

# ST NICHOLAS CHURCH, SIGHTHILL

## 15 August 2021

### BIBLE READING:

#### Judges 14:5-6

Samson went down to Timnah. His father and mother went with him. They approached the vineyards of Timnah. Suddenly a young lion came roaring toward Samson. Then the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully on Samson. So he tore the lion apart with his bare hands. He did it as easily as he might have torn a young goat apart. But he didn't tell his father or mother what he had done.

#### 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

#### Samson the strong man – children's video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPF8RmWM17k>

#### Reflection: A sad song of Samson

Samson is the figurehead for the next two weeks. When I was a kid, I loved Sunday school stories about Samson. I thought it was cool to go to church and hear about a really strong guy who fought a lot.

I remember learning about the source of Samson's strength: his long hair. I also learned he was one of the Old Testament judges of Israel, and that he definitely liked the ladies a lot. My early reading introduced me to this superhero – an ordinary man who received supernatural strength from the one true God, with the purpose of bringing hope and freedom to God's people who were being crushed underneath an oppressive government.

This is the Samson of Sunday school. When I got older, I read Judges 13-16 – I started to see another image of Samson – He was markedly different from my Arnold Shwartznegger – 'I'll be back' film star. My re-reading of Judges 13-16 introduced me to another Samson - a man who though had lots of physical strength – maybe a giant – but was also morally weak and vulnerable.

He was also a man whose 'weakness was turned to lots of strength' because of his faith in God. God used him for great acts of deliverance, and it is understandable that he became a great hero to the Jewish people and nation. Samson was an example of a great and faithful servant of God; in whom they saw God's Spirit work to do great things.



#### Call to Worship

O God, we gather here, all individuals, all unique, yet all made in your image. Despite the inequality, the judgment, the expectations, we are all made in your image of love which nothing can take away. As your beloved we gather, and in your presence we come to worship.

#### Opening Hymn: Pass me not O gentle Saviour

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Br8c0Kkx6vs>

#### Opening prayer and Lord's Prayer

God of grace, as you welcome our gathering here, uniquely created, uniquely loved, we welcome your acceptance of each of us as individuals with all our strengths and all our weaknesses.

Knowing ourselves loved, here we confess all the ways that we fail to accept and affirm others. We confess all the ways that we withhold the love that you freely give. We confess that we judge others and find them wanting while you refuse to condemn but rather lift us from our brokenness.

We confess that we imagine ourselves as more deserving than others, more worthy of your love.

God open our eyes afresh to the grace you pour out for us every day with a lavishness that knows no bounds—and help us to extend that grace to everyone we encounter in the days ahead until the places we inhabit are transformed by your love, alive in us. Amen.

#### THE LORD'S PRAYER

However, the more we delve into his story we cannot escape the fact that should we encounter a person such as Samson today in our churches, and even in society, we would be quick to brand him an absolute rogue. That is the dilemma of some of the famous characters of the Bible.

Although held up as figures of faith, yes, from whom we might learn about some aspects of life, we are not necessarily to emulate their way of life – like Solomon – a man believed to have great wisdom – but arguably a poor sense of judgement – involving gathering around himself 700 wives and 300 mistresses.

Likewise, Samson was a man of tremendous physique! But his exploits include evils we struggle with today – abuse of women, violence and annihilation of human and animal life beyond measure. Samson is someone who seems to have been handed power and, like many leaders of the world throughout history and in the present, has used that power opportunistically, randomly and often for self-gain.

Samson here, and particularly elsewhere, comes across as someone disrespectful of women. The power he has, is used to get/take whatever he wants. We say this is unacceptable, but recent cases of the misuse of power in the area of gender equality within the workplace, politics, film and TV, remind us that this kind of abusive behaviour still goes on.

The exciting thing about Samson is he is a man who is easy to understand. It's easy to read about men like David and Abraham and Moses and the incredible things they did and to think to yourself, "I could never be like them because they were extraordinary human beings. Not so with Samson – in fact one of the good things about Samson's story is that he is not presented as a special saint. He belongs here, with the regular people (or maybe with the irregular people – we know well).

We've seen his beginning—how he had it all. Then, right out of the gate, he begins to make mistakes. Not just one – but many mistakes. We read in Judges 14 about the Samson's multiplied mistakes:

- He went to the wrong place.
- He was looking for the wrong thing.
- He rejected Godly counsel.
- He continued a wrong relationship.

Samson is one of these tragic, flawed, characters of the Bible. He is not edited out of the Bible – He is there – that is the beauty of this book – it is not just about stories of the good people – but also of ordinary people like Samson. Samson is power-hungry and obsessive and ruthless in what he takes from the world through his power. At the same time, he is weak and vulnerable as the quick wittedness of his female companions reveals, as they uncover his secrets.

Samson is all too human a being and provides a lesson for us about the misuse of power and ill-treatment of others that we as humans must avoid in order to be part of God's vision for community. But even in his limitedness, in his humanity – he is not a man, a vessel that God will not use...

### **Prayers for others and intercession**

Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name. Lord, Creator of the world, following the Climate change report, 'Code Red for Humanity' of 9th August 2021, and the Water and Climate Change Conference in Namibia on 11th August 2021, we know that apologies are no longer enough. You give us the intelligence to understand, hands with which to work, skills to enable us to survive. Give us the will to do the work required and political leaders who no longer posture and claim empty promises.

Creator God, you are there. Lord, Creator of the world, we hold before you those threatened with wildfires in America, Europe and North Africa. We pray for those who have lost everything; for those who offer everything in the fight to contain them and for those neighbours who support one another during difficult times. We praise you for the gift of neighbours.

Creator God, you are there. We hold before you those threatened with unseasonable, unexperienced heavy rain and floods and for the multiple rescue agencies who make these their concerns. We praise you for the gift of forward planning. Creator God, you are there. We hold before you those threatened with drought, famine, and malnutrition and for the response of those who realize that stockpiles are unnecessary and who distribute from their abundance. For the people of Tigray, Ethiopia; for the people of Madagascar. We praise you for the gift of those who look beyond themselves.

Lord, Creator of the world, we pray for the peoples of Afghanistan as conflict fills their world. We pray especially for the vulnerable, those poor, unable to find work and the children. We praise you for the peaceable, the peacemakers, and peacekeepers however difficult their work becomes.

### **Final Song: You shall go out with joy**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unWnWSgoSt0>

### **Sending**

When the good news is difficult to see may we hold on in faith, may we journey in the hope that horizons come and new vision is seen. When the good news is difficult to see may we trust the love of God to reshape us, renew us, revive us.

And the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ...