

Two Anointings

In the first reading today, David is anointed as king over Israel. You may be excused if you feel a sense of *déjà vu*. Didn't we already have the story of David's anointing as king? And didn't it sound a little different than the story we heard today? We did, and it did. We heard a first anointing story almost a month ago, but it pops up other times in the church year as well. It's such a good story—the one in which the prophet Samuel sets out to anoint the new king, who, God tells him, will be the son of Jesse. Turns out Jesse has a lot of sons. They each come forward, but they're not the one, until the youngest son is called forward, David. I remember one time this anointing story popped up in the readings—not last month, I think this was about a year ago, and I used it for the children's sermon. I had grown men from the congregation come stand up here to represent the sons of Jesse, all of whom were not chosen to be anointed, and then I had one of our young ones, who was already up there for the Children's Sermon, one who happened to be named David, be David, be chosen to be anointed. Young David was fine with it, but in doing so I accidentally traumatized another child, who was not David, who was not anointed, who returned to her seat in tears. I still feel bad about that.

That's the first and probably more familiar story of David's anointing as king, an anointing that happens in a more intimate setting, in the presence of his family, you could call it the private anointing of David. It's our very first introduction to David, and he's probably not much more than a child when it happens, and he doesn't ascend to the throne immediately thereafter. In fact, in the immediate future, it seems he simply returns to shepherding, at least for a bit. At some point he then goes to visit his older brothers, who by then have enlisted as soldiers, they are fighting in Israel's army against the Philistines. Though he is "just a boy," as the text says, David too becomes part of the battle, he goes one-on-one with someone much, much bigger than he is, Goliath, whom he slays. This is not when David gets the a crown, but he does start hanging around the palace. He gets to know the guy who is then sitting on the throne, and the guy's son, who is David's age. The two boys grow up together, become bosom friends. Eventually they become soldiers, too, become caught up in battles not just with nations outside of Israel, but within Israel itself. A civil war erupts. David's life is threatened, numerous times. He sees his friends and rivals die, he mourns what might have been lost, and he soldiers on.

He's now thirty years old—we're now at the reading we had today. David has gained the recognition and respect of various local leaders. They tell him, "We see that you've been doing this all along. We see you can do this, that you are this." And they anoint David as king—his second, his public anointing. It's perhaps not as interesting a story as the first, but it's equally important, because of its implications, because of all that it impacts. The verse describing this was a very brief summary but shouldn't be missed: four decades of leadership that followed, the unification of a country once fragmented and fraught, the centralization and building up of a capital that continues to make world news, the course of history that is changed.

Two anointings, with different inflections and considerable time between them: The first one private: the intimate announcement that God is with him, that God has great things in mind for David, the confidence that instills in David, the assurance it gives when giants loom. The second one public, as others recognize David for what he does, the assertive steps he takes, the second one David living out his anointing in public, moving things around, building, bending, shaping history.

The two anointings remind me of stories I heard in Tanzania. As many of you know, before I became a pastor, my husband and I lived in Tanzania. It was a formative experience for me, and my family, it literally formed our family, our two children were born there. When we moved back to the states I enrolled in seminary, and we put our toddlers into day care, and pined for the people and life we had left. We tried to figure out a way to go back and visit—but how to afford it? An overseas trip for four on a teacher's salary? At the Divinity School I heard about a special grant for additional off-site

study, for which I applied: I proposed a summer study project that would take us all to Tanzania for several weeks—and I got it. I was also very interested in the project, which focused on women's ordination, women becoming pastors. While we lived in Tanzania women were not allowed to be Lutheran pastors, but a year or so after we left the Tanzanian church changed its policy. For my project, I would interview Tanzanians, Lutheran church and lay leaders and people preparing to become pastors, women and men, I would ask them about this.

The stories they told! One of the women I interviewed was one of the first to become a pastor in Tanzania. She had been a religion teacher before that, for decades, an excellent religion teacher. She inspired scores of young men to become pastors. She told me, with pride, that she would urge them to do so. A ridiculously high percentage of the male pastors had had her as a teacher. All the while, privately, she hoped one day she could be, too. And I remember talking to several other women who actually enrolled as students at the Tanzanian seminaries even before the church changed its policy. They knew it was very possible that when they finished their degree there would be nothing for them, but they pursued it anyway. They knew, inside, God was with them. And I remember, too, something a male pastor said when I interviewed him, when I asked him, "Why do you now allow women to be pastors?" he replied, "We knew they could be pastors when we saw that they could do it."

Now, there's a way in which that logic is frustratingly circular, and only works after the fact, and then only if you're open to it. If you never let someone try, you'll never see that they can. But there is also a way in which that pastor's explanation honors women's complete capability, "We knew they could be pastors when we saw that they could do it." It's like the second anointing of David, the public one: like how the leaders of Israel anointed David as king because they saw that's what he was. He was the leader God said he would be back when he was a child, they saw he was that in what he did, how he lived.

David was doubly anointed. We may be, too, every single child of God, young and old, women and men, may be doubly anointed. Our first anointing often happens, as David's first one did, when we're surrounded by family. Our first anointing happens at the baptismal font, with words of great intimacy, as we hear how much God loves us, what great things God has in mind for us, when we are given all the confidence we need for any battle, any giant we may face, for God has already defeated evil, sin, and death. We have this assurance, and we hold it close, but it is not only a private thing, without any implications after. What a shame it would be if we never acted on this anointing, if we never made it public! Baptism impels us to do so, to do discernably different things, live in certain ways, be recognizable, as, among other things, peacemakers. Note that peace is something that is made; peace is something that must be built. And, in baptism, we commit to work for justice; justice is something that requires work, exertion, effort. What we do will shape the world we live in. Or not.

I thought about this, the shape of things, and our part in it, when I read a meditation, with which I'll end this sermon. It's a bit of a longer quote, it's from a theologian named Bruce Springsteen. St. Bruce said this at the beginning of a recent show, it was when the question of families at the U.S. border was especially fraught. Some change has happened since then, but things are hardly settled. Springsteen said, "We are seeing things right now on our American borders that are so shockingly and disgracefully inhumane and un-American that it is simply enraging. And we have heard people in high position in the American government blaspheme in the name of God and country that it is a moral thing to assault the children amongst us. May God save our souls." Springsteen continued, "There's the beautiful quote by Dr. King that says the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice. Now, there have been many, many recent days when you could certainly have an argument over that. But I've lived long enough to see that in action and to put some faith in it. But I've also lived long enough to know that arc doesn't bend on its own. It needs all of us leaning on it, nudging it in the right direction, day after day. You've gotta keep, keep leaning. I think it's important to believe in those words, and to carry yourself, and to act accordingly." Endquote.

Two anointings. Believe, and act. Act accordingly. Act in accord with the Christ, the christos, "the Anointed One." In baptism God has made us all coheirs.