

The Sixth Sunday of Easter – Pr. Faugstad sermon
Judges 16:18-30: “The Spirit Helps Us in Our Weakness.”
May 24/25, 2025 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Dear Father in heaven, like Samson, I am a defeated sinner, spiritually blind and in bondage to the devil according to my sinful flesh. Remember me, Lord. Give me strength to carry out what You have called me to do. Direct me always to Christ who in His sacrifice pulled down the works of Satan and delivered me from captivity. In His holy name I pray. Amen. (adapted from *The Lutheran Study Bible*, CPH, prayer for Judges 16:23-31)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is written in the sixteenth chapter of the Book of Judges. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

When Delilah saw that [Samson] had told her all his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, “Come up again, for he has told me all his heart.” Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. She made him sleep on her knees. And she called a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him. And she said, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” And he awoke from his sleep and said, “I will go out as at other times and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the LORD had left him. And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison. But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved. / Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to rejoice, and they said, “Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand.” And when the people saw him, they praised their god. For they said, “Our god has given our enemy into our hand, the ravager of our country, who has killed many of us.” And when their hearts were merry, they said, “Call Samson, that he may entertain us.” So they called Samson out of the prison, and he entertained them. They made him stand between the pillars. And Samson said to the young man who held him by the hand, “Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them.” Now the house was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about 3,000 men and women, who looked on while Samson entertained. / Then Samson called to the LORD and said, “O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes.” And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. And Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines.” Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life. (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, the greater and perfect Samson, who delivered us from all our enemies, dear fellow redeemed:

There is an error about prayer hanging around some of the branches of the Christian Church. The error is the idea that if you pray with enough faith, or if you have proven yourself worthy before God by your good works, then He will give you exactly what you ask for. When people who are taught this do not receive what they pray for, they have a crisis of faith. They assume that God must be punishing them for something. They picture Him looking upon them with fierce wrath instead of looking upon them with mercy.

We see a different picture in God's dealings with Samson. But first, a little backstory is helpful. Before Samson's mother had him, she had been unable to have children. The angel of the LORD appeared to her and said that she would "*conceive and bear a son*" (Jud. 13:3). He would be dedicated to the LORD, and his parents were directed to let his hair grow. As he got older, we are told that "*the LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir in him*" (13:24-25).

One of the ways the Holy Spirit "*began to stir in him*" was by giving him tremendous physical strength. On one occasion, a young lion charged at him roaring. "*Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and... he tore the lion in pieces*" (14:6). The same language is used later on — "*the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him*" — and he single-handedly killed thirty men among the Philistines who ruled at that time over the Israelites (v. 19). The LORD was using Samson to deliver the Israelites from their oppressors.

For his next act, he caught 300 foxes, tied them together in pairs and put a torch between them. Then he set them loose in the Philistines' grain fields and olive orchards, and much was destroyed. The Philistines came after him, and with the jawbone of a donkey in his hand, Samson killed 1,000 of them. Another time, he tore out the gates and posts of one of their cities and carried it in one piece and set it on the top of a hill. Samson was a big problem for the Philistines.

And Philistine women were a big problem for Samson. We meet one of them in today's reading, a woman named Delilah. The Philistine rulers promised her great riches if she would "*seduce him*" and find out "*where his great strength lies*" (16:5). Samson told her that if he were bound with seven fresh bowstrings, he would become weak. When he fell asleep, she bound him with seven fresh bowstrings, but when he woke up, he broke them easily. She kept trying. He told her that fresh ropes would do it, but he broke those too. Then he said if his hair were tied into a weaver's loom, he would become weak. Delilah did this, but it didn't work either.

It is obvious that Delilah could not be trusted, but she wouldn't give up. She kept pressing and pressing until Samson finally gave in. "*A razor has never come upon my head,*" he said, "*for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man*" (16:17). You heard what happened next. The Philistines shaved his head while he slept, and when they attacked him, he figured he would defeat them like before. But "*his strength left him*" because "*the LORD had left him.*"

Samson had taken his strength for granted. He felt invincible. He thought he could not be defeated. He had forgotten where his strength came from. He had forgotten to put his trust in

God and follow the LORD's will. He was full of pride, and that led to his fall (Pro. 16:18). It was a tremendous fall. The Philistines gouged out his eyes and made him grind at the mill in their prison. Then they gathered for a great feast to their god Dagon to celebrate Samson's defeat, and they brought Samson in to entertain them. We can imagine the abuse and mockery hurled toward him. He had killed so many of their people, but now here he was—weak, pathetic, a joke.

