

## ZOOM CIRCUIT SERVICE 15 AUGUST 2021. Rev Lesley Martin

### Psalm 27

The LORD is my light and my salvation—  
whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold of my life—  
of whom shall I be afraid?

<sup>2</sup> When the wicked advance against me  
to devour me,  
it is my enemies and my foes  
who will stumble and fall.

<sup>3</sup> Though an army besiege me,  
my heart will not fear;  
though war break out against me,  
even then I will be confident.

Intro to theme: You know the throwaway comment: "Give me strength!" It's often a comment of exasperation. But there are times when it needs to be a true, heartfelt prayer of "give me strength". Our theme today is the strength that God gives us through the Holy Spirit to face whatever challenges we have in life. Let us pray.

**(Prayer of adoration)** Almighty God who laid the earth's foundations, who are we that you are mindful of us? We can only paddle in the shallows of your mighty sea, stumble amongst the foothills of your soaring heights. Your glory blazes bright and we exist through you. You are our strong tower, our true might and we worship you. Amen

### HP 545 Be thou my vision

1 Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart, be all else but naught to me, save that thou art ; be thou my best thought in the day and the night, both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.	4 Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise : be thou mine inheritance now and always ; be thou and thou only the first in my heart : O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.
2 Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word, be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord ; be thou my great Father, thy child let me be ; be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.	5 High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun, O grant me its joys after victory is won ; Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall, still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.
3 Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight ; be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might ; be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower : O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.	Irish, 8th century <i>translated by</i> Mary Elizabeth Byrne (1880–1931) <i>versified by</i> Eleanor Henrietta Hull (1860–1935) ( <i>alt.</i> )

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving and Confession**

Almighty God, you are our refuge and our strength. We give thanks for your goodness, faithfulness and total compassion. We thank you for the wonderful world around us and the gift of life within us, through your Holy Spirit. Thank you for Jesus who is our companion and our example. How awesome are all these gifts that you shower upon us. How awesome that you love your world and you love humanity, including us with such compassion; we give you thanks for this amazing love.

Forgive us when we do not love your world or your people as much as we could; forgive us when we could be more courageous than we let ourselves be, when we give up too readily.

We rejoice that, through our saviour Jesus, we are forgiven and we are encouraged and strengthened to walk the life you have given us, never alone but in your companionship. Amen

### **All Age Lord's prayer with Actions:**

Our Father who art in heaven: *raise hands waist level, open palms*

Hallowed be thy name: *raise open hands upwards in praise*

Thy kingdom come: *hands together in front of you in prayer*

Thy will be done: *keeping hands together, bow head*

On earth: *Open hands and drop them*

As it is in heaven: *raise open hands again, and lift head*

Give us this day our daily bread: *hold hands cupped together in front of you as if you were receiving the bread at Holy Communion*

And forgive us our trespasses: *make a fist with right hand and gently beat your breast*

As we forgive those who trespass against us: *open your fist and stretch your open hand outwards*

Lead us not into temptation: *bring right arm across your breast, open palm*

But deliver us from evil: *bring the other arm across your breast as if protecting your self*

For thine is the Kingdom: *begin to raise hands in the air*

The power and the glory, for ever and ever : *raise hands high as you can in praise.*  
AMEN

### **Judges 16 verses 23 – 30**

Now the rulers of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to celebrate, saying, "Our god has delivered Samson, our enemy, into our hands." When the people saw him, they praised their god, saying,

"Our god has delivered our enemy into our hands,  
the one who laid waste our land and multiplied our slain."

While they were in high spirits, they shouted, "Bring out Samson to entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he performed for them.

When they stood him among the pillars, Samson said to the servant who held his hand, "Put me where I can feel the pillars that support the temple, so that I may lean against them." Now the temple was crowded with men and women; all the rulers of the Philistines were there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women watching Samson perform. Then Samson prayed to the LORD, "Sovereign LORD, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes." Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived.

## **Sermon**

Samson the strong man would have performed well at the Olympics but his moral character left something to be desired; born to be a Nazirite he was set apart from birth to serve God to "*begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines*". But Samson had other ideas. His story is told in the book of Judges and covers 4 chapters where we see him lusting after 2 Philistine women and giving in to their persistent nagging, demanding his own way, killing a lion with his bare hands, eating the honey from a bees' nest within the carcass of the lion, killing 30 Philistines in anger, and finally being caught by the Philistines when Delilah cuts off his hair. Then as you will remember at the end Samson's hair – the source of his strength – begins to grow and he pushes the columns and kills more Philistines in that act than he had killed before.

It is a difficult story in the respect of the killing and slaying, but rather than focus on that, I want to preach about the strength of Samson.

