



1 November 2020

Introduction

Welcome to all joining us for this service of worship today. And today we continue with our journey through Psalm 23, where we come to the second half of verse 5 where we will focus on these words:

“You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.”

I want to begin today by looking a little bit at the second part of today’s phrase: “my cup overflows.” I wonder, what might that mean?

Psalm 23 was written by King David. As a King, David would have known a thing or two about throwing parties and being hospitable.

An overflowing cup was a powerful symbol in the time of King David. Hosts at that time used it to send a message to their guest. As long as the cup was kept full, the guest knew that they were welcome - hence why, at the wedding at Cana, Jesus saved the day by ensuring that the cups were kept full of wine. But, if the cup sat empty, the host was hinting that it was time for the guest to go home.

On some occasions, however, when the host really enjoyed the company of their guest, they filled the cup to overflowing. They didn’t stop when the wine reached the rim; they kept pouring until the liquid ran over the edge of the cup and down the table.

So what David is saying here is that God - the shepherd - pours and pours his blessings for us - his sheep - until they literally flow over the edge and down the table. In other words, God has given us so much that our hearts are not large enough to contain all our blessings. Now, I know sometimes it might not feel that way, especially at the moment with everything that’s going on in the world. But if we stop for a moment and take a step back, we can see that actually we do have so much to be thankful for.

The American pastor Max Lucado writes:

“Have you ever wondered why God gives so much? We could exist on far less. He could have left the world flat and grey; we wouldn’t have known the difference. But he didn’t.

He splashed orange in the sunrise and cast the sky in blue.

And if you love to see geese as they gather, chances are you’ll see that too.

Did he have to make the squirrel’s tail furry? Was he obliged to make the birds sing?

And the funny way that chicken’s scurry or the majesty of thunder when it rings?

Why give a flower fragrance? Why give food its taste?

Could it be he loves to see that look upon your face?”

And so that leads me to a challenge for any children watching today: in fact a challenge for any adults who want to take part too. What I would like you to do is think of something that you are thankful for; something that brings you joy; something that makes you feel like your cup is running over. And once you’ve thought of that thing, create an image of it. You could do a painting, or use felt tips, you might make a model with Lego or do some junk modelling, you might even feel inspired by ‘Bake Off’ and want to decorate a cake to look like the thing you’re thankful for. And once you’ve made your image, if you want to, you could share it with us on the church Facebook page.

Songs

Bless the Lord oh my soul

Oh my soul

Worship His Holy name

Sing like never before

Oh my soul

I’ll worship Your Holy name

1. The sun comes up

It’s a new day dawning

It’s time to sing your song again

Whatever may pass

And whatever lies before me

Let me be singing

When the evening comes

Refrain

2. You’re rich in love

And you’re slow to anger

Your name is great

And your heart is kind

For all your goodness

I will keep on singing

Ten thousand reasons

For my heart to find

Refrain

3. And on that day
When my strength is failing
The end draws near
And my time has come
Still my soul will
Sing your praise unending
Ten thousand years
And then forevermore
Forevermore

Refrain x3

1. Who breaks the power of sin and darkness
Whose love is mighty and so much stronger
The King of Glory, the King above all kings
Who shakes the whole earth with holy thunder
And leaves us breathless in awe and wonder
The King of Glory, the King above all kings

This is amazing grace

*This is unfailing love
That you would take my place
That you would bear my cross
You lay down your life
That I would be set free
Oh, Jesus, I sing for
All that you've done for me*

2. Who brings our chaos back into order
Who makes the orphan a son and daughter
The King of Glory, the King of Glory
Who rules the nations with truth and justice
Shines like the sun in all of its brilliance
The King of Glory, the King above all kings

Refrain

*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
Worthy is the King who conquered the grave
Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
Worthy is the King who conquered the grave
Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
Worthy is the King who conquered the grave
Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
Worthy, worthy, worthy*

Refrain

Prayers

God, why do you give us so much? You could have left the world flat and grey, but you didn't. Instead you gave us rugged mountains and rolling hills, deep valleys and flowing rivers. You gave us spectacular sunsets and colourful rainbows, crystal blue seas and bright green fields.

God, why do you give us so much? You could have made animals one shape and one size, but you didn't. Instead you made some with busy tails and some with curly ones. You made some with spots and some with stripes, some with fur and others with scales. You made some enormous like the blue whale, and others tiny like the ant.

God, why do you give us so much? You could have made all food to taste the same, but you didn't. Instead you made some spicy like chillies and pepper, and some cooling like mint. You made some sweet like honey and peaches, and others salty. You made some perfumed like vanilla and rose, others bitter like lemons and grapefruit.

God, why do you give us so much? You could have made human beings all the same like robots, but you didn't. Instead you gave us brains to think and to have new ideas. You gave us the ability to have different interests and passions. You made us all different shapes and sizes, with different skin, eye and hair colour. And yet you love each one of us just the same.

God, you have given us so much. You have given us an amazing world to live in, filled with extraordinary things. Our cup overflows. And for all this and more, we give you our thanks and praise. Amen.

Scripture Matthew 7:7-12

Reflection - Matt Burland:

One of the interesting things I've discovered about Psalm 23 as we've focused on it over the past couple of months is that as we journey through the psalm, we're actually journeying through a year in a sheep's life. We start at the home ranch where every need is so carefully supplied by the owner, out into the green pastures, along the still waters, up through the mountain valleys to the high tablelands of summer.

As Phillip Keller so eloquently puts it in his book 'A Shepherd Looks At Psalm 23': "Here, now, where it would appear the sheep are in a sublime setting on the high meadows; where there are clear running springs; where the grass is fresh and tender; where there is the intimate close contact with the shepherd; suddenly we find 'a fly in the ointment,' so to speak."

You see, for shepherds, summer time is fly time. I'm sure we're all familiar with that experience of being out in the warm summer weather, only to find our picnic or BBQ inundated by midges or other flying insects. For sheep, the hordes of insects that emerge with the advent of warm weather, cause a real problem.

This week's verse from Psalm 23 begins with these words: "he anoints my head with oil". Here David is reminding us of what a shepherd does for his sheep.

There are 3 reasons for a sheep to be anointed with oil.

- The first, as I've already alluded to, is bugs. Sheep are particularly susceptible to flies landing on their noses. These flies travel up the sheep's nose and lay eggs which turn into worms that can burrow into the animal's brain. They can die from this. So, each day the shepherd pours oil on the sheep's nose, and the flies slide out instead of flying in.
- Late summer and early autumn is mating season for sheep, and this leads to the second reason for needing oil applying. Male sheep during mating season will butt heads with one another to gain position and assert authority. A shepherd knows his sheep will clash sometimes and he can't prevent it, so he puts oil or grease on their heads. When they clash, their heads glance off without doing much harm to one another.
- The final reason for the application of oil is cuts. Sheep live outdoors – with thistles, rocks, sticks, predators. It's not a kind, gentle setting. Even the greenest pastures have hazards. So, shepherds check their sheep each day, sometimes morning and evening, to look for wounds that need attention. Adding oil to the wound brings healing.

This act of anointing with oil, is an act of care and kindness by the shepherd, bringing his sheep relief and comfort from that triple threat of bugs, butts and cuts.

But this psalm isn't just about sheep. It's a metaphor, with the shepherd representing God and the sheep representing each of us. And like the sheep, we experience things in life that cause us pain and suffering, and we too find ourselves butting heads with others sometimes.

In the reading from Matthew's gospel, we heard these words: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."

We heard in the psalm that there is only one remedy for the problems that sheep have: oil. When the shepherd applies oil to the sheep's head, the result is immediate relief. The sheep become calm and content. This is not a one-time application, though. It's a process that continues as long as the pests or injuries are present.

The key to the process of anointing lies in two words of verse 5: "you anoint." The shepherd does the anointing, not the sheep. At the risk of pointing out the obvious, it is impossible for the sheep to anoint themselves with oil. Even if they knew which oil to use, which they don't, they do not have the skill or physical dexterity to apply the oil where it's needed.

The same could be said of us. When we find ourselves troubled by pain and suffering, or we find ourselves butting heads with others, we find God - the shepherd - ready to anoint our heads with oil, to bring comfort and relief and forgiveness. All we have to do, as the gospel reading said, is "ask, seek, knock."

But there is perhaps another meaning behind this phrase: "You anoint my head with oil" as well.

If we think back to the first time we encounter David in the Bible it is when he was a young boy, before even he goes off to fight Goliath. David's family is visited by Samuel who was told by God to go to Bethlehem, to the house of a man named Jesse, where he will find the person God wants to become king instead of Saul. Samuel looks at each of Jesse's sons in turn, but each time God tells him that that is not the one who he has chosen to be king. Eventually, Samuel gets to the youngest son, David. God tells Samuel that David is the one. We then read in 1 Samuel, chapter 16: "So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on, the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power."

For David, the word 'anointed' would have had special meaning; not just from his days as a shepherd boy, but as a reminder of that moment when God chose him to be Israel's king.

And importantly here, when he was anointed with oil, it says that from that day on, the Spirit of the Lord - the Holy Spirit - came upon David.

Now we might not be anointed to be king like David was, but we are still anointed with the Holy Spirit. As Jesus promised in Acts chapter 1: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

God has put his Holy Spirit in us so we can become what he wants us to be. Like David, we are anointed to do God's work in this world. That work will be different for each one of us, but in essence it is the same: to be God's witnesses, to point people towards God through our words and actions, so that they too can "ask, seek, knock," and therefore experience the comfort and relief and forgiveness we talked about earlier. Amen.

Song

Faithful one, so unchanging

Ageless one, you're my rock of peace
Lord of all I depend on you
I call out to you, again and again
I call out to you, again and again

You are my rock in times of trouble
You lift me up when I fall down
All through the storm
Your love is, the anchor
My hope is in you alone

Prayers of intercession

Good Shepherd, within your embrace we are safe and secure. Within your embrace we know that we are precious in your sight. Within your embrace we feel the warmth of family and belonging. Within your embrace we grow and are nurtured together as one flock, the people of your pasture under your loving care and protection.

Good Shepherd, within your embrace we find comfort and healing. We bring to you those who are ill this day, struggling with either their physical or mental health. You are the great healer, and we pray for healing of mind and body for those we now name in the silence of our hearts.

Good Shepherd, within your embrace we find justice. We bring to you the brave voices who cry out for freedom, those prepared to stand up and be heard without counting the cost. We pray for those who have been imprisoned or tortured because of their race, colour, faith or sexuality. We particularly remember our brothers and sisters across the world who aren't able to practice their faith freely as we are.

Good Shepherd, within your embrace we find peace. We bring to you those orphaned, crippled or dispossessed by war, for refugees wandering this earth in search of a home, for all victims of warfare, and for all those who have dedicated their lives for the search for peace and reconciliation. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer *Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we*

forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Hymn

1. Seek ye first the kingdom of God

And his righteousness;
And all these things shall be added unto you.
Allelu-, alleluia!

2. Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
Seek, and ye shall find.
Knock, and the door shall be opened unto you.
Allelu-, alleluia!

3. We shall not live by bread alone,
But by every word
That proceeds out from the mouth of the Lord.
Allelu-, alleluia!

Blessing Let us forever remember the psalmist's words:

"You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."

And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forever more. Amen.