

The Folly of Samson

Judges 16: 23-30

It seems a little strange considering all that is going on in our world to talk about Samson. But after living with his story this past week, Samson might be the one Biblical character who captures this moment the most. His story provides us all with an invitation to open our eyes so that we might see how our story as people of faith is part of the larger narrative of how God is at work in this world.

As we may remember, Samson was dedicated to the Lord by his parents during a time when Israel did things which were evil in the sight of the Lord. We are told that the Spirit of the Lord began to move in him as he was called to serve the Lord.

As a judge for the people of Israel, Samson became known for his feats of great strength, even defeating 1,000 people with just the jawbone of a donkey. Nothing and no one could defeat Samson. Many of his enemies tried but they were never able to overcome his strength. Everything seemed to be going great for Samson until...it was not. We are told that Samson was captured, blinded, and made to perform for his enemies.

Now there has been much debate on what exactly caused Samson's downfall. Many say that there was a woman to blame but we know it was really

Samson's fault. Samson's pride led him to believe that his feats of strength were of his own doing and in no way related to God. This is where we pick up our text this morning. I invite you to hear these words...

Samson's death

²³The rulers of the Philistines gathered together to make a great sacrifice to their god Dagon and to hold a celebration. They cheered, "Our god has handed us Samson our enemy!" ²⁴When the people saw him, they praised their god, for they said, "Our god has handed us our enemy, the very one who devastated our land and killed so many of our people." ²⁵At the height of the celebration,^[e] they said, "Call for Samson so he can perform for us!" So, they called Samson from the prison, and he performed in front of them. Then they had him stand between the pillars.

²⁶Samson said to the young man who led him by the hand, "Put me where I can feel the pillars that hold up the temple, so I can lean on them." ²⁷Now the temple was filled with men and women. All the rulers of the Philistines were there, and about three thousand more men and women were on the roof watching as Samson performed. ²⁸Then Samson called out to the LORD, "LORD God, please remember me! Make me strong just this once more, God, so I can have revenge on the Philistines, just one act of revenge for my two eyes."^[f] ²⁹Samson grabbed the two central pillars that held up the temple. He leaned against one with his right hand and the other with his left. ³⁰And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" He strained with all his might, and the temple collapsed on the rulers and all the people who were in it. So, it turned out that he killed more people in his death than he did during his life.

³¹His brothers and his father's entire household traveled down, carried him back up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. He had led Israel for twenty years.

This is the tragic ending of a hero brought low and humiliated. Samson has lost everything. No longer does he resemble the man of great strength he once was. Now he is at the lowest point in his life, someone to be pitied rather than revered.

As people of faith, it would be so easy for us to characterize Samson, to say that this is just a story, that we would never be so foolish as to let our pride separate us from our connection to God. It would be so easy for us to say that we would never be like Samson, that we would never think our feats of strength, our achievements, our accolades were our own and not grounded in our relationship with God.

Yet, when we pause and take a few minutes to reflect, to reflect over the past few days, the past few months, to reflect over the past year, slowly we began to remember...remember those times when we claimed we could do things on our own and forgot our connection to God. When we take a few moments to reflect, we remember all those times when we believed the false narrative we often tell ourselves, the narrative which says that we are always right and everyone else is always wrong. When we take a few moments to reflect, we remember all those times when we used our gifts, our talents, our resources to only build up ourselves, ignoring the fact that all these things came to us from God and that we are called use our gifts, our talents, our resources to build up the Kingdom of God here on Earth, not only for ourselves, but for all of God's people as well.

It is humbling to think about all the moments in our lives when we have ignored our connection to God, our connection to others and only focused on our own wants and needs. Yet thankfully, when we look at Samson's story, we realize it does not end with Samson being brought low. Samson prays to God and he is given one last bit of strength to defeat his enemies.

As a preacher, I know that this would be a great place to end the sermon, to end with a simplistic reminder to never forget our connection to God, to end with a simplistic reminder that we are to never let our pride get in the way of our call to serve our God. As a preacher, I know that I could even go one step farther before ending this sermon to say.... That even at our lowest, God has the power to redeem us, a great lesson, which again, we all need from time to time.

However, we know that our journey of transformation does not call us to settle for simplistic reminders. Our journey of transformation challenges us to become the people God created and call us to be. Our journey of transformation invites us to always view our story as individuals as part of the larger narrative of how God is at work in this world, bringing about healing and wholeness for all of God's people.

And when we do that, we realize that one of the very elements of our faith is an invitation to name the brokenness in our world, to name our pain, to name the

pain we have caused others and to transform that pain, to transform that hurt into something which brings forth life, into something which brings forth healing and wholeness for all so that we do not pass this pain, we do not pass this hurt on to anyone else.

Or as someone who is way smarter than me once said: “Exporting our unresolved hurt, is the most common storyline of human history. The Jesus Story is about radically transforming history, [is about radically transforming] individuals so that we don’t just keep handing on the pain to the next generation. Unless we [see God in the midst of all] human suffering, and use it for good, humanity is in major trouble.” Let me say that again. “Unless we [see God in the midst of all] human suffering, not causing it, but rather there in the midst of it, holding us, surrounding us with God’s peace, inviting us as the people of God to use our pain, to use our hurt, to use our suffering to somehow fill this world with compassion, unless we can do all that, humanity is in major trouble indeed.”

So as people of faith, when we hold this truth to be an element of faith, we begin to realize that there is so much more going on in our text today than simply being about a man performing feats of great strength.

We realize that Samson’s story really is about naming all those times when we let our pride get in the way, naming all those times when we ignored our

connection to God, naming all those times when we caused pain to ourselves, naming all those times when we caused pain to others simply because we forgot that we cannot do this journey through life all on our own. We realize that Samson's story is really about becoming so uncomfortable , that it finally forces us to grow, to finally accept that need for change, to finally accept the need for a new narrative? When we hold this truth as an element of our faith, we realize that Samson's story is really about all of us putting aside our own wants and needs, and re-centering ourselves in our connection to God so that we can come together to build up the Kingdom of Heaven here on Earth. And when we begin to view our lives this way, when we begin to view our relationships with others this way, when we begin to see the world around us this way, then and then can we understand what it means to be filled with great strength. Amen.