the words of a prayer I will speak in a few minutes time it is

a sign of God's, acceptance and adoption,  
his equipping and empowering.

Common Worship, Pentecost Sunday

It is, in fact, a sign of what, as we have just heard, Paul promised in his letter to the Romans:

you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear,  
but you have received the spirit of adoption...

We are children of God, and if children, then heirs,  
heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

Romans 8:15.

When we are anointed with oil of chrism, we become like Jesus for the word 'Christ' simply means 'anointed one'; we become the anointed ones ourselves. The prayer goes on to ask that we may be

Formed in the likeness of Christ,  
and be witnesses of God's astonishing love,  
filled with life in all its fullness.

You might well ask who could possibly not want to be anointed with chrism? But that's the wrong question. The right question is this: who **should** not be anointed with oil of chrism?

The answer to that question is found in the Acts of the Apostles. There was a man called Simon who lived in Samaria and earned a living practising magic. He became a believer and was baptised and was extraordinarily impressed by the work of the Holy Spirit in his fellow

believers. In fact he was so impressed that he offered money to the apostles and demanded, 'Give me the same power so that anyone I lay my hands on will receive the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:17). He got short shift from the apostles. He saw the gift of the Holy Spirit is being about personal gratification, something simply to please him. The constant teaching of the Scriptures is quite to the contrary, that the gift of the Holy Spirit is to enable us to serve, to build up the Kingdom of God. We are anointed for service. So the answer to the question, 'Who should not be anointed with oil of chrism?' is anyone whose motivation is anything other than wanting to serve. But if you want to serve, if you want to build up the kingdom of God in this community, then come to be anointed.

Come for three reasons:

- come so that you may be changed;
- come so that you may be able to offer your time and talents to God;
- come so that you may have the courage to offer your treasure, your money to God.

You should have received a small flier two weeks ago setting this out in some detail. You have received another copy today. Let me say a little more about each of those three areas of commitment.

First, come to be changed, because you are not, I am not, we are not the people God wants us to be. Christ is still being formed in us. There will be some Christlike which we possess in abundance. But there will be some which we lack. These Christlike qualities are sometimes known as 'the fruit of the spirit'. The classic list is: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. (Galatians 5:22) Perhaps there are one or two, or three or four, that you lack. Or perhaps the ones you lack are not even on this list. Paul did not think of everything. Whatever fruits of the spirits, whatever Christlike qualities you lack, why not come and ask for them so that the world maybe a better place and the kingdom of God built up.

Second, come and ask for what you need for the work that God is calling you to do in the church, or in the world, to build his kingdom. What we need is often known as the 'gifts of the spirit'. Perhaps we might better

described them as 'tools for the job'. Perhaps you need the courage to speak out in order to offer challenge; perhaps you need the wisdom to keep quiet in order to build bridges. Perhaps there are people you need to care for. Perhaps there are administrative tasks you need to do. The gifts of the spirit are about the needs of the church and the world. The existence of the gifts of the spirit means it may not always be appropriate for me to say 'I can't do that'. Perhaps I can't in my own strength. But perhaps I can with the gift of the Holy Spirit. And what you need may be quite different from what I need. And what you need will be quite different from what your neighbour needs. But come and ask.

Third and last, come and ask for the power of the Spirit to give generously, realistically, out of your income to support the work of God. There is both a spiritual push and a spiritual pull in our giving. The push is the awareness that everything we have comes from God. The ancient Israelites knew it. And if they ever forgot, Moses and the prophets reminded them continually that they had been rescued from slavery by God's power. That they had any independent existence as a nation whatsoever was due to the power of God and not to their own strength. The early Christians knew the same. They had a strong sense that they have been rescued, not from physical or political slavery in Egypt, but from spiritual slavery to Satan. Paul put it like this to the Corinthians:

You are well aware of the generosity which our Lord Jesus Christ had, that, although he was rich he became poor for your sake so that you should become rich through his poverty.

2 Corinthians 8:9.

Many Christians respond to this generosity of God by making the decision that in principle they will give a fixed share of their income away every week, every month, every year. Many Christians decide that they will give away one tenth. The origins of this practice lie deep in the history of Israel when Jacob, founder of the nation, fought in a dream with God himself. His response to that encounter was a promise: 'I shall faithfully pay you a tenth part of everything you give me'. (Genesis 28:22) We find an echo of this in modern debt counselling, where some counsellors advise that a

10% cut in spending is a realistic and meaningful target. That's the spiritual push.

The spiritual pull is about need. Many years ago I was asked why the church was always asking for money, for this cause and that cause. I replied that it was because there was always a need. This church is committed to giving away one 10th of its income to other charities. Last year we supported several charities working in the third world; another supporting disabled people, another offering debt counselling in our own community, a team telling bible stories in local schools and an orphanage in Zimbabwe. We have made a difference - but the need continues.

And our own church has its needs. The major expense of this parish is paying the diocese for me. If we don't pay the diocese, they won't take me away. It doesn't work like that. But if we're not paying for our priest someone else is. And we have to ask ourselves why someone else should pay for a priest for this parish.

In writing to the Corinthians, Paul described how each Christian should respond: 'each one should give us much as he has decided on his own initiative, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God it loves a cheerful giver'. 2 Corinthians 9. The flyer provides a space for you to record your response either as a percentage of your income or as an amount per week, per month. Once you have made your decision you might like to come forward to be anointed to ask for the strengthening of God's Holy Spirit to enable you to follow through with that decision.

So come to be anointed knowing what it is you want to ask of God, knowing what it is you want to offer God. But come to be anointed prepared to be surprised. For God knows your heart is better than you do. God knows your needs better than you do and he wants to meet them. But God knows your gifts better than you do. God knows what he has made in you. And he wants to draw that out of you. He wants to surprise you.

N Clews  
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