

October 22nd: Anoint

This Fall we return to the Narrative Lectionary—a year long collection of readings that take us from the origins of God’s people to the first century world. These readings are chosen on purpose, because they help us trace a particular theme throughout our scripture texts—and this year our theme is “Love in Action.” Over the course of the year, we’ll read a wide variety of passages, from Old Testament stories, wisdom literature, prophetic teachings, scenes from the life of Jesus, and instructions for the early church—but in each, there’s a compelling action that is embedded into the narrative. Last year’s theme was “A Family Story,” and we focused on the identity and purpose of God’s beloved children—but this time around, we’ll be taking a closer look at the movement behind that belonging—the verbs that form the foundation of our faith and life together. Of course, love is the most important verb of all, so we’ll also be tracing how God’s love was shown to our spiritual ancestors and discover how God’s love is still being shown to us today.

As we study together, the goal isn’t simply to increase our knowledge of God—the goal is to increase in love towards God and towards each other. So as we read, and as we reflect, I want to challenge all of us to respond to these stories with action—with real, tangible ways that we can each show love to our hurting world. I want us to take these words of wisdom from our text and transform them into positive change in our community—so that our neighborhood, our city, our country, can be a place where God’s love is seen and felt by everyone.

As we continue to learn together, let’s prepare ourselves with prayer.

Holy God,

Like your chosen king David, we are chosen for your divine purposes. We are chosen to be your servants, we are chosen to be leaders of your people, prophets with your message, teachers for the next generation, and caregivers for those in need. We are chosen, known, and loved by you. As we step into these roles, prepare our hearts for this journey. Set us apart for your purposes, mark us with

your eternal Spirit, position us to do your will this week and every week. Anoint us this morning, we pray. Amen.

Today we return to the land of ancient Israel, but we've jumped forward a few centuries, so before we take a look at our passage for this morning, let's give us some context.

Our text from last week, from the Book of Ruth, was set in the time of the judges—a period of history when Israel was ruled by a series of magistrates instead of by a monarch. This is chronicled in the Book of Judges, and as you can imagine, Israel blossomed under wise and good judges, but declined and suffered under poor ones. It was a well intentioned but chaotic system, and eventually, it didn't work any more. At this point, the people of Israel, all twelve tribes, get together and agree that they are unhappy with the current system. They look around at their neighbors and see that all of the other nations are governed by kings, and so they have this sense of envy—they want to be like their powerful neighbors, so they too want a king to keep them safe.

We learn that God isn't necessarily happy about this development—and that is because God is supposed to be the King of God's people—but the Israelites persist in their demands for a human ruler. So God gives in, and selects the first king of the Israelites, a man named Saul. All the sons of Jacob are brought together under Saul's leadership, and everything seems fine for a while. But this relative peace and prosperity doesn't last—and for a variety of reasons, God grows dissatisfied with Saul and the decisions that Saul has made. During this conflict, there was a prophet in the land of Israel named Samuel. Samuel was an advisor to Saul, and an important spiritual leader for God's people during this time—but he gets some strange instructions from God about this situation.

In 1 Samuel 15, God officially denounces Saul as the King of Israel and sends Samuel on a mission to anoint a successor for Saul. God says to his prophet, "How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of

Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.” At first, Samuel is afraid, because even though God has rejected Saul as King, Saul is still on the throne and very powerful. Samuel fears that if he goes out to proclaim another man as King of Israel, Saul will have him killed. But Samuel is faithful to God, and he goes anyway, finding Jesse and his sons and waiting for God to choose the right one for Israel’s future. Through God’s wisdom, Samuel selects David, the youngest son of Jesse, passing over his many older brothers. In fact, David was not present for Samuel’s initial inspection, he was out in the fields tending the sheep. Despite David’s youth, God says to Samuel, “Rise and anoint him; this is the one.”

After being anointed by Samuel, David travels to Saul’s court and is employed as one of his musicians—but David also finds himself serving in other capacities too. In 1 Samuel 17, we read the famous story of David and Goliath, but in chapter 18, we learn that Saul is growing distrustful and fearful of David. It gets pretty complicated for the rest of 1 Samuel, with growing conflict and even some attempts at murder, until Saul dies by his own sword in chapter 31. At the beginning of 2 Samuel, David hears of Saul’s death, and he begins to lament. God then instructs David to travel to Hebron in the land of Judah, but while he is living there, he finds himself once again at war against Saul’s descendants and supporters. Finally, David is victorious, and the followers of Saul have all been conquered or recruited to join David’s side.

So that brings us to 2 Samuel 5, our passage for today. This is the moment that David has been waiting for since he was a young man—this is the moment that the prophet Samuel said would come to pass. This is a moment of peace after years of struggle. This is the moment when David is finally recognized as the King that God has chosen.

This is also a new day for God’s people—a new day for the land of Israel.

Our passage begins, “All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, “We are your own flesh and blood. In the past, while Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns. And the LORD said to

you, 'You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.'" Like Samuel did years before, the elders of each tribe come forward to anoint King David. David makes a covenant with them, a promise that he will be a good ruler for their families. David promises that he will be a faithful king to God's people. Verses 4 and 5 record, "David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years. In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years."

This closing statement tells us that David's reign as King of Israel was a long one—but as we read later in scripture, David is not a perfect person. He messes up at certain points, and he makes big mistakes that harm others. Like King Saul, there are moments when his wisdom is tested, and moments when he fails to do the right thing. David doesn't always trust God, or follow the advice given to him by the prophet Nathan. He falls short, he has bad days, he sometimes prioritizes incorrectly. He's human. And his people know that. God knows it too.

But God still chose him. God still selected him for this divine purpose. God still singled him out and called him into leadership. God still found him, protected him, and anointed him.

And, believe it or not, the same is true for each of us.

So our verb today is: to anoint. In this moment, here in our sanctuary, surrounded by the family of God, I want to remind each of you that you are anointed.

I think our passage today can remind us that no matter our life circumstances, each of us has been chosen by God, and set apart for a purpose and plan that is larger than ourselves. Each of us carries God's spirit inside of us, and each of us is filled with divine love. As followers of Jesus or people of faith or the inheritors of this biblical story, all of us are chosen by God for the work of ministry and the task of service.

Even though we might not be born into a royal family, or have not been called to appear in front of a prophet after tending the sheep, or have not made a covenant with the elders of our tribe, we are still leaders in our own ways. Whether that's a leader in our congregation, a leader in your workplace, a leader in your extended family, a leader in your friend circle, or a leader in a community cause—we each have influence that can be shared for the good of God's kingdom. We each have a voice that can be used to bring hope and healing to those in need. We each have something powerful to offer our city, or county, or nation, we each are equipped to bring about a new day or new system or new future for our world.

You might be thinking to yourself that you don't see yourself this way. When you look in the mirror, or when you think about your skill set, you don't see a teacher, or a prophet, or a preacher, or a shepherd—you only see imperfections, or old age, or untested youth, or inexperience, or a lack of expertise. But I'm here to tell you this morning: that's not what God sees. That's not what God created in you. That's not what God perceives about you when you worship, or pray, or serve in our community. That's not what God sees when you love your neighbor well or lead a ministry.

You don't have to be a perfect person to be someone that God can work through. Just like with King David, God works with us in our moments of weakness, and God sometimes confronts us when our behavior doesn't line up with what God desires, but that doesn't mean that God has stopped choosing us, or loving us, or anointing us. God is aware of our human-ness, but it doesn't prevent God from equipping us, or empowering us, or sending us out into the world.

Even at your worst, or your most broken, or your most overwhelmed, I hope that you can remember that you are God's beloved child, and God has marked you for something greater, something more beautiful, and something more eternal.

Amen.