These hardships had given Samson time to reflect. He knew where he had gone wrong. He understood how foolish he had been. He realized how arrogant he had been and how faithless before God. We see this humility come out in his prayer to the LORD: *"O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes."*

But why should God give back to Samson what he had so carelessly thrown away? He didn't owe Samson anything. Samson had been given a great gift from God, and he sold it for the charms of Delilah. Samson deserved to be the Philistines' slave. He deserved their ridicule and torment. Why should the LORD listen to his prayer?

The same question might come to our minds. None of us have had the strength of Samson, but like Samson, we have taken God's gifts for granted. We have not used our ability to think in pure and dedicated service to the LORD. We have not always used our mouths for His glory and honor. We have not always used our physical abilities to serve Him and our neighbors. We have treated these gifts as though they originated with us and not with God. Why should the LORD listen to our prayers?

The answer is not that we have somehow earned the right to have God hear us because our faith is strong enough or we have proven ourselves worthy before Him. We know this is not the case. The reason the LORD listens to our prayers is because He is merciful—full of mercy—toward us. He is not watching us and keeping a tally of all the things we do and say and think that are wrong, to see when the scale tips or the balance shifts away from His favor. If this were the case, our fate would have been sealed long ago for our sins against Him.

But as He looked upon Samson, so He looks upon us. He knows far more clearly than we do how we have sinned against Him. He sees every misdeed, every infraction, every transgression. We deserve nothing but torment from God for these sins, endless torture in the eternal prison of hell. But the LORD has mercy upon us. He saw us in all our weakness, surrounded by our enemies, unable to free ourselves, and He sent us a Savior.

Like the angel who spoke to Samson's mother, an angel appeared to the virgin Mary and said, *"you will conceive in your womb and bear a son"* (Luk. 1:31). The Spirit of the Lord was upon Him because He was the eternal Son of God. As He humbled Himself to carry out His saving work, Jesus appeared vulnerable and weak, but His enemies were not able to overcome Him. The devil, the roaring lion, rushed at Him with many temptations, the unbelieving world with all its power and resources tried to bury Him, death tried to hold Him fast in its dark chains. But all of them failed. He conquered them all.

He was our Samson, the strongest Man, who stood up to our formidable enemies. He had mercy on us in our weakness. He rescued us from the devil's prison house. He paid the price for our transgressions. He suffered and died for our sins. This is how we know God the Father loves us—He sent His Son to redeem us by pouring out His holy blood. This is how we know God the Father is not punishing us for our wrongs—He punished His Son in our place.

Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection on the third day is also how we know the Father hears our prayers and wants to hear them. In today's Holy Gospel, Jesus says, "*the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God*" (Joh. 16:27). Because of what Jesus has done, the way is open to the Father. He urges us to pray to Him as He says in Psalm 50, "*call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me*" (v. 15).

He knows that it is often in "*the day of trouble*" that we remember to pray to Him. It is when we are weak, when we are unable to control or fix something, when we don't have answers, that we remember to bring these troubles to our LORD. This is what Samson did. He was weak, he couldn't see, he was the object of everyone's scorn, and he prayed for the LORD to give him strength. The LORD did. Samson pushed against the pillars of the house, and the house fell on the thousands of Philistines gathered there, killing more in Samson's death than he had in his life.

The LORD had given him strength in his weakness, and He had done it for the sake of His people Israel to save them from their enemies. The LORD also works in you as the Holy Spirit strengthens and builds you up through His Word and Sacraments. He leads you to repent of your sins, to set aside your arrogance and pride, and put your trust in Him alone. He applies the saving work of Jesus to you, so you are comforted and assured of His grace.

The Holy Spirit also guides you in your prayers. He graciously brings your needs and concerns and requests before God. Romans 8:26 says, "*The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.*" The Lord God wants to hear your prayers, and in His mercy, He promises to answer them in the way that is best for you, both for your earthly good and for your eternal salvation.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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