

## **Fifth Sunday after Epiphany – February 10, 2019**

### **Judges 13:6-25**

6 Then the woman went to her husband and told him, “A man of God came to me. He looked like an angel of God, very awesome. I didn’t ask him where he came from, and he didn’t tell me his name. 7 But he said to me, ‘You will conceive and give birth to a son. Now then, drink no wine or other fermented drink and do not eat anything unclean, because the boy will be a Nazirite of God from birth until the day of his death.’” 8 Then Manoah prayed to the LORD: “O Lord, I beg you, let the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born.” 9 God heard Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman while she was out in the field; but her husband Manoah was not with her. 10 The woman hurried to tell her husband, “He’s here! The man who appeared to me the other day!” 11 Manoah got up and followed his wife. When he came to the man, he said, “Are you the one who talked to my wife?” “I am,” he said. 12 So Manoah asked him, “When your words are fulfilled, what is to be the rule for the boy’s life and work?” 13 The angel of the LORD answered, “Your wife must do all that I have told her. 14 She must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, nor drink any wine or other fermented drink nor eat anything unclean. She must do everything I have commanded her.” 15 Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, “We would like you to stay until we prepare a young goat for you.” 16 The angel of the LORD replied, “Even though you detain me, I will not eat any of your food. But if you prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the LORD.” (Manoah did not realize that it was the angel of the LORD.) 17 Then Manoah inquired of the angel of the LORD, “What is your name, so that we may honor you when your word comes true?” 18 He replied, “Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding.” 19 Then Manoah took a young goat, together with the grain offering, and sacrificed it on a rock to the LORD. And the LORD did an amazing thing while Manoah and his wife watched: 20 As the flame blazed up from the altar toward heaven, the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame. Seeing this, Manoah and his wife fell with their faces to the ground. 21 When the angel of the LORD did not show himself again to Manoah and his wife, Manoah realized that it was the angel of the LORD. 22 “We are doomed to die!” he said to his wife. “We have seen God!” 23 But his wife answered, “If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and grain offering from our hands, nor shown us all these things or now told us this.” 24 The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the LORD blessed him, 25 and the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him while he was in Mahaneh Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

As fans of professional sports teams, we like to think that we know what’s best for our favorite team. We know which coaches and general managers should be hired and fired. We know which players should be signed to new contracts and which ones should be cut from the team. We know who should be in the starting lineup and who should be on the bench when it comes to each and every game. As fans we like to think that we know better than the professionals who have been hired to make these decisions. If we were just given that authority, of course the teams would be much better off and would win a championship every year! As we continue to look at how Jesus reveals himself as our Savior during this season of Epiphany, we see today how Jesus shows that he has the power and authority to call people to service. We see

it in a rather unique way in our sermon text in the life of Samson. We see it in our gospel lesson as Jesus called men to be his disciples. We also see it in our own lives as we look at **The Lord's Call to Serve**.

In the Old Testament time of the judges, the people of Israel continuously repeated a specific pattern. They would fall away from God in their worship life, often choosing to follow the gods of the nations around them. God would then allow another nation to come in to attack and harass or even conquer and occupy the Israelites until they realized the error of their ways and turned to him in repentance. God would then raise up a judge to deliver his people and bring about a time of peace and prosperity until the pattern started all over again. As Judges chapter 13 begins, the Israelites had again fallen away from the Lord and so he had allowed the Philistines to conquer his people, for the longest stretch up to this point in their history—a period of forty years (13:1).

Samson would be the last in a line of twelve judges that God would raise up for his people and his story is rather unique as it is described in our text, both in his calling and who did the calling. Samson was called before he was even born. Samson's mother, who is not named, relayed her experience to Manoah, her husband: "A man of God came to me. He looked like an angel of God, very awesome. I didn't ask him where he came from, and he didn't tell me his name. But he said to me, 'You will conceive and give birth to a son. Now then, drink no wine or other fermented drink and do not eat anything unclean, because the boy will be a Nazirite of God from birth until the day of his death'" (vv. 6-7). There was no mention here of Samson as a judge, only as a Nazirite. Being a Nazirite was first described in Numbers chapter 6. It was a special vow for one who would be set apart for service to the Lord. It included no drinking of wine or other fermented drink, even the eating of grapes or raisins (6:3,4). It also included no using of a razor on the head and no contact with a dead body, even for a relative. Such a vow could be for a short time, as seemingly the apostle Paul did in Acts 21, or for life as intended for Samson.

