

March 15, 2026 – 4th Sunday of Lent, presented by Rev Kath Ordiway

Lent Sermon Series: Faith Through Trials
“Samson: An Unlikely Hero”
Judges chapters 13 and 16

We’ve all heard of Samson ... long hair – never cut, huge muscles – super strength, his birth to a mom who could have no children – predicted by the angels ... we have heard of Samson and the Lion ... and then there’s Samson and Delilah ...

Growing up, my parents always said, “If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all.”

My cousin says she can tell that’s what I was taught because I hold my tongue more than she’d ever be able to. But in my mind, is there really any benefit to getting angry and either saying something rude to someone specifically or talking about them to other people? To what benefit is that to me? It just elevates my blood pressure, gets me nowhere and reflects badly on me. Prime point – was it necessary to speak poorly of my ex-husband? Those who mattered knew our situation, those who didn’t know us at the time don’t need to know anything about it now.

Things are better for myself and more importantly for my girls because I was able to speak of his good points rather than speak badly of him.

I have been accused of being too non-confrontational, but my parents’ words stick with me and I’m happier for it.

So how do I stand here and make Samson out to be an incredible man of faith? How do I speak highly of him and his life choices? How do I find faith in his life? It’s like finding a needle in a haystack!

And yet, Hebrews 11 lists him with some of the giants of our faith ... Hebrews 11:32-34

³² And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.

For all the scripture that I’ve read, all the classes I’ve attended, I don’t think I realized that Samson was one of the judges! That lets you know that us ministers don’t know everything!

We know Samson’s name, so I guess he’s actually one of the most recognizable of the judges who ruled over Israel. He ruled for 20 years.

When God finally allowed Israel to enter the Promised Land, He commanded them to drive out all the idolatrous pagans. Instead of obeying God, Israel began to worship the idols of those nations, and they ended up being punished by God, who put Israel in bondage to their invaders.

When the Jews cried out for forgiveness, God raised up judges to deliver them from that bondage, as well as to guide them and judge their disputes. (We know eventually they demanded a king ... as if God their King wasn’t enough, but that’s for another day.)

As scripture tells us, Samson’s barren mother prayed for a child and an angel came to her and told her that she would indeed get pregnant and give birth to a son. She was told to drink no wine and eat nothing that was by law unclean. She was also told that her child’s hair should never be cut. He was to be set apart as a Nazarite, dedicated to God from the day he was born. Scripture says: “*He will take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines.*”

If you know anything about becoming a Nazarite, it was supposed to be a voluntary vow, but it wasn’t Samson making this vow ... it was his parents.

A Nazarite wasn’t to drink wine, not even anything with vinegar in it, not even grapes! They were to have a focused mind, dedicated to hearing from God. They vowed to never cut their hair while under that vow. It was a symbol of submission to God. And lastly, they pledged never to touch a dead body. It was symbolic to the desire to be separate from anything that could defile a person. So, they were to live a sober, submissive and separate life.

Samson's parents would have told him that the angel promised his birth and they would have taught him what it meant to be a Nazirite. He would have been told that he was special, no ordinary child.

In Judges 13:25, it says that *the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him*. If you have had the Spirit stir you – you know it! You can't ignore it. The Holy Spirit moved in Samson!

But then the power of free will and the temptations of the world started to pull him.

He wanted to marry a Philistine woman ... Israel's enemy, certainly against the advice of his parents. On the way to see that woman, Samson had an encounter with a lion – and he tore that lion to pieces with his bare hands! He's touching a dead body. He's out there going against what God wanted for him, but God still gave him the strength to defend himself against the lion! He had to know that it was God! And there are more stories in the Book of Judges that you can go back and read about the ways Samson frequently gave in to temptation, as well as how the Philistines turned on the Israelites because of Samson's words and decisions, and how the Holy Spirit still stepped in to save them.

BUT! God uses our weaknesses ... remember that.

Through all the bad stuff caused by Samson, God used him and Samson confessed that it was indeed God who slayed their enemies. Samson called himself God's servant. Through his temptations, Samson still recognized that he had been born to accomplish God's work. Even at our lowest, God can and will use us.

Sometimes it's easy to define a person by their worst days, by their worst acts, by their worst words. It's tempting to remember them for what they got wrong. I think that's a lot of the reason why I would rather praise a person's good qualities than remember their mistakes. I don't know how many times I've said, "The crazy idiosyncrasies of the people I love may be a part of who they are so much that if that part of them disappeared, they may not still be the person I love."

