

SATURDAY, AUGUST 2: 1 SAMUEL 17:20-47

TRINITY 6

David did not hesitate to fight Goliath when he dared to defy God's holy people Israel, but he placed no trust in himself and gave no glory to himself; he fought in the strength of the Lord, as he told Goliath, "Then all this assembly shall know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD's, and He will give you into our hands."

Indeed the Lord does not save with sword or spear, but with the precious blood of Christ, our true David. Luther writes about this beautifully in his Preface to the New Testament: "For the word 'Gospel' means a good report, a good story, good news, a good proclamation about which one sings, tells and rejoices, as when David overcame the giant Goliath. There came a good proclamation and comforting news among the Jewish people that their terrible enemy had been struck down, that they had been rescued and set at peace and joy, for which they sang and danced and rejoiced. So the Gospel of God and the New Testament is a good story and proclamation that has gone out into all the world through the apostles, about a true David who strove with sin, death, and the devil, and overcame them, and thereby has rescued, justified, made alive and saved all those who were imprisoned in sins, plagued with death and overpowered by the devil, and thereby has set them at peace and brought them back to God, for which they sing, praise and give thanks to God and are eternally joyful, if they otherwise firmly believe this and remain steadfast in faith."

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THE HOLY GOSPEL**St. Luke 14:16-24 (NKJV)**

Then He said to him, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.'"

So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind."

And the servant said, "Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room."

Then the master said to the servant, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper."

THE COLLECT

O Lord, who never fails to help and govern those whom Thou does bring up in Thy steadfast fear and love, make us to have a perpetual fear and love of Thy holy name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Goliath, the champion of the Philistines, came out with great hatred and contempt for the people of Israel and for their God. For forty days he came out onto the battlefield in search of an equal, hurling his challenge across the valley, "I defy the armies of Israel this day." Israel's only response was fear, until David came along and heard the taunts and jeers of the giant. When David heard Goliath's words, he was filled, not with fear, but with indignation. This unbeliever had insulted the Lord God of Israel. David would not stand for it.

Where did this indignation, this bravery come from? It came from a fervent love for the Lord and for the Lord's people on David's part. Why wasn't he afraid? Because, as David would later write in Psalm 27, "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

Satan is a much fiercer, stronger enemy than Goliath was. "On earth is not His equal. With might of ours can naught be done; soon were our loss effected. But for us fights the Valiant One, Whom God Himself elected. Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is, of Sabaoth Lord, and there's none other God. He holds the field forever. "

A Champion has appeared for us, to fight for us. And "if God is for us, who can be against us? He Who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:31-32).

Saul had the outward trappings of royalty, but he fell into unbelief and forfeited the kingdom. So God told Samuel, “I have provided Myself a king” among the sons of Jesse. God had raised up a man “after the Lord’s own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14), a man who, unlike Saul, trembled at the Lord’s Word. David was the Lord’s choice, though even Samuel and David’s own family wouldn’t have pegged David for a king. “Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

God has now provided Himself a King in the Son of David, Jesus, Who was like his father David in many ways. He was a Man after the Lord’s own heart, Who came from the bosom of the Father. Like a Shepherd, He cared for the sheep of the Lord’s pasture. He trusted in the Lord and honored His Word at all times. He walked humbly before the Lord and cared deeply for the Lord’s people. But His glory was hidden. He didn’t look like a king, much less like the very Son of God.

We who believe in Jesus don’t look like kings, either, even though God has made us to be royal priests and co-heirs with the Son of David of an eternal kingdom. But faith in Christ makes us people after the Lord’s own heart, and as new creatures, fed by Word and Sacrament, the Holy Spirit is molding us into the image of David, and much more, into the image of David’s Son, so that we fear, love, and trust in Him above all things as people who tremble at His Word.

It must have been a great comfort to Joshua, to whom God had given the responsibility of leading His people into the Promised Land, to meet the Commander of the Lord’s army face to face. When the pre-incarnate Christ said to him, “Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy,” Joshua must have been reminded of Moses’ encounter with the same pre-incarnate Christ at the Burning Bush. Moses was certainly guided to do his mission, and now Joshua has this same promise that he will be guided to lead Israel to victory in the Promised Land.

Joshua was given the reassurance to “Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).

In Dr. Luther’s hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*, Luther writes:

A mighty fortress is our God,
A trusty shield and weapon;
He helps us free from every need
That hath us now o’er-taken.

