

*<sup>23</sup>Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to their god Dagon, and to rejoice; for they said, "Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand." <sup>24</sup>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." <sup>25</sup>And when their hearts were merry, they said, "Call Samson, and let him entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he performed for them. They made him stand between the pillars; <sup>26</sup>and Samson said to the attendant who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, so that I may lean against them." <sup>27</sup>Now the house was full of men and women; all the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about three thousand men and women, who looked on while Samson performed. <sup>28</sup>Then Samson called to the LORD and said, "Lord GOD, remember me and strengthen me only this once, O God, so that with this one act of revenge I may pay back the Philistines for my two eyes." <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>Then Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." He strained with all his might; and the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So those he killed at his death were more than those he had killed during his life. <sup>31</sup>Then his brothers and all his family came down and took him and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. He had judged Israel twenty years.*

Judges 16: 23-31

Good morning/Good afternoon all! I continue to pray that you are all safe and well.

If I am being honest, this was one of my favorite stories when I was growing up. See, and I know this won't be a shock to members of First Lutheran, as they have heard me talk about it many times, I was a bit of a bully when I was growing up. It's something I am not particularly proud of. When I first read this story, I was so excited to see someone in the bible who was just as mean I was—until I read the story in it's entirety. Samson was a man of faith. His strength was given to him from God.

I am sure most of you know that there have been a few movies made of this story. One in 1949 called "Samson and Delilah" and one in 2018 simply called, "Samson". Samson, of course, was a Nazirite, a man of great strength. He possessed the ability to slay lions with his bare hands and massacred an entire Philistine army using only a jawbone of a donkey! Although there have been many contests over the years where men can claim to be the strongest in the world, I doubt any of them would be willing to slay a lion with their bare hands! The truth is our strength comes from the same God. I once read, "You may wield so much strength, power, influence, skills, resources, talents and money; but without direction, these cannot be productive".

Our direction has been manifested in us through the waters of baptism. We have challenges, problems, issues which can challenge us and cause us to use our inner strength to overcome. Our strength comes from above. Our direction is made possible when we trust in Christ to be our guide in all things. We often possess more strength than we think we do. When our faith seems fleeting, we need to be reminded that the Spirit is always at work offering direction so that we remember we are not alone.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10: 12-13, "So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. <sup>13</sup>No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it". The common misunderstanding about those verses is that God will not give you more than you can handle. That is NOT what it says. It says that we will not be tested beyond our STRENGTH. Maybe you think it is saying the same thing. To fully understand this text, the Greek original language has a much better interpretation. The Greek here actually says, "You will not be tempted beyond your limits and that God will provide sufficient aid". This of course is a shortened explanation, but as you can see, the understanding clearly helps us understand that our strength is and comes from our one true God. God will provide us the strength we need to overcome our temptations, our "lions", our fears, when we trust in the loving grace of the one who gave up all for us.

Obviously, I eventually overcame my bully phase. I have not used my fist to end an argument in a very long time. I do not need to, because like all of you, I know where my true strength lies. Thanks be to God. Pastor Rosy <><