Hi,

It is Saturday, I suppose . . . don’t all the days run together now. I hope and yours are well and staying as safe as you can. Here’s a few items:

* **We will have the Monday Bible study class (Matthew) at 3pm on Facebook Live**. All you will need to do is go to my page on Facebook (Scott Engle) and I’ll be there live about 2:50 or so on Monday. You will be able to comment and ask questions during the class. If you have joys or concerns you’d like to lift up in our Monday class, please email those to Patti at pattiengle@tx.rr.com.
* **The Tuesday class (Genesis) will also be on Facebook Live at 11:45**. I’ll be there about 11:35 or so. Once you are on the page, you’ll see the live feed. You will be able to comment and ask questions during the class. If you have joys or concerns you’d like to lift up in our Monday class, please email those to Patti at pattiengle@tx.rr.com.
* I won’t be sending out an email tomorrow, as we will all be able to join in worship. There will be on-line worship today at 5:40 and tomorrow at 9:30 (Traditional) and 11:00 (Contemporary). You can participate at the [church’s website](https://www.standrewumc.org/) and on Facebook Live.
* You don’t need a Facebook account to view the Facebook Live events, but you won’t be able to comment.

**23Now 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.” 24When 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.” 25And 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; 26and 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.” 27Now 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.**

**28Then 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.” 29And 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. 30Then 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. 31Then 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***

*Samson -- a hero?*

The story of Samson consumes four entire chapters in the book of Judges. This is an immense amount of space in the Bible and I arrived at these chapters expecting to find lots of great stories about God and God’s people. In truth, when I finished reading the four chapters the first time, I had trouble seeing God anywhere in the stories. Here is Samson’s story in a nutshell.

After the Israelites descended into evil yet again, God allowed the hated Philistines to oppress them for forty years. But then, God sent an angel to tell a barren Israelite woman that she would give birth to a son who would “begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines” (13:5). The child was to be raised as a Nazarite; i.e., set aside for God’s work. In all, Samson’s birth story is lengthy and conveys to us the momentousness of his birth; it is as if God was pulling out all the stops on this “deliverer.” The birth story prepares us for the arrival of a hero cast from the mold of Moses, which makes the stories of Samson’s life all the more jarring.

As his story unfolds, Samson turns out to be the reverse image of Israel’s first and model judge, Othniel. Samson never leads the Israelites into battle. He marries one Philistine woman and falls in love with another. He seems driven by his temper and his need for vengeance. He attends drinking parties with the Philistines and visits prostitutes. He kills thirty Philistines so that he can steal their clothing to pay off a lost wager. His fellow Israelites try to hand him over to the Philistines. Even the story of Delilah is filled with surprises.

In chapter 16, we are told that Samson falls in love with Delilah (though we are never told that she loved him!). Being a Philistine, Delilah is offered a fortune by the Philistine leaders (nearly $3 million today) to be a patriot and find out the secret of Samson’s strength. Delilah is shockingly honest with Samson when she says: “Please tell me what makes your strength so great, and how you could be bound, so that one could subdue you” (16:6). The first time she tries this, Samson lies, telling her that he can be subdued with leather strips that had not been dried. Then she ties him up and the Philistines jump him, but Samson defeats them because he can break the ties. You would think that after this episode, Samson would abandon Delilah . . . *but he stays*. So, with a fortune hanging in the balance, Delilah tries again. But again, Samson lies to her and avoids capture . . . *but he stays*. Delilah persists and tries a third time, but Samson concocts a new lie and evades capture again . . . *but he stays*. Finally, the relentless Delilah succeeds. Samson reveals to her that he will lose his strength if his hair is cut. There is no way that Samson can be surprised when Delilah then cuts his hair, enabling his capture and imprisonment . . . *but he has stayed with her through it all*. Later, in one last great act of vengeance (see 16:28), Samson pulls down the pillars of the Philistine temple, killing himself and thousands of leading Philistines. Why in the world would Samson have stayed with Delilah through all her transparent attempts to betray him?

*Where is God?*

What do we make of Samson? Where is God in this? Dennis Olson provides three helpful perspectives on the story of Samson.

(1) Samson embodies the nation of Israel in decline. He breaks his vows as a Nazarite (the drinking parties) just as Israel breaks its own obligations under the covenant of Moses. He chases after foreign women just as Israel chases after foreign gods.

(2) Samson represents the deterioration of the whole system of judges (Israel’s chief leaders and administrators under the kingship of the Lord God). Othniel, the first judge, had been obedient to God and a powerful leader of the Israelites. Samson was neither. Instead, Samson stood at the end of a long line of increasingly ineffective judges.

(3) *But here is the irony*; Samson also embodies “the kind of divine love that simply cannot let go.” He loved Delilah and despite her obvious betrayals, he kept on loving her. She might not love him, but he would still love her. She might actively betray his love, but he would still love her. He would keep coming back, time after time. Samson’s love was relentless and, by worldly standards, foolish.

Samson is a window into the character of God. The world might see Samson’s strength in his bulging muscles, but we understand that Samson’s true strength lay in his relentless, irrational love. Much of the Old Testament is taken up with the story of God’s relentless, irrational love for his people. Generation after generation might run away from God, betray God, and chase after other gods, but the Lord would still pursue them, call them back, and try to help them see the hope and joy that lie in God’s love. We ought to be thankful for God’s seemingly irrational love for us.

*No recommendations today -- no way you’ve read all the books and watched all the movies I recommended this week.*

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott