

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed, Alleluia! We are the second of three sermons in our sermon series: comedic joy. The theme of this sermon series is that because of the Joy of the Resurrection, we can be lighthearted, joyful, and even humorous because we know how our story will end. It will end with Christ raising us up on the last day!

Today we'll be exploring the theme of a fish out of water story. A fish out of water story is just as it sounds, someone goes out of their element and the resulting challenges and mix-ups usually have a comedic result. Beverly Hillbillies is an example of a fish out of water story. It's about a country family moving to the big city. Green Acres is the polar opposite with city slickers moving to the country.

In *A Little Book on Joy* President Harrison recounts a fish out of water story from one of his colleagues. John Pless, the former campus pastor at the University of Minnesota and longtime professor at my old seminary, he went to guest teach at a seminary in India. Professor Pless recounts being picked up at the airport by two men holding a sign who spoke very little English, being taken to his destination in the sidecar of a motorcycle as the men weaved through busy city streets. Professor Pless was taken in the dark to his guestroom. Dazed and confused from jet lag and a harrowing trip in a motorcycle, he gets ready for bed in the dark knowing he can get his bearings when the sun rises.

Just as he was starting to get settled in he heard the bed creak. It turns out he wasn't alone. His heart rate doubled, and his adrenaline shot up. Who could this be? Could it be a viper ready to strike? Could it be a stranger who would wake up and attack him? Out of the darkness a voice calls with a thick Australian accent, "John? That you, mate?" It turns out it was Professor Pless' friend and colleague, John Kleinig, also a long way from home. They were both professors teaching that week but didn't know when the other would arrive. Fear and adrenaline gave way to laughter and joyful greetings.

Darkness and uncertain greetings abound in our reading today from the book of Acts. Our theme for today: **GOD TAKES FISH OUT OF WATER FOR THEM TO LIVE IN HIS COMEDIC JOY.**

First, I. God takes a fish out of water to make him know his limit. We hear the account of Saul in today's first reading. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews—one of the most devout Jews, and he was headed to Damascus to persecute Christians. However, God had a different plan.

Jesus blew Saul out of the water, so to speak. Jesus encounters Saul and asks him, "**Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?**" Jesus then tells Saul to "**...rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.**" Saul is blinded after this encounter, so Saul's travel companions lead him to the city of Damascus.

Three days is a long time to be suddenly blind. Think of what a humbling experience that would be! Have you ever gone hunting with a blind man? Saul's

job was to track down and capture Christians. As a Pharisee, much of Saul's life was devoted to reading and studying Scripture. They didn't have Braille then, so a blind man, although he could speak and hear, could not read Scripture. Being blind in a foreign city was a complete fish out of water experience for Saul.

This fish out of water experience helped Paul to learn his limit. It took him down a few pegs. He had to rely on his friends to get to Damascus, and his hopes of going on a Christian hunt were sunk.

Have you ever had an unexpected setback? A sudden health scare that required emergency surgery. A financial catastrophe that rocked your plans for retirement. An accident or tragedy that threw your plans out the door. A trip that went poorly. I'm sure you can fill in the blank in your own life.

I want to be clear to say that God is not the author of evil. He doesn't cause tragedies to happen, but He can use tragedies, disappointments, and setbacks as wake up calls, as fish out of water experiences to let us know our limits: to make us know how fragile life is, how short our time is on Earth, or to know we can't accomplish everything we might like to with 24 hours in a day.

When we as Christians face difficulties there's lots of opportunity to be mad at God. To ask, "Why would let this happen?" "Why would take away my health?" "Why would God put me in such a difficult job?" "Why would God give me a family that is so dysfunctional?" Nonetheless, He takes fish out of water not just to see them squirm. Not just to see them suffer. He lets fish be taken out of water not only so that they can know their limits. II. God takes a fish out of water to make the fish trust Him.

What do we find Saul doing instead of cursing God? We find him praying. We find him fasting. We find him seeking out God, even in his blindness. That experience drove him to trust God more.

In our account from Acts we have a scene not unlike the story I told you at the beginning of the sermon where Professor Pless was in the dark, he saw that somebody was there. Perhaps you think of Professor Kleinig, he was also in the dark, he didn't know what was going on. For both of them there must have been a moment of panic, a moment of fear. Who is this new person? I'm in a strange new city. I'm jet lagged, I'm tired, I don't know what's going on. Yet this encounter with the two professors was an opportunity for comedic joy. An opportunity to trust the Lord who guided them safely to India so they could share God's Word with seminary students there.

And so picture the encounter of Ananias and Saul. Saul had dragged many Christians off to prison. All of a sudden, some unfamiliar hands are put on him. What could this be? As Ananias goes into this room filled with Saul's compatriots, does not he worry that Saul's friends could beat him up and arrest him? What is going to happen? And yet Saul hears these words "**Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus**

who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” How this opportunity a chance for Saul to see even though he couldn’t see with his eyes. How this was a chance for Ananias to have faith even though it appeared that Saul was an enemy of the church.

And so too, as we look at our own circumstances, what opportunities has God drawn you toward to make you trust Him more? That sickness may limit your mobility, and you always helped out at church or around the house doing various hands on projects. This might be an opportunity to pray. All of a sudden your schedule is cleared that you can pray for those in need.

What about a dysfunctional family? Certainly there is the temptation to be mad and return evil for evil, but maybe this is an opportunity to show loved ones the love of Christ. Showing love when you are faced with anger and returning peace when they throw turmoil in your life. A house fire can be an opportunity to step back and realize what truly matters: family, friends, and faith.

III. Comedic joy comes from the fish trusting despite his limits. It all ties back to Jesus, doesn’t it? Comedic joy springs from this Easter hope. There was this dread at Jesus’ crucifixion and at his suffering, death, and burial. There was a sense in which many thought none of this was going to turn out okay, but Easter tells us that this is not the case. Life is not a tragedy; it is a comedy. God has a happy ending in store. And just as He rescued Jesus, He will rescue us, too. He has rescued us. He has saved us through His Son Jesus Christ He has forgiven our sins and we can know that we have eternity waiting for us and that our God is a loving Father who does not torture His children or beat up or abuse them, but even uses fish out of water experiences as a chance to draw closer to Him.

We see Saul returning to the synagogues and preaching Christ crucified. And most people must have thought this was a joke! This must have been undercover work getting the Christians to trust him before he sprung his trap. Perhaps he went crazy. This was insane! But this was no joke. This was the comedic joy of the Gospel converting Saul from a fish out of water to someone quite in his own natural habitat. Converted, baptized, he became one to trust in the true God: Jesus Christ, our Lord.

So too, as we face difficulties and struggles in this life. This is not a chance to yell at God. This is a chance to draw closer to God. To know our limits to know and that we cannot do this apart from God. Each setback, each trial is an opportunity to say to God, “God, what do you have in mind here? I’m ready to go along for the ride even if I don’t understand.” Comedic joy tells us that your Heavenly Father is smiling even when life seems to be frowning at you. There’s a God who loves us and each setback is an opportunity to draw closer to God because He has a wonderful plan for your life.