

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Throughout Scripture marriage is constantly used as a picture of God's relationship to His people. Two weeks ago, we heard the Lord describe Israel's infidelity in the days of the judges as an adulterous relationship, as the Israelites were "whoring after other gods."

In today's text on Samson, we can see that picture in play as we hear of his unfaithfulness and the Lord's gracious return to him.

... We read as follows in Jesus' name:

When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines.... 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 ...

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. ...

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." ...^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

It is interesting to note how Samson's public ministry of judging Israel started, was shamed by, and came to an end on account of his weakness with women.

After an unfortunate ending to his marriage to a Philistine woman at Timnah, it seems that Samson gave up on the idea of marriage.

Not that that meant he gave up on the companionship of women.

In Chapter 16, we hear of two other women in quick succession.

One whom he met for only one night in Gaza;

the other was Delilah, whom we hear of in our text.

But with her, Samson has a longer relationship, but it wasn't a loving relationship.

Rather it seems both Samson and Delilah were using and dishonoring the other.

I'm sure both of them told the other, "I love you" but neither of them truly meant it.

Delilah kept pestering him, nagging at him, "**What is the secret to your great strength?**"

She was so insistent because she was looking to betray him for money.

And he was happy to use her for his own amusement, and to play games with her, each time mocking her.

This whole situation was pretty far from the self-sacrificing, loving relationship that God desires in marriage and that reflects Jesus' relationship with His Church.

In fact, Samson's unchaste and indecent life was a fruit of his spiritual unfaithfulness.

The Lord had certainly been good to Samson. He had given him great gifts of strength.

He had a strong, clever mind and a strong will, as well as physical strength.

He loved riddles and poems, making them up for others to figure out^{14:18}, or just for himself^{15:16}.

He was crafty enough to capture 300 foxes, and strong enough to kill a lion with his bare hands.

But his great strength was also his great weakness... for he was proud.

He viewed himself as a one-man show; He always took his enemies on alone... and won.

He didn't (usually) need anyone else, so what need did he have of God?

What need was there to listen to the Lord or to speak to Him even,

except that one time when Samson couldn't find water after killing 1,000 Philistines.

Samson was effectively giving God the silent treatment.

As unique as Samson was, there is a lot of him in each one of us.

The same sin of pride that made him feel like a one-man show infects us all.

For some of us, it comes out in more flagrant pride, like Samson.

No need to call on God, except in the direst of circumstances, and even then,

expecting Him to listen to and answer us immediately,

though we have failed, neglected, even refused to listen to Him at times.

For others of us, the pride is masked in humility. It might sound something like:

"Oh, I don't want to bother God for the small things. I will take care of those things."

But this betrays the thought that you have power to control all those small things,

like Samson thought he had.

But what kind of relationship is it when you only speak to someone when you want something?

That's like ignoring your spouse, except for those times when you have need of them.

...

We don't know how long it took for Delilah to wear Samson down,

but she knew immediately when **he had told her all his heart**.

Sadly, he told her only about his hair, not about the almighty God whom he was to serve,
who was the real source of his strength.

So this weak Philistine woman, brought down strong Samson with a simple shave.

It's scary to think that Samson, the Lord's judge,

had so ignored, neglected, even forsaken the Lord, that he didn't even realize the Lord left.

Samson's strength gave him a false sense of security, in both physical and spiritual life.

Dearly beloved, Self-security and self-sufficiency is not what the Lord gives you.

Instead, He gives you certainty! and that certainty is outside of you and bound up in Jesus Christ.

Samson came to see this once again as he blindly ground flour at the mill in prison.

His faithlessness had dishonored God and emboldened the Philistines in their false worship,
as they praised Dagon, their god, for finally delivering Samson to them.

Our faithlessness has the same effect for those around us today.

Why should they be encouraged to join us in the Divine Service (physically or virtually)

when we demonstrate how little we think of these opportunities to hear and speak to God,

to be in His presence, when we consider it non-essential, when we absent ourselves from it,
neglect it or even avoid it?

Why would they want to listen to God's Word when our lives don't reflect that Word,

as if we are not listening to it? Or are not doers of the Word, as James speaks of it.
Why would they pray to a God that we hardly pray to or are ashamed to pray to?
Why should they want communion with Him, if we effectively give Him the silent treatment?
Or why trust in a God that we show little trust in ourselves, when we live in fear of illness/death?

If these questions strike your conscience... if your self-confidence has been shorn...
Then take heart and hear what the Holy Spirit testifies about this same blind, weak Samson,
in Hebrews: he was a man who **by faith** was “**made strong out of weakness.**”
As he entertained the crowd in Dagon's temple, he realized where his strength had come from.
He no longer trusted in himself, but the Lord who would save him.
His prayer shows a humbled, repentant servant, recognizing his own weakness,
ready and willing to serve sacrificially as the Lord had called him to do.

How did that change of heart happen?
How could such a self-centered, proud man now willingly give up his life to save others?
It was because of his God-given faith in the coming Messiah, who would do the same for him.
Thankfully, the Lord graciously then gave him another kind of strength – a strength of faith.
That faith believed in a perfect and certain salvation completely outside of Samson.
A salvation so complete that it covered over his pride with the purest humility.
A salvation so certain that he knew that though he would die in this final act of service & love,
yet God would raise him back to life in eternal glory.

Notice how this one Servant finally defeated the enemy.
In the appearance of great weakness and mockery He spread out his arms and bowed his head.
And the house fell upon all who were in it, and “**He was numbered with the transgressors.**”
But I am talking about Jesus, the minister of the Lord who truly was a one-Man show.
Who meditated on the Law of the Lord day and night, who prayed without ceasing,
telling His heavenly Father all His heart, and praying for you,
and making the way for you to pray directly to the Father;
Who found His strength not in the strength of his own flesh, but in the Word of God,
Who hallowed God's name as He taught *God's Word in its truth and purity*
and truly lived a holy life according to it and gave that perfect, holy life to you in Your baptism.

This is the God who desires to hear your humble prayers as we will pray in a moment,
“**Create in me a clean heart, O God.**”
AND promises to answer them according to His good and gracious will.
This is the God who speaks to you words of forgiveness for your pride
and words of comfort to soothe your guilty conscience.
This is the God who loves you and desires to teach you where your true strength is found:
not in your own mind or flesh, but in the flesh and blood of Christ.
For through them, He strengthens your weak flesh for works of sacrificial and loving service,
and lifts up your heart to pray to the Lord with confidence *as children ask their dear father,*
and to rejoice that the whole house has fallen on sin, and Satan and death.
They have no power over you for Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**
Thanks be to God!

Soli Deo Gloria