

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
Pentecost 9  
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Sermon by Pastor Chris Pflughoeft  
**Hope for a city built by God**

### **Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16**

What type of camper are you? Some people like to camp by roughing it in the woods. They wouldn't dream of staying at a KOA or even a campsite with water and electric hookups. These people want to stay in their tent. They want to separate from society.

Some people prefer to camp in a camper. They want camping that is a little less connected to the wilderness and roughing it. They like to have their heating and shower. Some will even go so far into what is called "glamping." In these cases, the camper is nicer than some homes.

Others will hear about plans to go camping and want nothing to do with it. They don't want to go spend time in a tent, a camper, or any sort of temporary living quarters in the woods. These people want to be in the city. They like their homes, air conditioners, and modern luxuries.

Today, I want to encourage you to be a little more like the third group. No, I am not saying this to take down the attendance to Good Shepherd Bible Camp or to the Church Campout. But today I do want to encourage you to be city slickers in the spiritual sense. In our reading today, there is a contrast between the tents that Abraham dwelt within and the city built by God's own hand that his eyes of faith looked to. My takeaway from this message for you today will be to **hope for a city built by God**.

Our reading for today comes from perhaps the most well-known chapter in the book of Hebrews. The book of Hebrews has the overall message that Jesus is greater. It was written to Jewish Christians who because of persecution were likely tempted to fall away from the Christian truth and revert back to the old and false Jewish religious practices. In this argument to stay faithful to the Christian faith in the midst of such persecution, chapter 11 plays an important role. In chapter 11, the author of this book uses Old Testament heroes of the faith as examples to follow. These Old Testament heroes were able to be faithful to the point of death. Like them, the writer of this book encourages these Jewish Christians to move forward by faith.

As we look at the reading for today, we see the beginning description of faith from Hebrews 11. We then look to one of the examples which was Abraham. Let's take a closer look at this text.

The first verse is one that many Christians know well. *"Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of things that we do not see."* Here we have a basic definition of faith. Faith is trust in what God has promised. This hope is seen just a few verses earlier. Prior to this section, the writer encouraged the believers in the face of the loss of their physical possessions, because of God's promise. He wrote, *"36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. 37 For, 'In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay.' 38 And, 'But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back.' 39 But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved."* (Hebrews 10:36-39) Faith is trust in God's promise of the resurrection and eternal salvation.

Following this basic definition of faith, the writer of Hebrews transitions by saying that faith is the reason that the patriarchs, these Old Testament heroes, were commended in the Scriptures. God commended these people for their faith... not their actions... but their faith. Following this, the author goes through a

list of these patriarchs who were commended for their faith. We will now fast forward through this list to look specifically at one of these men. This is Abraham.

By faith, Abraham followed the Lord's calling. The Lord had called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans. Although it may not have made sense from a human perspective, Abraham followed the Lord's call. There in a foreign land, Abraham lived as a stranger. There he lived in a tent, but he kept his eyes on the city with the foundation built by God.

In this section, there is a strong focus about life in the midst of death. Abraham was elderly and infertile and the same was true about his wife Sarah. Yet, it was as if God had brought Abraham back from the dead as he provided a child for them. God's promise led to life. Then, God followed through on his promise and made his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky.

Abraham, like the heroes of faith listed before him, had a focus not on this world, but on a heavenly country. These people died and had not received all that they looked for. In death, however, the heavenly country was received. In the resurrection, it will be seen to the fullest extent.

In this section, we see that faith holds onto the promise of a better heavenly country. The imagery seen in Abraham's journey really resonates with me. As Abraham lived in tents among strangers, his eyes looked forward to that city with the foundations built by God. Abraham didn't dwell on the temporary treasures of this life, the tents. Abraham looked forward to the heavenly treasures, the city with the foundations built by God. When Abraham died, he lived by faith. On the last day, Abraham will gather with all believers in the resurrection in the heavenly city.

Abraham's faith looked forward to what Jesus did. As we read in the first reading, "*Abram (That's Abraham before his name was changed.) believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*" (Genesis 15:6) Abraham had faith that was certain of what the Lord had promised him. God has fulfilled that promise in Christ Jesus. Through Jesus, all nations have been blessed through Abraham's offspring.

