

Judges 16:22-31 – (EHV)

But the hair on his head began to grow after it had been shaved. ²³ Meanwhile, the serens of the Philistines gathered to make a great sacrifice to their god Dagon and to celebrate. They said, “Our god has given our enemy Samson into our hands.” ²⁴ When the people saw him, they praised their god: “Our god has given our enemy into our hands, the devastator of our land, who has caused the death of many of us.” ²⁵ When they were feeling good, they said, “Send for Samson, so that he can provide amusement for us.” They summoned Samson from the prison, and he served as their entertainment. They made Samson stand between the pillars. ²⁶ He said to the young man who led him by his hand, “Put me where I can touch the pillars that support the building, so I can lean upon them.” ²⁷ The building was full of men and women, as well as all the serens of the Philistines. On the roof were about three thousand more men and women watching Samson as he was amusing them.

²⁸ Samson called out to the LORD. He said, “LORD God, remember me, I pray. Give me strength, I pray, this one more time, O God. Let me get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes in one act of vengeance.” ²⁹ Samson then grasped the two central pillars supporting the building. He leaned against them, one with his right hand and one with his left. ³⁰ Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines.” He pushed with all his strength, and the building fell upon the serens and upon all the people who were inside. The Philistines he put to death when he died were more numerous than those he had put to death during his lifetime. ³¹ Then his brothers and his father’s entire household went down, carried him back, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had served as judge of Israel for twenty years.

Dear fellow children of God,

It is common for people to come up to children and comment on how much they have grown. Whether you are 5 or 6 years old or in your high school years, it seems like kids grow up way too fast. One minute they are a baby in diapers and the next minute they are off to their first job and starting their family. Can you imagine what the people of Israel were saying about Samson as he grew up. One day he was a baby and the next minute he was destroying the enemy and saving the people of Israel. Samson was certainly something special. Stronger than any grown man who ever lived! He was everything Israel needed, especially during such dark times. Or was he?

Even if you don’t know your Bible well, my guess is you probably have heard about the world’s strongest man -- Samson. He’s the main character in today’s story. The plot is like out of a novel. He was a local hero who had fallen and that is where our text for today picks up the life of Samson. He has been taken captive into the hands of the wicked Philistines, and he was inside the pagan temple of Dagon -- the false god of the Philistines. Some of you might be thinking to yourselves, how does this sad account from Samson’s life fit with Christian Education Sunday?

Today on this Christian Education Sunday, we will that Samson’s story is more than just a story and certainly more than just a four-chapter rise-and-fall of a man who had superhuman strength. We are going to see that Samson didn’t get his strength from his hair. It came from God and I pray that as we study Samson’s life and death, we will learn some valuable lessons about our own strength and life. There are definitely

times when you and I walk around and live life just like Samson did – as if we are completely unbeatable, as if we were too powerful to be overcome. Maybe we have even caught ourselves saying or thinking, “I’m Invincible!!!” Are we? Really? Our text will drive home this truth:

Sermon Theme: We Are Strong

- 1. Not by our own strength**
- 2. Only By the Grace of God**

All the hype and excitement were so real! Samson was a really special baby. You see, his mother had no children. Then God totally flipped that around. He even sent his angel to promise her a son! Eventually Samson was born, and he was the first of his kind—at least as far as Scripture records for us. And Samson ... was a Nazirite. This meant he was totally set apart from birth. Every Nazirite also took a serious vow that included, among other things: 1) no alcohol 2) no being around dead bodies 3) no haircuts. But Samson wasn’t a Nazirite just because that’s pretty neat. No, the LORD chose Samson. The LORD specifically designated Samson from birth, to grow up in his Spirit, to someday deliver a whole nation – his people Israel – from the harsh rule of the wicked Philistines. Samson was God’s unique instrument, chosen to carry out the LORD’s purpose.

So... do you suppose Samson’s parents, as they held their big little miracle baby, thought, “Boy, these tiny hands will someday catch three hundred foxes, tie their tails together in pairs, and light them on fire.”?? Do you think Samson’s parents whispered softly to each other, “Just think – one day these little arms of our boy will not only tear open a lion but also will kill over a thousand men!!!”? Probably Not! But nevertheless, Samson was an amazing blessing of a child. He was destined for greatness.

But Samson made an amazing mess of his life, and then he did worse than that. For all the physical strength God gave Samson, Samson own human pride swelled up inside him, right along with his muscles. The LORD had essentially declared over Samson, “This is my servant. His heart and mind belong to me.” But it seemed, the moment Samson grew up, he decided to chase whatever he saw, and whatever looked good in his eyes. His heart was determined to wander far away from his LORD. As for Samson’s mind, it too was in danger of flat-out forgetting about God. And his Nazirite vow?? More or less an afterthought. Now Samson was too busy finding new ways to complicate life. I don’t know. Maybe we’ll call it Samson’s “younger days” and he was just immature – sins of his youth. Whatever you call it, it was living a sinful life because he felt almost... almost Invincible!!!

But who could really tell him differently? Samson was a fierce warrior, and you can only imagine the stories of his great feats of strength. His hobby was to get revenge on the Philistines. He teased them with riddles, burned their fields, and slaughtered hundreds of their best soldiers. All of their traps Samson handled with ease. And the Philistines were terrified of Samson.

