

THE FIRST 15

Monday, August 12, 2024

Today is Monday, August 12 and we are studying what the Bible says about anointing with oil.

OPENING PRAYER

I come to this quiet space and seek the presence of God, my gracious host - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I still the rushing thoughts of my busy mind and focus on His presence. I calm my body and slow my breath. As I breathe deeply, I inhale God's gifts of healing, holiness, joy and peace and exhale any negative thoughts, worries or concerns. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever. Psalm 23:1-6 (RSV)

REFLECTION

We continue our deep summer dive into the study of the 23rd Psalm. This week we focus on the second half of the Psalm's fifth verse, "You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows." In the ancient Middle East, anointing someone's head with oil was a common cultural practice. In Biblical times, anointing someone's head with oil was a sign of respect and welcome, and a way to refresh them after a long walk in either warm or cold weather. The oil was often perfumed with aromatic herbs and spices. When someone entered the home, a thoughtful host would anoint guests as a sign of honor and welcome, especially at lavish banquets and celebrations. It was a way of saying, "Welcome special guest, I am honored by your presence tonight."

In ancient times, oil was also used for medicinal purposes. Anointing someone was an act of healing. Oil was used to soothe the skin and heal various illnesses and diseases. Anointing the head with oil was thought to lift a person's spirits and pull them out of a period of sickness, mourning or grief. Oil was also used to sanctify objects and people. By anointing them with oil they were set apart for particular purposes, to do God's work in the world. Priests and kings were anointed with oil and set apart as leaders.

In modern times, it would be rather odd to pour oil over a guest's head when they walk through the door. Today a thoughtful host shows respect for guests in other ways. He or she prepares the house for them, provides food and beverages, dresses nicely and devotes their time and attention. The host deliberately makes the guest feel significant, valued and wanted. Perhaps hours of preparation have gone into the visit and there is a desire for things to go well. The investment, in money, time, convenience and concern, is gladly made because the guest is worth it.

One way we can understand God is as our gracious host. In Psalm 23, He invites us to a well set table with festive oil and a brimming cup. Like the Psalmist, we may have just come through a dark valley. We may be battered, bruised, weary and wounded from the struggles of life. We may need to be lifted out of our grief and given encouragement. We may need healing for our hearts, souls or bodies. We may be tired, worn-out, worried or afraid. God, the Host, has prepared a table for us and each of us is His welcome guest.

I am His guest. He anoints my head with oil. I can smell the fragrance of the holy substance and feel its presence on my forehead. He welcomes me. He is honored by my presence. I am valued and wanted. I am refreshed. My spirit is renewed. My heart is soothed and my soul finds healing and rest.

Ask: How might the Holy Spirit want to anoint me today? Where do I need welcome, refreshment, healing or renewal?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord God, You are my gracious host. Thank You for inviting me to the table of Your love. I come seeking merely to abide in Your presence. Pour out Your Holy Spirit upon me and revive my soul. Anoint my heart, uplift my downcast spirit, reverse my negative outlook, heal the wounds of my past, shine Your light in my darkness and bring me to the banquet of your steadfast mercy and love. Amen.