Dear people of Emmanuel, God's encouragement for us today is to keep our focus on that heavenly city. Let us not get distracted by all that is included in the temporary tents of this life. Sadly, many people can grow content and even obsessed with these temporary tents and lose their sight of the heavenly city.

This truth is echoed in one of my favorite Christian hymns, I'm But A Stranger Here. The first stanza of this song says, "I'm but a stranger here, Heaven is my home; Earth is a desert drear; Heaven is my home: Danger and sorrow stand Round me on every hand; Heaven is my fatherland, Heaven is my home." This song reminds us that the temporary tents of this life are not our true home as Christians. Our true home is in heaven with God. Our true home is the city with foundations built by God. Therefore, by faith, we want to keep our attention there. Let's **hope for a city built by God.**

In what ways can we lose our sight on the city with foundations built by God by focusing too much on residing in the temporary tents of this life? I believe this improper perspective can be seen in raising children, preparing for retirement, and our considerations for the needs of others.

First, let's consider how this this focus on temporary tents can be seen in raising children. What are your goals for your children? Maybe you desire that they experience the fun of this world and have fond memories of this childhood. Although a fine goal in itself, Disneyland is a temporary tent. That experience will end. The memories will fade. Maybe you desire to make your child a good person who is kind and helpful. Again, a good goal in itself, but the interactions that they have with others will pass by. People's remembrances of their good character will fade as well. Maybe your goal is to establish your children financially for a good life. Again, a good goal in itself, but that money will not last forever. It could be taken

in a moment through financial depression or physical death. If these goals in themselves are it, your goal for your children is only on the temporary tents.

Next, let's consider your preparations for your own retirement. As you approach the stage of life in which you move into retirement, what are your desires? Perhaps your goal is to have the financial freedom to travel the world with your spouse. A good and fine thing to do, but wars, disease, and death could take these experiences away from you. That Caribbean Cruise is nothing more than a temporary tent. Perhaps your goal is to have the financial ability to be generous to others. Again, that is a great goal. However, your generosity to children, grandchildren, and the organizations you love will not last forever. The money you give will be spent. Sometimes, the money you give may even be abused. If these goals in themselves are it, your goal for retirement is just a temporary tent.

Finally, let's consider your considerations for the needs of others. In the Valley there are many impoverished and struggling people. With homelessness, food insecurity, and financial stress, there are people who need help. Many people desire that churches and Christians help them. This is often done through food banks, financial counseling, and even gift giving. This is a noble cause to pursue. However, making a person's life better here is again a temporary tent. The meals given won't solve chronic issues. Financially hard times can last a person's entire life. People don't only need their tent cleaned. People need to be directed to the city with foundations built by God. If our considerations for others only regard improving this life, these considerations only regard a temporary tent.

Brothers and sisters, in many ways we can become overly occupied with these temporary tents. When this brings our attention away from the city which is built by God's own hand, that can have horrible results for us. Do not allow a focus on the temporary tent cause you to lose out on living forever in the holy city.

In this list of heroes of faith, these people weren't perfect. Abraham was a sinful man too. Abraham at times lost focus on the city. Twice he passed off his wife as his sister to try to protect himself from perceived threats and handed her over to other men. Once he devised a plan to father a child with another woman. The truth for Abraham is the truth for you too. Abraham received God's forgiveness through faith. Abraham lives by faith, so do you. Through your faith, you receive God's grace and the results of the forgiveness that Jesus won on the cross. You are forgiven for prioritizing a temporary tent over the holy city. God commends you for the sake of Jesus whose perfection is given to you.

By God's grace received through faith, you **hope for a city built by God**. You will join all believers of all time to be with our God forever. Moved by this hope, strive to keep your attention on this holy city rather than being overly preoccupied by the temporary tents of this life. In raising your children, prioritize sharing Jesus and his Word with them. In preparing for the end of your life, prioritize your own connection to Jesus. In your concern for others, care deeply for their eternal and spiritual wellbeing.

If you are a person who prefers sleeping in a tent in the woods over staying in the city, I am not saying you are wrong. Enjoy your trips! In a spiritual sense though, let us keep our focus on the city built by God over the tents of this life. Amen.