Samson seems to have been an egoist, full of his own importance and demanding his own ways, as so many of us do. But Samson went so much further. He went full out to get what he wanted and when he was thwarted he retaliated in anger and violence. You know and I know that this is not uncommon; we know it happens in private homes and with gangs on the streets in every country of the world. We see and hear reports of this in the news; perhaps you live with it in your own life, walking over eggshells in the hope of not precipitating an angry aggressive outburst. Like Samson many people choose anger and violence over patience and kindness, and we wonder how it could be different. Do you realise that in the end when Samson brings down the temple on the Philistines he does not say that he is doing it for God, but does it in revenge for them putting out his eyes. Samson is self-absorbed to the last.

Is there any good news to come out of this story? Yes, there is always a positive message in the bible if only we would search for it. I searched! Samson was strong. His strength, according to the bible, was a gift from God. God gives different gifts; Solomon you remember was given the gift of wisdom. But sadly Samson used his gift of strength for his own ends, and not God's.

We are also given strength; not as Samson was bestowed it, but we have God's inner strength. Deuteronomy indicates the importance of strength in the commandment: *Love the lord you God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength (or might).* In Matthew's gospel Jesus quotes this command from Deuteronomy, but adds on the words "and with all your mind". That's interesting isn't it; something to **think** about.....

But back to being strong. There is a passage in the First letter of Peter which says this: *Be careful. Watch out for attacks from the devil your great enemy. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to devour. Take a firm stand against him and be strong in your faith.* Be strong, in order to work for good.

Samson knew how to deal with a real roaring lion; he ripped it apart. What is your metaphorical "roaring Lion"? I expect it manifests itself in some kind of fear: fear for the future, for your health, for friends and family's welfare, fear .... fear often experienced as overwhelming anxiety. How can you deal with your roaring lion? God gives you strength. When you forget this, pray to God for strength; strength for each new day, for each restless night.

Revisiting the story of Samson begs the question whether his life was a failure or a success. In reality, is any body's life a failure? Of course not. Samson many have detoured from the path set out for him at his birth, from his task to "*begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines*" but Samson did actually begin that deliverance by bringing down the Philistine temple. God worked through him at the end... as the hymn says: "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform"

So what do we take from this short example of the life of Samson?

Perhaps it's a nudge to realise our own self-centredness, demanding to have what we want, riding roughshod over others.

Perhaps a nudge to realise how even our failures can be turned into something positive by God. Thank God that, as with Samson, God can use us with all our faults and failures.

And perhaps a definite nudge to be strong, and take positive action, out in the world and within your own life with your own fears and anxieties... remembering that God is with you always, and gives you strength to live each day in all its fullness.

The following hymn encourages in verse 2 to “come all you saints, fresh courage take”

**StF 104 God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform**

<p>1 God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform ; he plants his footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm.</p> <p>2 Come all you saints, fresh courage take, the clouds you so much dread are big with mercy, and shall break in blessings on your head.</p> <p>3 Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace ; behind a frowning providence he hides a smiling face.</p>	<p>4 His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour ; the bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower.</p> <p>5 Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan his work in vain ; God is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain.</p> <p>William Cowper (1731–1800)</p>
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**Prayers of Intercession**

We pray for the world, giving thanks for the courage and commitment of those who work for good. Giving thanks for joy and beauty. We also pray with longing for the world that is torn apart by anger and violence; a world that is broken by dishonesty, cruelty, intolerance and loathing. Teach us how to love.

We pray for the world starving because of selfishness, thirsty for clean water, cold for want of a roof, dying for lack of medicine or care; a world of complacency, greed and ignorance. Teach us how to love.

We pray for your world that it may become more and more a world where we are willing to help and not hinder, willing to give and not receive, open to share and not to withhold, full of goodwill.

There are situations and people which are on our hearts and minds today. We think of them in this time of silence asking Loving God that you will overrule in their situations and grant them mercy, peace and wisdom. *(Pause)*

Lord God, who loves us fully, truly, deeply help each of us to show our love by actions and words, to be brave to meet each new day with positivity and to welcome your guidance in all that we do. Amen

## HP 465 Guide me O thou great Jehovah

<p>1 Guide me, O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land ; I am weak, but thou art mighty ; hold me with thy powerful hand : Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven, feed me now and evermore ; feed me now and evermore.</p> <p>2 Open thou the crystal fountain whence the healing stream shall flow ; let the fiery, cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through : strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer, be thou still my strength and shield ; be thou still my strength and shield.</p>	<p>3 When I tread the verge of Jordan bid my anxious fears subside ; death of death, and hell's destruction, land me safe on Canaan's side : songs of praises, songs of praises, I will ever give to thee ; I will ever give to thee.</p> <p>William Williams (1717–1791) <i>translated by Peter Williams (1727–1796)</i></p>
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**Blessing** Go in the strength of the Lord,  
In paths he has marked for your feet;  
Follow the light of his word,  
Nor shrink from the dangers you meet,  
His presence your steps shall attend,  
His fulness your wants shall supply;  
On him, till your journey shall end,  
May your unwavering faith rely. Amen