

Sermon Draft

Text: Hebrews 11:1–16

Sermon: Called to be Something

All of the appointed readings address how through the gift of faith God calls us out of nothingness. In the Old Testament Reading God calls Abraham and *“Abraham believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness”* (Genesis 15:6). In the Gospel, our Lord exhorts his hearers to trust in God’s providential care, and then encourages them: *“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom”* (Luke 12:32) Through the gift of faith God transforms from nothingness to something special, children of God. In our Epistle, which is our text, the writer to the Hebrews holds up, as examples of faith, Abel, Enoch, Noah and, especially, Abraham. Great men who God used to accomplish His will. Men who without God were nothing but God transformed them into men of faith. From nothing to something special. It’s hard for us to grasp.

Remember the story of the young boy who wanted a bicycle more than anything else for Christmas. He began begging his parents and Santa and whoever else he could ask months before December for a bike. All his hopes were centered on this bike. His father, however, was a bit of a practical joker. So, he found a very large box, large enough to fit a bicycle. It was empty. On Christmas Eve, he wrapped it up and placed it under the tree. That young boy came down the stairs on Christmas Day and saw that box and was sure, absolutely sure, he had a bike. Soon he opened that box but found it was empty. He let out a cry, “I got nothing, nothing at all!” Of course, the father right away strolled the new bike out to give to the boy. But the experience of “nothing” helps us understand the Scriptures we hear today.

God finds us in “nothingness” (vs 1–3). Hebrews tells us that the world was not created out of things that are seen. It was created out of nothing. This nothingness is a perfect picture of the state we are in apart from God’s gracious activity in our lives.

We are “nothing” in sin and our fallen condition. On our own we are unable to please God, do what is righteous or prevent our own death.

Remember even the Old Testament saints mentioned in Hebrews were great big nothings on their own (vs 4–8). Abel was no strong achieving hero; he was murdered by his brother. Enoch is commended not for his achievements but because God took him. Noah was an heir of righteousness, someone who inherited and received his goodness; it was not his own. Abraham had nothing; he wandered in a land not his own; he owned nothing himself.

God calls us out of nothingness to faith in him. The universe was created out of nothing by the Word of God. The universe did nothing to help itself be created. God spoke and it was done. Through the Word of God, the nothingness was called into existence.

This is a picture of our coming to faith. God calls us by his Word. We do nothing but hear and take that Word. The proclamation that Christ has died for our sins is delivered to us and pulls us out of the nothingness of our sin to new life.

Gardeners often begin their gardens in the garage with tiny containers of dirt. My dad did this every year. He would place seeds in the containers and water and tend them until they were big enough to be transplanted into the garden and of course the weather was warm enough.

One year, a gardener, not to be named did this but encountered a problem. His tomato plants wouldn't come up. He watered and fertilized them and kept them at the best temperature. But there was nothing, no green shoots out of the dirt. He couldn't figure out what was wrong. He finally discovered what had gone amiss. He hadn't put any seeds in the cups! He was trying to grow tomato plants out of nothing. We can't do that, but God can and does. He created the entire world out of nothing (Hebrews 11:3).

Just as important for us, by his Word God plants the seeds of faith in us. And the Holy Spirit makes those seeds of faith grow and we become living and active children of God.

The story of Abraham shows that this faith results in good works and obedience (vs 8–12). First comes faith and then good works. Abraham was a “nothing”; so was Sarah. They did not even know where they were going. Yet faith in the Word of God led Abraham to obey, to follow the Lord’s calling. He left his homeland and went to Canaan, living in tents. That obedience is a result of faith. God’s Word pulled Abraham out of his nothingness to new life, and that new life involved obedience and new good works following God.

God calls us to follow him to the promised land. Each Old Testament saint is shown as following God and being “commended” (v 2): Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham. They are commended for their faith and trust in God. This faith leads them to follow God in righteousness and obedience.

Each one finally gets to the end of his journey and receives peace and eternal joy.

Abraham's earthly journey is a picture of the journey through which everyone who lives by faith goes. We have nothing of our own to show God, no righteousness. Yet God calls us by the Gospel and gives us new life. We live that life by the Holy Spirit. We follow our Lord to the promised land of heaven. Strangers and exiles, we find our home in the eternal presence of the God who guided us through this life (vs 13–16).

Remember years ago, when going on a trip, how you would rely on your memory not your smartphone or a GPS device? You would look at a map, memorize the turns and various interstates, and off we would go. These days GPS and smartphones have made such memory work obsolete. Voices continually bark out at us which way to turn, how long before an intersection is coming up, and so on. But sometimes the GPS is wrong, and we end up going to some random place we never wanted to be.

Abraham did not have a GPS or a smartphone when he left his homeland for a new place. He didn't even have a map. What did he have? God's word and promise. He went out not knowing where he would go, trusting in the Word of God (Hebrews 11:8). God calls us to the same journey. The God who died on the cross and rose again is a trustworthy voice who calls out to us to follow him. We trust his word, knowing that his voice will never lead us down a blind path or toward a dead end.

Nothing is a pretty bad place to be. Having nothing is no fun. Being a nothing is even worse. But we have a God who out of nothing has created a better place for us, a promised land. In fact, he calls the entire universe into being out of nothing. And as if anything could be more than that, God calls us out of nothing to trust his promises and follow him to the Promised Land knowing that all our sins are gone, and full joy awaits us.

Amen