

From betrayal to anointing

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This week's sensual anointing text is one of those biblical texts that has a personal story permanently attached to it. Late one night, sitting in the ER, I wiped blood away from a dying member's hands and experienced death's sting along with his family. I knew the power of being present in Christ's name when there are no words to speak.

A few years ago at the Festival of Homiletics, Barbara Lundblad was finishing her lecture. She received a standing ovation and was moving away when she stepped back to the microphone. As an afterthought, she asked a question that continues to move me to reflect on the mystery and manners we use at the Lord's Table. "Have you ever wondered why we begin our invitation to the Lord's Table with remembering Christ's betrayal," she asked "instead of beginning with the anointing of Christ by a woman?"

I pulled out the Bible from the pew rack and wondered myself, What would happen? What does it mean to shift from a perspective of betrayal to one of anointing at the table? Try saying, "The week our Lord was anointed by a woman, ..." I can testify that one thing that happens is that those who are steeped in liturgy—who have always heard it said in a particular way—tilt their heads, raise their eyebrows and reflect a posture of "What did she just say?"

Theologically, I can testify that the new expression is good. God is a living God who works through both betrayal and love's anointing.

When the family of faith comes to the loaf of bread and witnesses one of its own whose life's mistake is plastered in the paper, the fear of judgment and shame are transformed into God's beauty and restoration made real. "This is Christ's body, broken for you." When the family of faith comes to the cup and witnesses one in the body whose grief is so palpable, the hope of merciful kindness transforms the darkness and weight of grief into God's beauty and steadfast love made real. "This is the cup of the new covenant, shed for you."

Coming to and leaving from the table, we are anointed in God's good love. And the language—of our liturgy, prayers and invitations into the mystery of God—straightens out the way, binds us together and compels us to service.