We have to be careful forming our conclusions about a person. We can read about the highlights ... which are mostly low times ... of Samson – but the book doesn't tell everything of his 20 years as a judge.

There had to be some good stuff or God wouldn't have allowed him to continue as a judge in Israel. There were times when the Israelites refused to follow Samson, leaving him on his own in his battles against their enemy. God knew Samson's heart and we aren't privy to his whole story.

Chapter 16 tells us how the story ends. First, another bad decision ... he visits a prostitute and the people of Gaza decide to kill him. Using his supernatural strength, God's gift, Samson escapes again! You have to ask – why does God keep rescuing him? Remember though, God said that He had chosen Samson to deliver Israel from the Palestinians and God is true to His Word!

And then Samson falls in love with Delilah ... Do you remember the "Movies for a Sunday Afternoon?" Some of you may be old enough to remember getting home from church and turning on the TV for a movie. I think that was my introduction to the handsome Samson.

Samson supposedly hates the Philistines – the enemy of his people, but here he is falling in love with another Philistine woman. Does he learn nothing?

Delilah, though, wanted to corrupt Samson. She wanted to separate him from the One and only True God. That's what sin does and she found her way. Delilah's people wanted to know where Samson got his strength from and she tries lots of tricks (Samson knew a lot about tricks himself). He lies to her a few times, but eventually Samson falls for her pledge of secrecy and love and he tells her that if his hair was ever cut, he would lose all of his strength and become like any other man. That part of his Nazirite vow he had kept.

Judges 16:19-20 reads: *After putting him to sleep on her lap, she called for someone to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him. They she called, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!"* ... but the strength of God had left him.

Every time Samson got into trouble, every time he messed up ... which was a lot, God bailed him out, God always provided a way of escape ... but not this time. God was allowing Samson to be in a situation that would become the deliverance of Israel from the Philistines.

Samson had always believed, had had faith, that God would use Him to God's glory. What Samson must have been thinking at this point – he feels alone.

The story gets gruesome ... The Philistines gouged out Samson's eyes. He's blind and without strength and the Philistines start mocking him. They bring him to their place of worship, the place where they gave tribute to their pagan god and they rejoiced that their enemy had been delivered into their hands. They praised their god for what they saw as their victory. It says that three thousand Philistine men and women were there – but that was how many were on the roof, they were also inside the building.

Someone led Samson around the temple so he could be laughed at. They tied him to the pillars that supported the temple.

And here's where I believe Samson's faith in God appeared most strongly through his trials, through his sin. This is why I feel that Samson's story deserved a place in our Lent series.

Samson knows that God's strength has left him. He knows that there is absolutely nothing he is able to do on his own. Anything good, everything good, that Samson has ever been able to accomplish in his life has been because of the presence of the Spirit of God.

Samson tells his captors that he needs to lean on the pillars supporting the temple, that he has no strength left. I remember this in those Sunday Afternoon movies. Samson was about to exercise his real faith ... he turned to God in prayer. Samson had faith that God would not only hear his prayer, but that God was going to answer those prayers.

Verse 28 reads: *Then Samson prayed to the Lord, "Sovereign Lord, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more."*

He gives God honor, Samson admits that God is in control of all things and that despite his selfishness, his stupidity, his belief that he was above God's laws - Samson admits that God is able to work out all things to HIS purpose in this world.

Samson acknowledges that God had destined him to be used to bring down the Philistines and the time was now. He prayed that God would strengthen him one last time ... and he said, *Let me die with the Philistines.*

Samson pushed with all the strength God gave him one last time and pushed those pillars over. The temple came down on the Philistine rulers and all their people.

When we break our vows to God, as Samson clearly did, there are consequences, maybe big ones, maybe small ones, maybe delayed ones, maybe instantaneous. Our sin enslaves us and will cut us off from God's power, but God will never abandon the person who calls on Him in faith!

We may be weak on our own. We may succumb to worldly temptations. We may make all kinds of mistakes and sin – but when we call on God to be used as He would use us – God's strength is more than anything we can imagine.

Samson, not a perfect model for us to follow, but he left this earth calling out to God in faith. God uses the imperfect, the broken, the weak. God has a purpose for each of us; our lives are part of a greater plan.

Psalm 91:15 *When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble; I will rescue them and honor them.*