We have received the same promise Joshua did. Indeed, each time we hear the Word of God, each time we confess our sins and hear the words, “I forgive you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” each time we receive the Body and Blood of our Savior in the Holy Supper, we are the recipients of that same promise. We are forgiven. We hear and see our Risen Lord Jesus Christ say to us, “I am with you. Sin, death and the devil cannot overpower you.” Indeed, the Kingdom ours remaineth, now and forever. Amen.

Yesterday we read that the “Commander of the army of the Lord” told Joshua how he was to lead the Israelites in the defeat of Jericho. From a military perspective this seems to be a pretty lame plan: no swords, no bows and arrows, no chariots, no show of power at all.

The reading does not tell us what the Israelites thought of this, but one might assume they were thinking, “How does anybody think we can win like this! This is all show! We need some power!” And yet we know the Lord did indeed give the victory.

In Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus tells His Church on earth how to win the victory. He says “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

The Commander of the Lord’s army has sent His church out with the Word and Sacraments to call people to Him. Many people somehow think that these tools are not enough to do the job. We need more attractive settings, more “feel good” music, and a more relevant message.

But when the Commander of the Lord’s army is working through His Word and Sacrament, nothing more is needed. Indeed, despite appearances we have the victory and the Kingdom ours remaineth, now and forever. Amen.

Saul chose to alter the Word of the Lord, devising his own way to worship God, and he actually expected God to be happy about it. But Samuel’s question highlights Saul’s disobedience, “What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?” If Saul had obeyed the Lord’s commandment, all the sheep and oxen of the Amalekites would have been dead already. Instead, Saul reasoned that the Lord would be more pleased with Saul’s “good” intentions to offer these animals as sacrifices to Him. What could be more pleasing to God than a person’s sincere devotion and sacrificial gifts?

Answer: “Obeying the voice of the Lord.” For “to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.” When we circumvent God’s Word in order to worship Him as we think He would want to be worshiped, we are rebelling against the revealed will of God and seeking God where He has not revealed Himself, and that, He says, is the same thing as witchcraft and idolatry.

We cannot invent ways to worship God and gain His favor. “For every service of God, ordained and chosen of men without the commandment of God to merit justification and grace, is wicked, as Christ says, ‘In vain do they worship Me with the commandments of men.’ And Paul teaches everywhere that righteousness is not to be sought from our own observances and acts of worship, devised by men, but that it comes by faith to those who believe that they are received by God into grace for Christ’s sake.” (AC:XXVII:36-37).

We learn in today's reading that partial obedience to the Lord's Word is no obedience at all. God had given strict orders for the utter destruction of the Amalekites—an order so harsh that human reason stumbles over it. Saul's reason told him that the Amalekite king would make a fine prize and that it would be a waste simply to slaughter all the animals. Surely the Lord didn't actually mean what He had said!

Do some of God's Commandments seem too harsh, too unreasonable, too unloving to obey? Do we think we know better than God, or that His commands should fit into our own judgment of right and wrong? Of course we balk at God's commands by nature! Deep down in the depths of our sinful flesh, we all want to determine right from wrong. Deep down, we all think we could do a better job than God at running the universe.

But our reason is a false god. The Lord alone is God. He is good. What He does is the definition of right. He doesn't ask us for our opinion, nor does He give command and then let us change His Commandments as we see fit. Partial obedience is complete rebellion. Therefore, God calls the rebels to repentance, for Christ has suffered for all the rebellion of men, that we might be set free from punishment by faith in Him, and that we might be renewed by His Spirit to walk in His commands, turning aside neither to the right nor to the left. For "this is love, that we walk according to His commandments." (2 John 6).

Our reading is a grave warning to God's people of all times. That warning is simply, "Listen to the Word of God!" At Jericho the Commander of the Lord's army had worked a great miracle. And what did the children of Israel do? They ignored God's Word to "abstain from the accursed things" (6:18).

Many times in both the Old and New Testaments God's chosen people chose to disregard God's Word. Already in the Garden of Eden the words, "Did God really say...?" had a powerful effect on Adam and Eve. They ignored God's Word, and sin came crashing into this world. Man ignored God's Word and ate of the forbidden fruit. As a result, all mankind was infected with sin, and death came to all.

In Ephesians 2:4-10 St. Paul writes:

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Thanks be to God for His great mercy! Amen.