The other unique part of Samson's calling was who delivered the message. Manoah and his wife were a bit confused at first on that part. She first referred to him as a man of God, possibly an angel. In Manoah's prayer in verse 8 he referred to him as a man of God, possibly thinking he was a prophet. Even in his second appearance, they were not aware yet who this was (v. 16). The text refers to him as the angel of the LORD. While this at times in Scripture can refer to a created angel, someone like Gabriel, the angel of the LORD is more often God himself. More specifically he is the second person of the Trinity—Jesus making an appearance in human form before he was born and took on human flesh. There are clues here in the text to show that this angel of the LORD is God. When asked his name, he said, "It is beyond understanding" (v. 18). He then ascended in the flame of the offering that was made (v. 20). Manoah and his wife then knew, "We have seen God!" (v. 22). This angel of the LORD had appeared before including to Gideon at his calling as a judge (Jdg 6), to Moses in the burning bush (Ex 3) and to Abraham as he was sacrificing Isaac (Ge 22). For the Lord to call Samson in this way showed the importance of what God was calling Samson to do.

Sadly, Samson did not fully live up to his calling as a judge or Nazirite. From his life we knew he stumbled and fell in many ways. He took a Philistine woman instead of an Israelite woman as his wife; he visited a prostitute and then seemingly lived together with woman named

Delilah. He thought little enough of his Nazirite vows that he was willing to toy with Delilah about it until he finally lost his hair and lost his strength. But the Lord could still use Samson and his strength to be a thorn in the side of the Philistines throughout his twenty years as judge. In his death he would repent of his wayward ways and kill more Philistines in pulling down their temple than he had in his life, but it would not be until Samuel came on the scene that the Philistines would finally be defeated.

In our gospel lesson (Lk 5:1-11) we see Jesus again making a call to serve, calling Peter, James and John to follow him as his disciples. What is remarkable about this call is that they were fishermen. Of all the people Jesus could have chosen to be his disciples who would later be sent out as apostles and messengers to the world, he chose those who may not have been the best-educated or best-trained. But Jesus was demonstrating his power and authority in that his teaching and instruction would give them what they needed to fulfill their calling to serve him, to catch men by sharing the gospel.

We have not been called to take vows as Nazirites, nor have we been called as judges to lead God's chosen people, or as disciples and apostles of our Lord. But the Lord still has a call for us to serve. In our second lesson (Ro 10:13-17) the apostle Paul wrote those familiar words that faith comes from hearing the message (v. 17). And if someone is going to hear the message, someone else needs to preach and share it with them (v. 14). And so there is a call to serve as public ministers. Not everyone will be able to serve as pastors, teachers, and staff ministers, sharing the gospel in a full time ministry. But with an ongoing need and even growing shortage of workers, there is still a great and increasing need to encourage and recruit others for ministry and even consider it for ourselves, whether we are making our college plans or considering a career change. It is still the Lord who makes this call to serve. With his power and authority he gives gifts for those who are willing and able to serve.

For everyone, regardless of whether or not we serve in the public ministry, there is a general call to share the good news. And so we look for opportunities in our lives to reach out to those who do not know the love of Jesus. That will mean making new friends and building relationships so that we have opportunities to witness. That will mean invitations to worship and bible information classes and events so that pastors and others can share that message. That will mean prayers asking for blessings on the Holy Spirit's work. That will mean offerings to support our local and national and world ministry. That will mean a mission mindset to recognize the prospects that we see all around us in our lives. Of course none of us are perfect in these things; all of us are sinners in need of repentance for the opportunities we have missed. But it is still the Lord's call to serve and he will give us the gifts that we need and will bless our efforts. He is the one who does the work of creating faith and he will use our imperfect efforts to make his kingdom grow.

We may like to think that we would have the perfect solutions for our favorite sports teams when it comes to the hiring and firing of personnel, the game day play and everything in between. But that is not how it works because we are not in charge. So also the Lord is in charge when it comes to his call to serve. He chose imperfect Samson and used him for his purposes in leading his people. He chose imperfect disciples to carry his gospel message out to the world. So he will also use imperfect us, whether to serve in public ministry or in personal

ministry so that the message is heard through the word of Christ. May he continue to bless us in our efforts to serve him in whatever calling he has placed us. Amen.