

**Sermon, January 29, 2023**  
**Psalm 15; Matthew 5:1-12**  
**“Thru the Water: When the Beauty Comes”**  
**Rev. Dr. Brian Jones, Senior Pastor**



The Out of Towners is a movie written by Neil Simon made in 1970. It's the story of a Gwen and George who live in Ohio who are headed to New York City for the husband's job interview with a "big Firm".

Now, if you've seen the movie or the remake, you will know this is the last time virtually that anything goes right for the couple. Their flight gets stalled up over JFK and rerouted to Boston, with their luggage that contains all their extra cash and George's ulcer medication. This is the first but not the last time we will hear Gwen utter, *O My God*.

They miss their train, they get on another overcrowded train, wait two hours to get into the dining car (they haven't eaten) only to find the only thing left is some peanut butter, some olives, and clam juice, but they are told by the waiter *it ain't cold*.

They get to New York only to find the taxi drivers, the sanitation department, subway, and bus drivers, in a spirit of unity, are all on strike. We see the couple walking past mountains of garbage in the streets and hear Gwen utter again, *O My God*. They finally get to the hotel, six hours late only to find they have no room as it was given away since they didn't call. Under her breath we hear Gwen mutter *O My God*.

I'll spare you the blow by blow details, but in the ninety minutes or so of the movie, we see them mugged, caught up in a bank robbery, George chips a tooth, a lost wedding ring, and kicked off of a bus. Somehow, the next morning, George makes it to the interview and gets the big promotion. But the couple realizes their lives were better in Ohio, of course, and so they go home. The last scene is of their plan blissfully, finally, taking them home. Only to hear the plane is now being hijacked and taken to Cuba. And, of course we hear Gwen one more time yell, *O My God*.

It's a comedy of absurdities, to be sure. Yet, there is something in here most of us can associate with. We can see ourselves there, can't we? Well, let me put it this way, have you ever been in a place where you thought everything was going to go right, and it went wrong? A job, a vacation, a relationship? It seemed like it was going to be perfect, but before too long, we find ourselves wondering *how did we get here?* Lost in unfamiliar territory with few resources? Sure, I think to a great or lesser degree, most of us have found ourselves wondering how we got where we are in the midst of trial and tragedy or frustration; we, like Gwen want to utter *O My God, where are you?*

We continue our series this morning looking at what I want us to think of as the Baptized Life. What does it mean to be a baptized believer in Jesus? Baptism for us as United Methodists is not simply a series of actions. It's not a ritual where we go through the motions. It's a sacrament where God is actively present in our lives. Now, because God is God, and we are not, we can never fully plumb the depths of all God does in a sacramental moment. But we know that He is the active agent moving us from our world life into a new life from what we were to what God has always called and designed us to be.

Therefore its natural, I think to assume if we are walking into a new life, it ought to somehow be easier than it is. Do you remember the Old American Express slogan, membership has its privileges? That's how many of us approach our life in Christ. And it's not completely wrong. A life filled with joy, filled with the presence of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, heaven, it has its privileges. It's just that sometimes we assume those privileges will mean that life will be easier than it often is. And we find ourselves wondering *O my God, how could you forsake us?*

If you are under that impression, please let me remind you we follow a Savior who was crucified on a cross and uttered those same words. We follow a Savior who told us in no uncertain terms that we are to take up our cross and follow Him. All of the disciples, we believe, were martyred for their faith. Just because we enter into the sanctified life of the Baptized does not mean life is easy. Yes membership in the body of Christ has its privileges. And easy life just isn't one of them.

But what it does do when we come through the water, it changes our perspective on life and on what we are experiencing. What happens when we become a Christian is that over time, our vision is changed, we see things, even our difficult moments, in a different light.

Let's go back and look at our Gospel lesson this morning. The opening to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Has there ever been a more beautiful opening to a sermon? It's beautiful. We know these first 12 verses in Matthew 5 as the Beatitudes. They are called the Beatitudes because they remind us over and over again we are blessed. It's beautiful because it's true. We teach them in Sunday school.

But they are also dismaying. They are troubling. Oh yes, if we look at the end, the result is wonderful. But if you look at the beginning, they are cause for dismay. You will be poor in spirit, you will hunger and thirst for righteousness, you will mourn, you will be persecuted, you will live in times of conflict, you will be hurt, and must decide if you are to be merciful. Over and over, Jesus says if you follow Me, life will not always be easy. In fact, it will be as difficult as it is for everyone else in life. There are the moments we cry out *O my God, why have you forsaken me?*

But look at what Jesus says, He does not say you are blessed because of what you experience. You are blessed because of what God will do with our times of difficulty. The faithful Christian knows that as we go through times of difficulty, when we are in want, God is actually using those moments to make us into what we have always been created to be. It is not that God has forsaken us. But that He is using those moments to shape us and then to meet our needs in ways we have never even dreamed was possible.

How am I blessed when I am poor in spirit? Because it is in that poverty as you let go of all the things in life you think are going to make you happy that you actually experience the riches of God that truly satisfy.

How can I be blessed, how can I have a happy attitude because I mourn? You aren't blessed because you mourn, You are blessed for when you mourn, you experience the presence of God in a way that others have not. There is a depth of God's love that we cannot understand or experience until we are in moments of loss. God does not create our loss. God meets us in that loss. God does not leave you alone.

Yes, we hunger and thirst for righteousness, we see a world where justice and righteousness do not prevail. We see sin all around us. We are not blessed by that, we are blessed that when we have a hunger for real righteousness, when we hunger for holiness, when we see all of the things in our life we have depended on have left us in poverty that we find that which will truly meet our needs and satisfies us.

My friends, it is not that giving our lives to Christ and going through the water saves us from problems. It's just that we begin to see them differently. We see places where God is going to meet our needs, we see places where we are going to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. We see moments where the sweetness of the presence of the Holy Spirit is present in our lives. We see that there are some blessings

in life that we simply cannot find in times of ease. There are some blessings that only make themselves known as we go through the trials of life.

I hope you see that today. I don't know what difficulties you are facing today. But I hope you will begin to see them not as places where you have been forsaken. But places where in the forsakenness you will see the greatest blessings of God poured out in your life. Amen.