In yesterday's reading we saw how God dealt with the sin of Achan, who kept for himself some of the accursed things from the capture of Jericho. His sin had endangered all of Israel when they went up against Ai, but the Lord identified the culprit who had brought disaster on Israel. The transgressor and the things he had kept were destroyed. God's turning from His wrath because of the death of one man, Achan, reminds us of how God's wrath is turned from us because of the death of Jesus Christ, who became sin for us and absorbed God's wrath at the transgressions of humanity. After Achan's death, Israel is restored to the covenant relationship with the Lord, and the inheritance of the Promised Land proceeds under God's direction. In the return engagement with Ai, God's people are given the victory.

That the Lord's wrath is followed by His favor not only points to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but it also is a reminder that sin and faithlessness may bring disaster on parts of the visible church—and eternal damnation for the faithless—but the Church of the resurrected Christ will be restored and will live on by His grace. The Lord's mercy shines again on all who trust in Him.

This chapter, like so many others, shows clearly that it is the Lord alone who saves His people and leads them to victory by means of His Word and the faithful proclamation of that Word. Praise God, who He keeps His promises and gives His faithful people the eternal victory! Amen.

Tens of thousands of Philistines were lined up against Saul's three thousand, and the Lord commanded Saul to do... nothing. But after a week of waiting for Samuel, with a rapidly dwindling army, Saul took matters into his own hands. He "felt compelled" to offer the sacrifices himself, in violation of the Lord's Word through Samuel. He lost the kingdom because of it.

Saul's is a tragic story. God had given him a kingdom and promised him even more, but when Saul's faith was put to the test, it crumbled before the enemy army. He lost sight of God's power and faithfulness and turned instead to himself and to his own devices.

By nature, we do the same thing. God has given us Christians a kingdom and has promised us even more—providence, protection, forgiveness, and strength to endure temptation and the cross. But our flesh doesn't believe God will keep His promises, so our flesh tempts us to ignore what God has said and do whatever we "feel compelled" to do to help ourselves.

God's Word exposes the folly of our flesh and at the same time feeds our faith by revealing Christ to us as more powerful than any enemy and more faithful than any friend. In the face of our great enemies—the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh—God calls on us to do... nothing to save ourselves. For Christ has done everything. "In returning and rest you shall be saved; In quietness and confidence shall be your strength." (Is. 30:15). Unbelief exalts our enemies and humbles God. But faith will find a God Who is a very present help in trouble.

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. Matthew 5:20-26 (NKJV)

“For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.”

THE COLLECT

Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

In verse 25 of our reading for today Joshua said to the Israelites, “Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; be strong and of good courage, for thus the Lord will do to all your enemies against whom you fight.” These words are similar to ones the Lord spoke to Joshua when he took over the leadership of God’s chosen people (Joshua 1:9). God’s promises are repeated again to reassure His people that He remains faithful to all that He has promised. He will, and does, continue to deliver His people from all evil.

In the Lord’s Prayer we pray as Jesus instructed us, “Deliver us from evil.” Dr. Luther, in his explanation of this petition, says, “We pray in this petition ... that our Father in heaven would deliver us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.” And in the Conclusion he writes that the “Amen” means “that I should be certain that these petitions are pleasing to our Father in heaven, and are heard by Him; for He Himself has commanded us to pray in this way and has promised to hear us. Amen, amen means ‘yes, yes, it shall be so.’ ”

As surely as Joshua and the Old Testament Israelites had the victory over their enemies, so too, we have the victory over sin, death, and Satan by faith in Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord. Amen, Amen, it shall be so!

In the reading for today it is obvious that Joshua loves the people of Israel a great deal. At the end of his life he wants them to continue in the Lord. He reminds them of how the Lord has blessed them so greatly. “Therefore,” he says, “be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left ... but you shall hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have done this day.”

This love which God has for His people is still conveyed to them today by the pastor in the Baptismal service. He says, “Almighty and most merciful God and Father, we thank and praise You that You dost graciously preserve and extend Your Church, and hast granted to this child a new birth in Holy Baptism, and made him a member of Your dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and an heir of Your heavenly kingdom. We humbly beseech You to keep him in his baptismal grace, that he may be faithfully brought up to lead a godly life to the praise and honor of Your holy name, and finally, with all the saints, obtain the promised inheritance in heaven, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

Indeed, like the Israelites of old, we have nothing to fear. We hold fast to our loving, merciful God. God is our Father; Jesus is our Brother! We have the victory! Sin, death, and Satan will not defeat us. Thanks be to our loving God. Amen.

The final step in this process was to anoint of Saul and declare him king over the people. God made it clear that the people had rejected Him in favor of an earthly king. God also made it clear to Saul through the prophet Samuel that He had chosen Saul to be their king. God also made His presence known to Saul by giving “him another heart.” Saul was a different man for “the Spirit of God came upon him” and people questioned that a man of such a lowly background would prophesy.

But as we heard, when Saul was declared king to the people, some “despised him, and brought him no presents.” In Saul, we see glimpses of the One to come. When Jesus spoke in the synagogue, the people asked, “Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary?” Though the people had questions about Jesus, God remained faithful. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the prophecy was fulfilled: “Behold! Your King is coming to you.” Yet, He was despised, rejected, and ultimately crucified.

Looking back with the eyes of faith we see that through it all God remained faithful and remains faithful. All that happens is in accordance to His plan. The faith God has so graciously given to us is also according to His plan. The life we live in faith is under His direction. Even when we fail, He does not. He draws us to Himself with repentant hearts and causes us to cling to the salvation which is ours in Christ.

Even though the people of Israel had rejected God by calling for a king like the other nations around them, God was still in control of the situation. He would select the one who would be their king. He would be everything that people would find becoming of a king: tall and handsome. Quite a contrast from the King Who would come later: “He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.”

God was setting the stage for much disappointment to come upon the Israelites at the hands of their earthly king. This king would look the part and yet fail so miserably. Even though this king ate with the prophet Samuel and would partake of the choicest of meats set aside exclusively for him, he would later fail as king.

On the other hand, the King to come would not look at all like an earthly king. Jesus wasn't handsome and dashing like King Saul. Yet, Jesus never failed in fulfilling the task given Him by His Father. Though He looked like a failure when He died on the Cross, Jesus conquered all our enemies; sin, death, and the power of the devil.

God has anointed us to be heirs of His eternal kingdom. Thus, Jesus invites us to come to His table to eat and drink the food of everlasting life.

THE HOLY GOSPEL**St. Luke 15:1-10 (NKJV)**

Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, “This Man receives sinners and eats with them.” So He spoke this parable to them, saying:

“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

“Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!’ Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

THE COLLECT

O God, the Protector of all that trust in Thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy that, Thou being our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

It was out of mercy and pity that the Lord raised up judges in order to deliver the children of Israel from oppression. However, when the judge was dead, the people reverted back to their old sinful behavior and even worse. They received the grace of God in vain. Rejecting the working of God, “They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way.”

The Lutheran Confessions describe the temporary “good” behavior of the Israelites under the judges as “works of the law” as opposed to “fruits of the Spirit.” The student who only behaves well when the teacher is watching is producing a work of the law. When the teacher turns her back, the student does what he wants. “But when man is born anew by the Spirit of God, and liberated from the Law, that is, freed from this driver, and is led by the Spirit of Christ, he lives according to the immutable will of God comprised in the Law, and so far as he is born anew, does everything from a free, cheerful spirit; and these are called not properly works of the Law, but works and fruits of the Spirit.” (FC SD VI 17).

Similarly the Lord has not completely driven out our sinful nature, in order that he might test us whether we “will keep the ways of the Lord.” “We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.” (2 Cor. 6:1). Confess your sinful desires and trusting in free forgiveness of your Savior Jesus Christ, serve with a cleansed heart and mind.

“Be careful what you ask for!”

Samuel was getting old and his sons were not faithful judges of Israel. The people saw a problem. However, they did not see the proper solution. They had a really good system. God was their King. He watched over them and had placed judges over them. They were a unique nation among the nations for the true God was also their King. He is the God Who rescued their forefathers from bondage in Egypt. He provided food and water for them in the wilderness. He defended them from their enemies. He gave and gave and gave.

But the elders of Israel had another idea” “Now make us a king to judge like all the nations.” They weren’t content with God’s way of doing things. They would rather be “like all the nations.” Indeed, their king would be “like all the nations.” “He will take.” The people refused to listen to God and God gave them what they wanted and they suffered much for it.

It is hard for us to fully grasp that the True God is a giving God. He has expectations for His people: “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” Yet, all that He expects, He gives to us in Christ. The explanations to the three articles of the Apostles’ Creed clearly show our giving God.

