

“Nothing”
Romans 8:38,39
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August 1, 2021

Back in the 1980s an idea originated to showcase speakers who presented great, well-formed ideas in under 18 minutes. They found that the short model worked, since an audience only had to give their attention for a relatively short period of time. Some Ted Talks have been as short as five minutes. The types of Ted Talks fall into categories like The Big Idea, The Tech Demo, The Artist’s Statement, The Performance, The Issue Talk, The Small Idea, and The Dazzle With Wonder. The Ted Talks have caught on, and they are very popular. Over the years the talks have generated a ranking of some of the “Best” Ted Talks. The titles of these “Best” talks are intriguing:

- Body language
- How great leaders inspire
- The power of vulnerability
- Inside the mind of a master procrastinator
- The next outbreak? We’re not ready (After COVID, I didn’t have the strength to watch that one.)
- Looks aren’t everything. Believe me, I’m a model
- What makes a good life? Lessons on a study of happiness
- How to spot a liar
- The art of misdirection
- The power of introverts
- How to make stress your friend
- Grit: the power of passion and perseverance

I have no quarrel with any or all of these talks being called the “best”, but I know for certain they left out one of the best Ted Talks I have ever heard. None other than our own Julie Eberly gave a Ted Talk, and I mean to tell you it was awesome and inspiring. She talked about how kids can learn to be entrepreneurs, and through being entrepreneurs

it can launch them on a positive and wonderful future where they discover how they can succeed in life. Julie worked for years as the President of a non-profit called Lemonade Day, and through the use of Lemonade stands they helped kids experience their ability to be successful entrepreneurs. During her talk she used a variation on the proverb, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and he can eat for a lifetime.” Adapting that to Lemonade she asked her audience, “Are we giving kids a glass of lemonade, or are we teaching them how to own the stand.”

Often a Ted Talk comes from a person’s own life experience. Recently I saw that a friend of ours from California was giving a Ted Talk about a tater tot casserole. I performed the marriage for this woman and her husband more than 25 years ago. The combination of a dear friend speaking and the topic having anything to do with tater tots was too much to resist. I cued up the video and leaned in to hear something fun about a tater tot casserole. Well, true to the title the message was about a tater tot casserole. But the recipe for her Ted Talk included some difficult and painful ingredients. Her son, at the age of 15, started to harm himself as a way of dealing with stress. He eventually became suicidal. The tater tots came into play when she said, “No one brought us a tater tot casserole when our son was struggling.” And then she said, with a vulnerability that was deep and filled with heartache, she said no one brought a casserole because no one knew. And no one knew because she was afraid of sharing the struggle their family and their son were facing. Her plea, in this powerful talk, was to let people know the challenges you face, and particularly, in terms of depression or mental illness, don’t let any stigma keep you from reaching out. She finally broke down with a friend, she finally shared the struggle, and she allowed people in.

Ted Talks can be informative. They can be instructive. They can be inspirational. Hearing our friend share the experience she went through, hearing Julie talk about the great change young people can experience by learning to be entrepreneurs, looking over the intriguing titles of some of the best Ted Talks, I decided I wanted to give a Ted Talk. Finally, the opportunity presented itself for me to give a Ted Talk.

Once I was scheduled to give a Ted Talk, I realized I had to come up with a title. I struggled with a title that would capture what I wanted to say, and unfortunately, it is not a title that generates much interest or is an attention grabber. After thinking about what I wanted to say in my Ted Talk, the best title I could come up with was, “Nothing”.

I know that title is not impressive, but I hope it doesn't drive anyone away. Because believe it or not, it just so happens that today is the day I am giving my Ted Talk. And you are the audience. You get to hear my Ted Talk with the title, “Nothing.”

I'm calling my sermon today a Ted Talk because we are incorporating remembrances about the life of one of our beloved members who passed away during the COVID pandemic into our service this morning. We had a memorial service planned last summer, but it fell apart with travel restrictions and testing requirements. As with so much during the pandemic, we missed out on a chance to celebrate the life of this dear friend who passed away. His name happened to be Ted, Ted Glasson. My message today is inspired by the faith of Ted Glasson. That is all well and good, but you might wonder, “And the title you chose for this Ted Talk is *Nothing*?” All I can say, “I know the title doesn't sound too good.”

Now let me be clear, it is not that there is nothing to say about Ted Glasson. There is so much to say about Ted, and all of it is good. When we worship on communion Sundays, on Sundays like this morning, the banners for communion were donated by Ted. Just to know Ted left us these words, the words of Jesus, to visually remind us of the blessing of what Christ did for us, what a gift, what a lasting legacy. This is my Body...This is my Blood...Do this in remembrance of me.

Ted sang in our choir. He added much to the choir with that deep bass voice of his. For several years Ted hosted an end of season party for the choir, inviting everyone out to Stoneridge. Ted was very good at welcoming a new pastor to the church. I know this from firsthand experience. He called me and asked if he could come visit. Ted sat in my office and gave me a warm welcome. He invited me to have lunch at Stoneridge. He was such a gracious host. He wanted to learn about me and my family and my hopes for the church. And Ted told me a little bit

of his story. As I share some of what he told me, you will ask yourself again, “And so why did you choose the title *Nothing*?”

Ted told me about earning a Bachelors in Engineering from Yale, and how he attended MIT as he studied for a Masters Degree. He served as a Lieutenant in the Navy during WWII and was present at Iwo Jima in an LSM. He later captained that LSM. Ted had a career filled with distinction as he worked designing and building submarine power plants. His career ended but his life flourished as he and Betsy settled in Quonochontaug. The life he and Betsy shared touched so many as they were known for their kindness. Ted volunteered to help drive, and he developed a relationship with Sam Pierson’s mother. He helped her with transportation and according to Ted, she helped him with some major life decisions. Numerous sweet stories are told about this wonderful man named Ted. How could I choose as a title for this Ted Talk the word *Nothing*?

Well, the selection of the title for my Ted Talk owes a little bit to Greek Mythology. When Odysseus was captured by the Cyclopes, and the Cyclopes demanded to his know his name, Odysseus tells the Cyclopes his name is Outis, which when translated is “Nobody.” When Odysseus attacks the Cyclopes and the Cyclopes cries out for help, he shouts, “Nobody is attacking me.” Well, his fellow Cyclopes hear him say, “Nobody is attacking me” and they show no alarm. If nobody is attacking him, he must not be in danger.

In my defense, it wasn’t really me that chose the title for the Ted Talk. Ted chose the title. Ted selected the scriptures we are using today. Ted selected the hymns we are singing today.

- Be still my soul, the Lord is on thy side...if the Lord is on our side, what danger can overtake us? Nothing
- Rock of Ages...Nothing in my hand I bring...we do not bring anything before God, we do not bring anything that earns our salvation or merits God’s favor or demands God’s love...NOTHING in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling
- When we read from I Corinthians 13 and the words about love, about a love that is patient and kind and longsuffering, a love that is gentle and a love that will not fail, and we heard the affirmation

that the greatest thing is love, we can say with confidence,
“Nothing is greater than love.”

- And when the Apostle wrote about what could separate us from the love of God, he says emphatically, “Nothing can separate us from the love of God, the love that has been given to us in Christ Jesus.”

When Ted talked with me, he told me about the incredible stress involved serving on a ship during a World War. The epic struggles threatened to undo him and the members of his ship. Ted quietly told how hard it was when his daughter Mary died. He spoke with great tenderness about what a blessing Betsy was to him during their 63 years of marriage, and how losing her was such a blow. The more I thought about Ted and about the scriptures and the songs he selected, and the witness of his life, the more it seemed obvious to me that the title that captured his life best was the word *Nothing*.

So now as we prepare to come to the table, where the banners Ted donated tell us that we do this act of celebrating communion in remembrance of Jesus, and with the timeless words of the Apostle resonating in our ears, may we recognize the great promise our God has made, a promise that finds its fullest meaning in the word *Nothing*.

“I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, indeed, there is nothing in all creation that will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Nothing can separate us from God’s love. Thank you, Ted Glasson, for living your life as one long Ted Talk, a talk with the eternal message of hope, “Nothing can separate us from the love of God.”