

Lent 5, March 29, 2020  
Matthew 26:6-13 and Psalm 23  
Pastor Lauren Eanes

**Children's Message:**

Good morning! Our children's message isn't just for kiddos today. I've got a request for everyone who is listening. What I need you to do is go into your kitchen and get a small bowl with a little bit of oil in it. Whatever you've got: olive oil, canola, vegetable, coconut.

The oil I've got here happens to be olive oil. Does anyone know where we get olive oil from? Did you say from olives? Yes! They take some perfectly ripe olives, and smush them up to squeeze the oil out.

What do we typically use oil like this for? Do any of our kids know? Yes, cooking! That's what I use this oil for most of the time. Put a little in the pan, and then I can cook my chicken or veggies or whatever. And it makes them taste better because it adds a little fat and it keeps the food from sticking to the pan. Sometimes I'll use oil like this if I'm making salad dressing, or I'll oil if I'm baking something, like a cake. There's a lot of ways we use oil to cook food.

But there are other things we can do with oil too. A few years ago coconut oil got really popular. There were all these articles on the internet like "76 Genius Ways to Use Coconut Oil." Turns out you can use coconut oil not just in recipes but also to condition your hair, soften your skin, unstick a zipper, and get gum out of your hair. And I can personally attest to that one—I won't tell you which of my children needed that trick.

Sometimes people put scented stuff in plain oil and use it sort of like a perfume. My friend gave me this little roller thing that has some essential oil in it. It's a smell that makes me feel good and relax when I smell it.

In our story from the Bible today, a woman comes to Jesus and she brings some ointment with her, it says. And what she had was probably something like this, some oil with some good smelling stuff in it. We read that it was really expensive, and she had it in a fancy jar. And she brought it to Jesus, and do you know what she did? She poured it on his head! That seems like a strange thing to do.

But it turns out that back in Bible times, when someone was being made a king or a queen, they would have oil poured over their head, as a sign that they were special. They were anointed to be the king. So pouring oil over Jesus is one way that this woman could say to him, You are my king.

Jesus also thinks this woman did it for another reason. In this story, the very next thing that happens is that Judas betrays Jesus. He tells the people who wanted to kill Jesus where they could find him. That means we're getting really close to the part of the story where Jesus is put on trial and then he dies on the cross. And so Jesus says, this woman poured this oil on me as a way to get me ready to be put in the tomb after I die. That was a really loving and caring thing for this woman to do for Jesus. And Jesus says, that was a really good thing that she did even if it didn't really make sense to everyone who saw her do that. This woman loved Jesus a lot, and this woman knew that Jesus loved her and all people so, so much, that he was willing to die and be raised up again so that we might live and love others.

This week, one of the ways we are loving others is by washing our hands a lot. We show love to others by making sure we don't have any germs on our hands that we might pass along to others. But when we

do that, our hands can get awfully dry. Why don't we all take a little bit of this oil we have here and rub it into our hands? (And this is for kids and grownups alike!) Let that oil soak into your skin, all over your hands. Your hands may be tired from all the work they've had to do this week, or they may be restless because your work can't be done this week...either way, know that it is surrounded by God's love. And any time during the service today that you want to remember that, put some more of that oil on.

And this week, whenever you or your mom or your dad are using oil, whether it's in a lotion that you use on your body or the kind of oil you use to cook food, remember God's extraordinary love.

**Sermon:**

*The sermon is done in dialogue, with one person reading the psalm (in blue) while the other responds.*

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

But I do want, Lord.

I want so many things right now.

Like...more toilet paper. What if I run out?

I want human connection. I want to hug and shake hands and gather in a big old group of people and I want to bring packages into my house without having to treat them like a bomb or something because they've been touched by someone I don't know.

I want some sense of what the future will hold. I want to know there is a future for me and for the ones I love. I want hope.

I know you're my shepherd, Lord, but sometimes I feel so socially distant from you.

I want patience, to get through this without wanting so much.

He makes me lie down

That's fine, God, I'm fine standing here, really.

He makes me lie down

No, I'm good, there's so much to do. I need to be doing something right now, not just sitting here.

He makes me lie down

But there's all these news articles to read, I can't sign off Facebook now

He makes me lie down

in green pastures;

he leads me beside still waters;

he restores my soul.

You restore my soul?

Even if my soul is aching?

Even if, when I allow myself to sit in the quiet, it forces me to feel all the pain inside of me that I've tried for so long to avoid by keeping myself so busy, by surrounding myself with noise and distractions?

Even if, when I keep still, my soul aches because it remembers the things I've done, the things that have been done to me, the ways in which I've failed, the questions, the doubt, the shame?

Can you really restore that soul?

He restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths  
for his name's sake.

Right paths... like safe paths? Clearer paths? Easier paths?

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
That doesn't sound like an easier path.

Even though I walk through  
Fear for my loved ones  
Fear for my own health

Even though I walk through  
Tough decisions  
Plans on hold  
Dreams delayed

Even though I walk through  
No work  
Too much work  
Frustration  
Loneliness  
Uncertainty

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
Yes, it's like a dark valley!

I fear—  
Exactly. I fear so much. It's just so much fear.

I fear no evil;  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff—  
they comfort me.

I don't know. I've found comfort on my own.

I work in my pajamas some days now. That's comfortable.

And, I mean, my snacks have really been comforting me. Stress eating is real. And that Netflix show with the tigers? In a weird way that comforts me. It distracts me, at least.

Honestly, what really comforts me is my google calendar and my Zoom calls, my amazon orders, and all of my signs of productivity.

Your rod and your staff? Comfort me? I don't know.

You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my—

doubt

fear

anger

shame

--enemies;

I don't know, God. It sounds like a table for one. Just me, and those enemies, that are inside of me. I'm at that table Lord.

And you—you meet me there. You are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

I sit at that table and I want to hate those enemies, both within and outside of me. I want to hate them but all I can do is confess to you and to myself the times that I've fallen short.

I sit that table and all I can do is forgive, and be forgiven.

I sit at that table and I am confronted with the profound absurdity of the gospel, because here at your table there IS forgiveness, and grace.

*you anoint my head with oil;*

Seems like hand sanitizer might be a better choice than oil these days, God. But I'll take the oil.

I so desperately need this reminder that I have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.

I so desperately need this reminder that I can be strengthened and filled with God's grace.

*my cup overflows.*

Grace does overflow. That extraordinary love that you give me spills over, past our walls, past our 6 foot distances, past our fear. It soaks into our skin and transforms us.

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,*

Goodness and mercy follow us. They pursue us. We try to run away, we try to avoid being caught by anyone. And I am so good at running away.

But goodness and mercy pursue us. All the days. Every day. Even today.

*and I shall dwell—*

--in my house forever? That's kind of what it feels like.

*and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
my whole life long.*

Could it be? That Christ will meet us not just in the dark valleys, but in the resurrection life?

May we trust. May we rest. May we live.

Amen.