But there is one thing that He does “take” from us. He takes away our sins. He takes away our sins so that that He may give us life and salvation. So be careful what you ask for by always asking for forgiveness.

As we continue to follow the events surrounding the Ark of the Covenant, we hear that the Israelites fair no better than the Philistines. They, too, desecrated the Ark by looking into it therefore God “struck the people with great slaughter.”

It took a long time before God would respond to the cries of the Israelites. Finally, after twenty years, Samuel brings the Word of God to the people. The message was the same as it always was and is: “Return to the Lord.”

We may ask ourselves, “Why did God take so long?” We best leave that to God. What we truly need to see is that God is compassionate and long-suffering. He never really left the Children of Israel.

It is not unlike how we sometimes deal with our own children. The three year old is whining and crying, and will not stop. He simply wants things his own way. So, the parent gets up and moves to another room and soon the child follows, whining and crying. This goes on until the child realizes the whining and crying must stop. Only then can the parent talk to the child. What the child finally realizes is that Mom and Dad are still there and he needs to listen to them. They never left the house, never left him really alone.

There are times that we may feel like God has left us alone. But He hasn't. We need to repent of such thoughts and realize that we need to stop and listen to His voice. Listening to God we will then hear what we really need to hear, “Return to the Lord.”

God uses the most unlikely people. In today's reading we have Othniel, known as the younger brother of Caleb, the left-handed Ehud, and the foreigner Shamgar, whose weapon of choice was an ox goad. And yet through Othniel, God provided 40 years of rest. Through Ehud, God provided 80 years of rest. In our sinfulness, we often shirk our duties because we don't consider our God-given calling to be that important. The pastor might say, “I would spend more time writing my sermon if I had a big congregation.” A mother might lazily goof off and say, “I'm just a housewife and a mother.” Rather than do our vocation, we question God's wisdom. Ecclesiastes 9:18 warns us, “Wisdom is better than weapons of war; But one sinner destroys much good.”

Out of thankfulness for our salvation in Jesus Christ, our duty is to be faithful in our calling. Give thanks that God has given us His command in the divine estates of pastor, hearer, father, mother, son, daughter, civil authority, citizen, etc. so that we know what we are to do. Ask God for humility to see our unworthiness and yet trusting in God's goodness do our work diligently and faithfully. God used these unworthy judges to provide, as He strengthened them for the task He gave them to do. With the wisdom that we are forgiven through Christ, do good to your neighbor wherever God has placed you.

In Judges 5:17-18, Deborah complains that many of the Israelite tribes did not come to fight their enemies. Deborah told Barak to fight against Sisera and defeat the Canaanite uprising. When Barak refused to go without Deborah, she scolded him saying, "...there will be no glory for you...for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Jael, Heber's wife, killed Sisera with a tent peg. When the men neglected their God-given duty, God used women like Deborah, Abel, and Huldah. Through a woman, the Virgin Mary, we received the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, Who defeated all our enemies.

"We shall for the present not be concerned about the right of these women of the Old Testament to teach and to rule. But surely they did not act as the infiltrators do, unauthorized, and out of superior piety and wisdom. For then God would not have confirmed their ministry and worked by miracles and great deeds. But in the New Testament the Holy Spirit, speaking through St. Paul, ordained that women should be silent in the churches and assemblies [I Cor. 14:34], and said that this is the Lord's commandment. Yet he knew that previously Joel [2:28f.] had proclaimed that God would pour out his Spirit also on handmaidens. Furthermore, the four daughters of Philip prophesied (Acts 21:9). But in the congregations or churches where there is a ministry women are to be silent and not preach [I Tim. 2:12]. Otherwise they may pray, sing, praise, and say 'Amen,' and read at home, teach each other, exhort, comfort, and interpret the Scriptures as best they can." (Luther's Works, Vol. 40, p.390).

By capturing the Ark of the Covenant, the Philistines may well have thought they had captured the God of Israel and by doing so they had secured the permanent defeat of Israel. Though they knew about the God of Israel, they didn't know Him for who He truly is.

God causes the statue of their god, Dagon, to fall prostrate on the ground. Though the Philistines put Dagon back in his place, God really put Dagon in his rightful place: "...fallen on its face to the ground before the ark of the Lord. The head of Dagon and both the palms of its hands were broken off on the threshold." In addition, God "ravaged and struck them with tumors." No matter where they took the Ark, the Philistines could not escape God's judgment against them.

There is no escape from God. "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?" (Ps. 139:7). The Philistines knew they had done wrong and were looking for an out. Their own priests knew about the need for a "trespass offering" to accompany the return of the Ark. What they didn't understand was their need to repent and trust in God's forgiveness.

We as Christians can make our own lives miserable when we want to fashion our own "trespass offering" to God rather than simply trusting in the offering made by Christ on the Cross. When we flee to God and ask for mercy for Jesus' sake, we are given the "peace which surpasses all understanding."

“It’s Only Weird If It Doesn’t Work”...such is the conclusion of a funny TV ad about football fans’ superstitions. What makes the ad funny is that there is a hint of truth underlying the humor. We know of people who can be quite superstitious at times, and not just football fans. Just ask the person wearing a cross necklace where he or she goes to church. All too often the answer is, “I don’t go to church.” Their idea of wearing a cross is just to bring “good luck.”

After being soundly defeated in around one of their encounters with the Philistines, the Israelites enlisted the help of “The Ark of the Covenant.” You can almost hear the discussion among the Israelites, “Hey! We heard it worked at Jericho. Let’s try it here.” For them, the Ark of the Covenant was simply their good luck charm. Little did they understand the significance of the Ark. Within the Ark of the Covenant were the Two Tablets of the Law, and on top of the Ark was the Mercy Seat. The Ark of the Covenant was a reminder to the Israelites of both God’s Law and His Mercy.

Their superstitious attempt didn’t work. The Israelites were again defeated in battle and God allowed the Ark to be captured by the Philistines. God would not be manipulated by the Israelites and neither would He allow the Ark to be desecrated by the Philistines as we hear later in 1 Samuel. This account is a vivid reminder to us that we, too, cannot manipulate God. We are simply to take Him at His Word: Law and Gospel.

Both the affliction by the Midianites and the deliverance from the Midianites is sent by the Lord. It is not that we have a fickle God who changes His mind. Our Triune God is using Law and Gospel to try and save them from their sins. In verses 7-10, we are told that God sent the children of Israel a prophet to exhort them. Though God had brought them out of Egypt, rescued them from slavery and given them the Promised Land, they had served other gods and not obeyed God’s voice. Because they did evil, God punished them. God’s prophet was leading them to repentance.

The Angel of the LORD Who comes to Gideon is none other than God Himself come in the human form of a traveler carrying a staff. The Gospel message He brings is that through no credit of their own, Gideon will “save Israel from the hand of the Midianites.” When Gideon proclaims that he is the least in his household from the weakest clan, God says, “Surely I will be with you.” Hebrews 11:32-34 praises Gideon for his faith in the Lord’s Promise! Gideon “...out of weakness was made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.”

Like the Virgin Mary, you, and I, the weak and lowly Gideon had found favor with God. That is, we are graciously blessed with the Promise of the Lord’s deliverance, which creates and strengthens faith in Jesus Christ. Gideon already knew what the apostles found out Easter evening, “Peace be with you; do not fear, you shall not die.” The LORD is peace.

On the night after the Lord visited Gideon and strengthened Him with the Promise, God directed Gideon to remove the idolatry of his father, Joash, by tearing down the altar of Baal. Afterwards, Gideon was to build an altar to the LORD God and sacrifice a seven-year-old bull, showing forth the end of the seven years of oppression. By means of this sign the Israelites were to know that their punishment had come to an end and that God had accepted the sacrifice.

Jesus made our sacrifice and atoned for the sins of the world. The announcement, "It is finished," bears witness to the Father's acceptance. Hanging on a cross, Christ was, in fact, cursed, so that we would be set free from an eternal oppression.

In unbelief, the men of the city cry out to Joash asking for Gideon's death, as did the Jewish leaders who handed Jesus over to Pontius Pilate. Unlike Pilate who gave in to their requests, Joash turns it all over to Baal saying, "Let Baal plead against him, because he has torn down his altar." Although Baal can do nothing, the cry of the chief priests, "He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" are answered on Easter morning. Romans 1:4, Jesus was "declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."

Like the dew of the fleece, Jesus is the only blessed One from Heaven, while we are dry and dead in sin. Yet through His Redemption, we are drenched with heavenly blessings and Jesus alone receive the curse of the Cross.

THE HOLY GOSPEL**St. Luke 5:1-11 (NKJV)**

So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets. Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat.

When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."

But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net."

And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.

When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.

And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men."

So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.

THE COLLECT

O God, who has prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man's understanding, pour into our hearts such love toward Thee that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

In 1 Samuel 2 we see a contrast portrayed. The faithful service of Samuel is contrasted with the unfaithful service of Eli's sons, Phinehas and Hophni. Samuel "grew in stature, and in favor both with the Lord and men." Phinehas and Hophni, on the other hand, had a prophecy of their death due to their unfaithful service to the Lord.

What is the difference between Samuel and Eli's sons? Phinehas and Hophni were greedy. They took what was not theirs by right and were only concerned with serving themselves, and not God. Samuel, on the other hand, served God. Even his name reflects his service—Samuel means "His Name is God." Hannah named him this as a testimony to who her God is, and Samuel was truly Hannah's son, for he possessed the same faith that she had shown.

As corrupt as Phinehas and Hophni are, Eli is not without fault, which is why the prophecy is given to him and includes his whole household. Eli knew about his sons' corruption and did nothing to stop it. And so, in Eli and his sons we see both sides of the Fourth Commandment being broken; Phinehas and Hophni for not honoring their father, and Eli for allowing his sons to be wicked and undisciplined.

This is why Samuel stands in contrast to the corruption of Eli's sons. Samuel is the image of the one true Priest, who atones for the sins of the whole world, our Lord Jesus. Christ is faithful where we are unfaithful, and redeems us with His obedience to the Law, and with His death.

Luther does such a fine job with this text, that he will write today's devotion: "These three pictures or conflicts are foreshadowed in Judges 7, where we read that Gideon attacked the Midianites at night with three hundred men in three different places, but did no more than have trumpets blown and glass fragments smashed. The foe fled and destroyed himself. Similarly, death, sin, and hell will flee with all their might if in the night we but keep our eyes on the glowing picture of Christ and His saints and abide in the faith, which does not see and does not want to see the false pictures. Furthermore, we must encourage and strengthen ourselves with the Word of God as with the sound of trumpets..."

"And when did Christ do this? On the cross! There He prepared himself as a threefold picture for us, to be held before the eyes of our faith against the three evil pictures with which the evil spirit and our nature would assail us to rob us of this faith. He is the living and immortal image against death, which He suffered, yet by His resurrection from the dead He vanquished death in His life. He is the image of the grace of God against sin, which He assumed, and yet overcame by His perfect obedience. He is the heavenly image, the One Who was forsaken by God as damned, yet He conquered Hell through His omnipotent love, thereby proving that He is the dearest Son, Who gives this to us all if we but believe." (Luther's Works, Vol 42, p.106).

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. Luke 6:36-42 (NKJV)

Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.

And He spoke a parable to them: “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher. And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother’s eye.”

THE COLLECT

Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance that Thy church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Hannah, having her prayer answered with the birth of Samuel, praises the Lord God with a Messianic prayer. Her barrenness is an image of the spiritual unfruitfulness of this world on account of sin, death, and the devil. The torment that she received is a picture of the tormenting of these unholy three upon all the faithful of God. The fruitfulness of the womb of Penninah, Hannah’s rival, is an image of the seeming triumph of our spiritual enemies who seem to bear new false children every day.

However, just like Hannah’s torment is over on account of the grace of God, so too will the world’s torment by the unholy trinity be over on account of a Son to be born—the Lord’s Anointed. On that day “the adversaries of the Lord shall be broken,” “the wicked shall be silent in darkness,” and “the Lord will judge the ends of the earth.”

On that day grace will abound. The spiritually hungry will cease to be hungry for they will have the Gospel of our Lord’s redemption to feed them. The devil, the world, and sinful mankind, who have borne many false children, will no longer bear false children. Rather, the children of mother Church will be borne through the out-pouring of the Holy Ghost through the means of grace.

This is what our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished for us on the tree of the holy Cross. He fulfilled the Law and bore our sin so that we might become sons of God, and He defeated sin, death, and the devil so that we might have forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation.

Not only is Hannah childless, but her rival, Penninah, “provoked her severely, to make her miserable.” And this torment, both in her conscience from the shame of being without child, and outwardly from Penninah, does not last only a short time. We are told that this torment went “year by year.” Further, having poured out her heart to the Lord and having made a vow to give the child to lifelong service to the Lord, she is even tormented by the priest Eli, who charged her with drunkenness.

There are many who, having endured years of seemingly unanswered prayers and who face continual torment, would forsake God, blaming Him for the trouble that they are experiencing. But not so with Hannah. In this Hannah shows her true and enduring faith. Certainly she wanted her prayers answered in the affirmative; her weeping and fasting are evidence of this. But amidst all this torment she does not abandon her Lord, but clings to Him.

These events have taken place and have been recorded for our benefit, for they are a testimony to what great faith truly is. Even her name, Hannah, which means “grace”, is a revelation to us, for our prayers are answered by the grace of God. When we suffer torments, grace is the one thing we truly desire. We desire to be in the good graces of our Lord Jesus so that He might lift our torment and restore us. So with our sin and guilt, our Lord lifts these from us with the words of the Absolution and removes our torment through His promises.

In the Gradual for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity we sang the words of Psalm 79: “Provide atonement for our sins, O Lord. Why should the nations say, ‘Where is their God?’ Help us, O God of our salvation; for the glory of Your Name, deliver us.” Today’s reading from the book of Judges offers a connection to the Propers from Sunday’s liturgy. The connection is located in the riddle that Samson uses to question the Philistines: “Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet.”

We know from the narrative the answer to the riddle. Samson was referring to the lion he had encountered and killed with his bare hands. Upon his return he discovered that honey bees had taken up residence and formed honeycomb filled with honey in the lion’s corpse. The Early Church fathers likened this image of a lion giving honey to our Lord Jesus giving salvation to mankind.

Our Lord is known as the Lion of Judah. Honey in Scripture is likened to the Word of God—especially the good news of our Lord’s atonement for the sins of the whole world. With this view we can certainly see the similarities between this lion and the Lord. The Lord Jesus lays down His life so that He might give us food of forgiveness, life and salvation in the Sacrament of the Altar. Through His holy Word the Church is established; new Christians are born. The Lord delivers us through His holy Gospel, the proclamation that our sins are forgiven for His sake, which is as sweet as honey to our ears.

Samson is an image of our Lord Jesus Christ in that he attacks and defeats the enemy of the people of God. We see this image of our Lord portrayed in Samson three times in the reading: first, when he destroys the grain fields, vineyards and olive groves of the Philistines; second, when he kills a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey; third, when he escapes the city of Gaza by putting the door and posts of the gate on his shoulders and carried them up the hill that faces Hebron.

In the first instance Samson retaliates for his wife being unrightfully being given to another. If we understand this spiritually, we understand this as false teachings that unrightfully lead people away from the truth. Those who have been lead away by false doctrine use these lies to sustain themselves. But this is a false sustenance and it must be destroyed. Our Lord destroyed the false doctrines of His enemies by being incarnate in our flesh and teaching salvation in Him alone to all those who would hear.

The second case shows Samson as an image of the Christ in that he utterly destroys the enemy. Our Lord destroyed the Enemy—Satan—by His death on the holy Cross.

We see this image of the holy Cross in the third part of this reading where Samson lifts the door and posts on his shoulders and carries them up a hill to defeat his enemy. Our Lord Jesus Christ did likewise when He carried our sins on the holy Cross up the hill of Golgotha to win for us forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Our Lord Jesus was betrayed by Judas Iscariot for thirty pieces of silver. Samson was betrayed by Delilah for 1,100 pieces of silver from each of the Philistine lords. Samson was taken away bound. Our Lord was taken away bound. Samson gave his life to destroy the enemy of the people of God. Our Lord Jesus Christ offered up His life as a ransom for the sins of the whole world and won forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal life for all those who believe on Him.

Samson is an image of our Lord. Granted, Samson is a flawed image, for he is full of sin. In this he is as much an image of the first Adam as he is the Second Adam. Adam was deceived by Eve and led all of his descendants—us and the whole world—into a life tormented by sin, death, and the devil. Samson also was deceived by the woman Delilah and this led to blindness, imprisonment, and slavery at the hands of his enemies.

We are also spiritually blind, imprisoned, and in slavery at the hands of our enemies—the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh—if we do not believe on our Lord Jesus Christ. For this reason our Lord took upon Himself our flesh and fulfilled the Law perfectly. Then He took our punishment of death upon Himself so that we might have forgiveness, life, and salvation. He provides us with the faith to believe in Him by giving us the means of grace through which the Holy Ghost creates saving faith in us.