It’s crazy to think about it. Samson’s own parents had given up a while ago. Remember? They tried passing on some dating wisdom, but Samson married the first foreign woman he saw. He got whatever he wanted. He was virtually unstoppable – never one to be denied! Plain and simple – Samson was living his life however he liked. Samson had completely bought into his self-absorbed lifestyle. He still had two eyes to see, but he was as good as blinded by the sheer thought of himself. He was completely unafraid to broadcast his own opinion: “I’m Invincible!!!” It was this attitude with which Samson effectively made an amazing mess of his life, and he was going in the direction of hell. Listen as we see Samson at his lowest spiritual point, **“He awoke from his sleep and said, “I will go out as I have time after time, and I will**

shake myself free.” But he did not realize that the LORD had left him. The Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes, brought him down to Gaza, and restrained him with bronze shackles. He had to grind grain in the prison. (Judges 16:20-21)

Then the godless Philistines brought Samson out of his cell and they made fun of the Israelite champion. “Oh, what happened to your hair???” “Not so strong now, eh, Samson?!?” What insult to injury! God tells us that Samson once struck down a thousand men with a donkey’s jawbone, but now, Samson himself was blind and weak. He was supposed to be Israel’s judge and deliverer, but now he had no power to help or save anyone.

Sad but true. Sad, but this is exactly what Samson needed! This was it – the unexpected unfolding of God’s grace for his servant Samson, that he would somehow find himself in the middle of thousands of false god-worshippers, shouting the name of some useless god. This was the time for God to work a change in the heart of Samson. This was the time for God to lead him to remember the real source of his strength, which his sinful soul needed so badly!

This was a new beginning at the end of his life. Suddenly God led Samson to see. He knew that he was not strong on his own, but only through God’s grace. For too much of his life, he had lived his life in vain and things were a spiritual mess. His fists and arms were always so alive, ready to strike. But inside, he was totally dead, and his soul all but wasted away. The more Samson lived to gain, the less “invincible” he became. His definition of that word was about to change. Suddenly he remembered why the LORD set him apart in the first place. To save God’s people. To steer his life in service to his God. To learn the real meaning of “Invincible.” To at least learn life is not about self, but about the LORD and his unstoppable love. Finally, Samson understood that he would now have something in death that he carelessly ignored throughout his life à grace. God’s grace came to Samson as he died. And just like the thief on the cross next to Jesus, **“Samson called out to the LORD. He said, “LORD God, remember me, I pray. Give me strength, I pray, this one more time, O God.”** And the LORD did remember Samson.

So you came in here today on this Christian Education Sunday and, lo and behold, you hear about Samson. God has led us to see how incredibly weak he really was. Strip away all that muscle, all that manly might, even cut his hair – and you see, he’s as bald as can be and just as broken, just as bare as anyone here. In fact if we look close enough, we might see we look and act a lot like Samson. Just change the time and the place and the characters—it’s easy to see us making the same mistakes Samson did. Samson’s graceless life is often very similar to ours. Not because God’s grace isn’t always there, but rather because we too think we are Invincible. Ask yourself again: when in my life am I invincible?

I might feel invincible when paychecks are steady and my family and I can finally afford a proper—and well-deserved—vacation. Just a little taste of the good life—I’ve worked so hard for this, you know. But before I know it – it happens fast – my life turns into a “vacation from God.” How did I lose touch? I’m not invincible.

I might feel invincible if and only if people like me! Because everyone needs that approval! I’m still a Christian, yes, but I think so much headache and heartache can be avoided if everyone could just coexist. Let’s just get along, right?! Just let people believe what they want to believe. Let people live how they want to live! I just don’t want to be so outspoken or so staunch when it comes to my Jesus. It’s best to keep my little Christian opinion to myself... it’s just one of many.

You or I can claim to be Invincible, but it’s just a big lie if we don’t have the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. I’m Invincible is impossible without God’s grace. Our lives may seem strong, but by ourselves we

are dead and empty if we can't live under the grace of him or face death in the same way. Who of us can do that? When will you be able to say, "I'm Invincible!!!"

Well – only through Jesus. That's when. When you live in God's forgiving love and in love and thanks serve God every chance we get. We are only strong and invincible when the blood of Jesus covers all our sins and leads us to fear, love and trust in him above all things. We cannot be Invincible when we lose track of Jesus and his Word. When we set God's Word aside, we will end up just like Samson where God will once again need to lead us to see our sin and remind us of his love and forgiveness. As we think about Christian Education, why is it so important to us? It isn't so that we can become so smart from coming to Bible Class or Sunday School or even Church, but so that we get to see over and over where our true strength lies. Our true strength in the same place that Samson's strength did. It lies at the foot of the cross of Calvary and in the empty tomb of our Lord and Savior. It lies in the pages of the Bible as the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith through his Word and through the Sacraments of Baptism and Lord's Supper. What a blessing we have at St. John that we have so many ways for us to be strengthened through God's Word and the Sacraments. Sunday School isn't just a program. It is God's strengthening for our children. Bible Class is not just for the strong Christians. It is one more way God blesses us and our faith. Church is not a weekly obligation. It is a weekly feast where God comes to us as the weak, the lost and blind sheep, as he offers us the greatest blessing of all – the forgiveness of all our sins.

Only one person could ever say, "I'm Invincible" and speak the truth. Jesus not only shouts this from an empty Easter tomb, but in every life of every believer. It is only by God's grace that we will pass from death to life. It is only by grace that we live today, and only by grace that we die tomorrow. Full of God's peace strength, may we live our lives to give all glory and thanks to God. Next time you hear the phrase, I'm Invincible ... you may think of Samson, then shake your head. But then, think of Samson's LORD who is also our LORD and our God and our Jesus. Amen.