

“You Anoint My Head With Oil...”

👁 Freedom from frustration

👁 The cup of contentment

In the name of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, dear sheep:

We’re meditating on this magnificent poem, a “Hymn of Praise to Divine Diligence,” Psalm 23. King David once a shepherd boy near Bethlehem, brags as one of the well loved sheep, “*The LORD is my Shepherd.*” A full year in a sheep’s life has the first three verses still on the home ranch where the Shepherd supplies every need. Now in verses 4-6, the careful owner has been leading his flock “out into green pastures, beside still waters, up through mountain valleys to the high uplands of summer.” Here in the high meadows and cool, clear springs you might expect a sheep’s paradise. But the flock suffers “a fly in the ointment.” Campers know it, but you have hands and netting for protection. Sheep are totally defenseless when summertime turns to “fly time.” Warm weather swarms with warble flies, bot flies, nose (nasal) flies, deer flies, black flies, mosquitoes, gnats – all buzzing summer’s golden sunshine into torture for sheep. You know what it means to “be bugged.” Now learn to praise your Good Shepherd’s skill. “**You Anoint My Head With Oil...**” for...

👁 Freedom from frustration

Any sheep herder knows that summertime is “fly-time” when flying parasites and misery invade the mountain meadows and drive sheep to distraction. Among the most annoying of the flies is the nasal fly which seeks to lay its eggs in the damp mucous membranes of a sheep’s nose. When the slender, worm-like larvae hatch, they work their way up the nasal passages of the sheep’s head, burrowing into the sinuses. What intense irritation this causes with severe inflammation. No hands means wild **frustration** as the sheep beat their heads against rocks and trees. A sheep can go blind from infection. He can also kill himself.

What a picture of the intense irritation and danger of sin, except that sin takes less time to lay the eggs of annoyance, seconds to hatch into the larvae of **frustration**. And the end result of sin’s **frustration** is eternal death. “Sin-flies” are buzzing our heads with advertising, “Go ahead! You deserve this! Treat yourself!” when in reality, we deserve nothing but eternal condemnation for the way we love ourselves more than God and our neighbor. Flies are laying their eggs in our minds when society sees sex outside of marriage as normal and healthy. Larvae are hatching **frustration** if we believe we have to “keep up with the Joneses.” “*For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evils. By striving for money, some have wandered away from the faith and have pierced themselves with many pains.*” (1 Timothy 6:10 EHV).²

Summertime is also “scab-time.” Sheep have a habit of rubbing heads. But that can easily spread a highly contagious disease called “scab” throughout the flock. Our Good Shepherd’s flock can suffer during warm and prosperous times. “Scab-materialism” spreads as we rub heads with the world around us. Anti-Christian ideas infect us through the media and turn us inward. We end up thinking only of ourselves. During some of the most prosperous times since the Second World War our own Synod was in debt, struggling to maintain Christian schools and open new missions. After the crash of 2008, the LORD our

¹ Keller, Philip. *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. Zondervan Publ. House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1970. Available from NPH, 1-800-662-6022. Also at Amazon / Audible Books. Tenth in Summer Sermon Series by Pastor Mark A. Cordes.

² EHV ~ Evangelical Heritage Version, by the Wartburg Project. Available: 1-800-662-6022.

Shepherd led us to pay off our Synod debt so that once again mission work is expanding. Isn't that amazing when you consider how family incomes have not really increased? Once again our Good Shepherd has displayed His love and skill in shifting priorities from selfish **frustration** to Gospel **Freedom**. Our Good Shepherd's own anointing protects us with **Freedom from frustration**.

“You Anoint My Head With Oil...” Whatever affects my head affects my life. A shepherd wants his sheep to be peaceful and calm. So he anoints the sheep's head with a special mixture of linseed oil, sulfur and tar to repel flies. Right away the sheep graze as lambs feed on their mothers, then lie down in peace to grow strong and healthy. If “scab” infects, the shepherd dips the entire flock, carefully anointing the head with his hands. When his flock is free and unblemished by “scab,” he enjoys....

👁 **The cup of contentment**

Weeks go by as summer gives way to autumn in the high country. Cooler nights and touches of frost close out “fly time.” Birch and aspen fire the mountainsides with crimson, gold and bronze, as mist and rain begin to prepare the land for winter. Subtle changes come to the flock. Rams grow strong, powerful necks, irritated with each other. It's rutting season when rams butt heads to compete for favors of the ewes. Crashing battles are heard day and night. To prevent injury and death, Phillip Keller smeared axle grease on his rams' heads. They'd crash, then slide off and stand stupidly wondering what happened.

Remember Jesus' disciples in the upper room, butting heads over who was the greatest? The Good Shepherd promised to send the Counselor, the Holy Spirit to bring them peace and **contentment** (John 13 - 17). The Holy Spirit would remind them how Jesus suffered to pay for our sins, how He humbled Himself even to death on the cross. How terribly foolish to keep butting heads in selfish ambition and conceited competition. “Top sheep” at church, work, school seems so foolish when the oil of the Holy Spirit is on our heads. Why shouldn't we humble ourselves before others? Jesus did. Why shouldn't we let cutting remarks slide? Jesus did. Why shouldn't we turn the other cheek? Jesus did. Why shouldn't we be willing to yield rather than argue? Jesus was. Our Good Shepherd brings **contentment** as He applies the oil of His gracious Holy Spirit to our heads through Word and sacrament.

Storms break through the golden summertime bringing the cup of suffering to the flock. Shepherd Philip Keller carried a flask of brandy and watched for shivering sheep and lambs. He loved how the little ones would take a spoonful of brandy and water, then wiggle their little tails as they warmed up.

Jesus' cup of suffering relieves us with His **cup of contentment** that overflows our lives with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Instead of the fly-scab invasion of sin, the Spirit's anointing brings life. For **“the way the sinful flesh thinks results in death, but the way the spirit thinks results in life and peace.”** (Romans 8:6 EHV) Instead of suffering from flies of discontent, we **“make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”** (Ephesians 4:3 EHV) Christ's Gospel ointment spreads contented forgiveness in **“a harvest of righteousness [which] is sown in peace by those who practice peace.”** (James 3:18 EHV) **“You Anoint My Head With Oil.”**

See your cup overflowing? Jesus willingly drank the cup of suffering for you and me. Give humble thanks, **“My cup overflows.”** How miserable and wretched we would be if Jesus had not willingly followed God's plan to bring us life through His death and resurrection. Saved from chaos and **frustration** of hell, we're blessed by our Good Shepherd's self sacrifice! By faith in Jesus we anticipate endless summer as He keeps anointing our minds with His Holy Spirit for **Freedom from frustration** in **The cup of contentment**. **“Godliness with contentment is great gain.”** (1 Timothy 6:6 EHV). And Jesus promised, **“If you then, even though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?”** (Luke 11:13 EHV) Just ask. Amen.