

# Anointed with Love

A Sermon by Rev. Joel Christian Glenn

22 March 2026

## Children's Talk: What Makes Something Holy?

And you shall make from these a holy anointing oil, an ointment compounded according to the art of the perfumer. It shall be a holy anointing oil. With it you shall anoint the tabernacle of meeting and the ark of the Testimony; the table and all its utensils, the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense; the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the laver and its base. You shall consecrate them, that they may be most holy; whatever touches them must be holy. And you shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that *they* may minister to Me as priests. (Exodus 30:25-30)

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In just a few weeks we will celebrate Easter. For the most part we probably are all aware of the broad outline of that story: how Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey on Palm Sunday, the Last Supper on Thursday followed by betrayal, the crucifixion on Friday, and the empty tomb revealing His resurrection on Easter Sunday. But in thinking about preparing for Easter I wanted to focus in on one of the lesser-known stories that took place that week, in which Jesus specifically refers to preparation for His own death, and what that might tell us about how we too can prepare for Easter.

Before we get to the story I'd like to ask a question to get you thinking: is it more important to love the people around you or to love the Lord? I'll ask you to just ponder that question for a moment; and if you feel like you have an immediate answer, reflect on *why* you think that is the case; and perhaps why someone else might give the opposing answer. Now I'm not going to give an answer, but let's see how we can think about that question through this story:

And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table. But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor."

But when Jesus was aware of it, He said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always. For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her." (Matthew 26:6-13)

The story itself is straightforward: a woman pours incredibly expensive oil on Jesus' head; the disciples are indignant because the oil could have been better used raising money for the poor; but Jesus approves of the woman's choice reasoning that they

can always help the poor; they only have Him for a short period of time. There is a ton going on here, but we'll just focus on a few key aspects: the oil, the focus on the poor vs. the Lord, and preparing for burial.

Firstly, the oil. Oil was expensive and precious in the ancient world, but beyond that, it was incredibly important in Jewish rituals. It was used to anoint kings and priest as a sign they were sacred and chosen by God; Messiah and Christ both mean "the anointed one." Oil was also used on all the articles in the tabernacle and the temple to make them sacred and holy for the worship of the Lord. Oil was used this way because of what it stood for:

That the anointing was done with oil was because "oil" signified heavenly goodness; and heavenly goodness is the goodness of love from the Lord, and consequently the goodness of love to the Lord. This goodness is the very essential in each and all things of heaven and eternal life. (*Secrets of Heaven* §9474)

Just as oil indicated holiness in the rituals of the time, the presence of love to and from the Lord is what makes things truly holy. That heavenly love is the very essence of everything that is spiritual and good. When the woman poured costly oil on Jesus' head it was a symbolic acknowledgment of that love, and its source in the Lord.

Now we turn to the disciple's indignation – how can we understand that?

We're told that,

when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor."  
(Matthew 26:8-9)

It's interesting that they do not seem to have been acting out of selfishness, but rather out of a concern for a different kind of love: the love for the poor, or we might say love for the neighbour (although at least one of them, Judas, most likely was acting out of selfishness; see John 12:5-6). They had been with Jesus long enough to know that He certainly cared more for others than He did for Himself. I want to sit

for a moment with what this tension represents in our own life experiences. There can definitely feel like there is a tension between loving the Lord and loving the neighbour, and it can take different forms:

- One is the fact that we have finite resources of time, energy, effort, money, ability to care, and so on. How much do we put into worship and prayer, reading the Word, meditating on what it means, when so many people also need our attention?
- Sometimes the needs of other people are so great that we really can't seem to shift any attention anywhere else, not even to the Lord: think of new parents trying to both hold down jobs while also caring for their newborn; or an older person having to care for an ailing parent on top of all their own needs.
- Another form this tension takes is when following the Lord seems to mean harming or not supporting another person: the Lord says we must forgive and love our enemies, but sometimes a friend who's hurting seems to need someone to just join in bashing the person who hurt them; the Lord says XXX

How do we try to balance this tension? Sometimes we don't have time for both, sometimes one feels squeezed out; which do we prioritize in that moment?

The Lord addresses this in His response to the indignation of the disciples, and by extension, our own tension around doing the external work of charity towards the neighbour and the internal work of loving the Lord. He says,

Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always. For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial. (Matthew 26:10-12)

Jesus's answer has two main parts to it: you always have the poor, but you don't always have Me; in pouring the oil on My body she prepared Me for burial. Let's deal

with that first section first. You will always have the poor, but not the Lord; so prioritize the Lord. That sounds almost dismissive of the plight of the poor. But if serving the poor stands for all the external actions we take to be a good person it can start to make sense why we have to prioritize looking to the Lord. When we see someone in need our instinct can be to jump right in and start “doing.” That’s even a good instinct in many ways. The problem is that when we jump in like that we are not necessarily equipped to actually love and serve the people involved. We can be a lot like the child who wants to jump right into a painting project without any preparation and without any care for the impact (even damage) it might cause to clothes and furniture and so on. A parent’s input would make a significant difference to how things will go. We first need to consider how best to help and make sure we have the love that will carry us through being able to help.

We get those from the Lord. For however much you love that person, the Lord loves them more; no matter how perfect your solutions are, the Lord’s ones are better. First get in touch with the Lord’s love; look to Him for the love and guidance that you will need. Sometimes that is easy; other times a need seems so pressing that we can’t think about the Lord in the moment; but even if it’s just through a small prayer we need the help that He offers before we can best help someone else.

There’s also the question of inner motive, and this brings us to the second half of Jesus statement:

For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial. (Matthew 26:12)

Jesus says this because when a body was buried it was anointed with oil. As we have seen, oil stands for the Divine love that purifies and makes holy: it made physical objects holy for worship; it made flawed humans to be kings and priests for the Lord; and in this case it prepared a physical body not just for burial in a tomb, but

for resurrection and eternal life, the culmination of Jesus' work in the world.

Symbolically, it was the Divine Love, expressed in every action of Jesus' life, that led to the resurrection; and just as the Lord's body was resurrected in being united to Divine love, we are regenerated through our connection to the Lord's love, expressed in our lives (cf. *Apocalypse Revealed* §193). Being able to adopt the Lord's love into our lives is crucial in preparing us for this regeneration.

Regeneration means a new birth, not just of our behaviours, but of the things we love and care about. The Lord doesn't just want us to be able to help people; He wants us to be able to love helping people, for all of the right reasons. Loving the Lord and having our motives transformed are intrinsically connected. It is through a relationship with Him that we can rise above our own wants and adopt His wants for others, to step outside of our own viewpoint and see things His way. When we have taken the time to connect with the Lord, we are then able to do the right thing not out of obligation or pride, but for the sake of the Lord's love. We can do the work of serving others with or without first looking to the Lord; but if we prioritize our relationship with the Lord first, we will be in a much better position to serve well, in a way that is truly loving, prompted by a motivation that is greater than ourselves.

Let's finish by turning our thoughts to how this ties in with Easter. Through His physical body, Jesus perfectly embodied Divine, Infinite, Love. Jesus' life work shows us the possibility that the Lord's love can be fully and perfectly united to a lived human experience among other people. Not that we can do it perfectly; but that the whole point of us going to the Lord is so that His love can be expressed in how we treat others and how we live. That is a real possibility, and so is worth pursuing. This story encourages us to always keep coming back to love to the Lord as the

heart and soul of the church, and to remember that love to the neighbour is enriched and enhanced by this love.

Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her." (Matthew 26:13)