

John 10:11-18 Good Shepherd/Earth Day
April 21, 2024

Alleluia! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the healer of our every ill. Amen.

I love the smell of A&D ointment, or A and D ointment as I called it as a kid. I was confused by that D. They should put a bigger space between the D and the Ointment. I'm just saying.

Anyway. I love that smell. I thought the scent came from the lanolin that is in it, but it turns out that after being processed lanolin has no smell. So, where the smell of A and D Ointment comes from is still a mystery to me. It is the mysterious "fragrance," but I like it. And I can recognize that smell right away.

Now, I know that A&D Ointment is meant for diaper rash. It is used to keep the skin from being irritated, but at my house growing up, after the diaper period, we used it for everything that had to do with the skin – from scrapes to cuts to burns to whatever irritation our skin might have. A&D Ointment was always there.

Perhaps my parents liked the smell of it as well – or they just had a ton of it left over from when I was a baby. But that didn't matter to me, because I like the smell. Perhaps I like the smell because it is associated with my skin feeling better. When I smell that scent, I know things will be improving.

The sense of smell actually makes memories quite quickly. With one sniff, we can experience all sorts of memories and even emotions, good or bad.

In my book, A&D ointment is a good salve. I like it, even if it also has petroleum jelly in it. And, I understand why it has a petrochemical product in it. Lanolin by itself is really expensive. Adding petroleum jelly keeps the cost down, but isn't that the problem we have with all of our petroleum products, including plastic. It's cheap.

Although how cheap is up for question these days as we face all sorts of problem from high CO2 levels to plastic pollution. Oil, once known as a gift, has turned into a conundrum for us. We like it. It gets us where we are going and produces all sorts of products that we use everyday. It's "cheap." But, it's also causing all sorts of problems.

When we face the oil issues head on, truly looking at it and not burying our heads in the sand of one side or the other, we realize that we are having a really hard time figuring out what to do with our oil dependence. We need it. We love it. We hate it. It's a necessary evil, or not evil at all. It is used and abused. It is all of the above and when we really think about all of the ramifications, we come to one conclusion.

We need a Savior. We need someone who is on the inside and the outside, who is God incarnate. We need the good shepherd to lead us in the right path-way beside still waters in green pastures. We need him to restore our souls through his Word and sacraments. And to anoint our tattered heads that spin with too much information or not enough information with his healing salve.

A salve. A salve that is better than A&D Ointment or any salve that we can create ourselves.

Did you know that the world salve is linguistically related to the word salvation? They have the same root. It's also related to the word salvage.

A salve is something that soothes, mollifies, or relieves. Salvation is the act of saving or protecting someone from harm, risk, loss, or obliteration. Salvage is to save something from destruction.

And when used as a greeting, *salve* in Latin and Italian has the connotation of wishing someone wellness as a greeting. *Salve* – I hope you are well. That's kind of a nice way to start off a meeting with people. First off – I wish you wellness. *Salve*. I like it. It's like *Gesundheit* in German when someone sneezes – you wish them health.

So, when Luke says in Acts 4:12, there is *salvation* in no one else, he is saying that Christ alone soothes us, saves us from harm, and keeps us from obliteration. He alone is the salve of salvation who salvages us. *Salve!* And that is what we remember in Baptism when the oil is placed on our foreheads in the sign of the cross. The salve, Christ himself, is applied to our heads in Baptism. We are marked with the cross of Christ, God's healing salve, forever. The salve that soothes us, comforts us, protects us, and keeps us from destruction.

Christ is our healing salve who brings us healing and gives us hope in all situations, including those where some might say there is no hope. He saves us from all fear, so that we can live boldly in the world knowing that he is leading us to where his healing salve is needed.

Our cups of salve is overflowing, so that we can share it out in the world with those who are chaffed by the ways of this world, who have been scraped up by injustices and oppression, who have been cut deeply by those who have done them wrong.

As his sheep, we bring the salve of the Savior out into the world. Just as real sheep carry lanolin, a healing salve that grows in their hair, so we carry Christ, our healing salve, out with us everywhere we go.

Lanolin is the oil that is squeezed out of wool. It is found right in the sheep's hair. It is a part of them, just as the Holy Spirit is part of us. Through the Holy Spirit, we carry the healing salve with us everywhere we go.

So, every time we are faced with the conundrums of this world, we do not freak out with our hair on fire. Instead, we apply the soothing, healing, comforting salve of our Savior on all situations, bridging the gaps between fear and hope, helping others to see that all is not lost, because we have a good shepherd, a really good shepherd who is with us, leading us and guiding us, so that his healing can be brought into the world.

Through Christ, we are soothed, calmed, and relieved, protected from harm, risk, and loss, and saved from destruction, so that we can sooth, mollify, relieve, protect, and save God's good creation, the creation God loves, as a response to God's great love for us. *Salve!*

God does not want us, or creation, to go up in flames, but to grow beside still waters in green pastures with his healing salve on our heads.

So, although we may be confounded today, we don't give up tomorrow. We seek God's guidance to lead us into a better world, a world in which there is no oppression or injustice, to any people or the rest of creation.

I know that sounds impossible, but with Christ all things are possible, so we live into that reality to the best of our ability here and now in our own little corner of the world, within our realm of influence, knowing that the good shepherd is leading us.

The good shepherd who will do anything for us, including laying down his life for us and picking it back up again for us. Out of pure love, he gives his life for all life and continues to live so that life will keep on going.

He is our Savior, our healing salve, and we know him like how I know the smell of A&D Ointment. We can recognize him instantaneously, because we know with him there is healing. He soothes our every ill.

And because we know him and love him and he knows us and loves us, we never give up hope.

We know with him there is healing, so we look ahead to where he is leading us, knowing that he only wants the best for his creation and that death is never the end of the story.

We are an Easter people; a death and resurrection people! So, we do not give up. We never give up, because even if we die, we will be resurrected. Christ is our soothing salve, our eternal salvation, who salvages us from despair. *Salve!*

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Thanks be to God. Amen.