



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
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Sermon

Strengthen yourself in the Lord **Mark 1:29-39; 1 Samuel 30; Isaiah 40:21-31**

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Ziklag

What does that word mean to you - Ziklag?

Recently, I decided to read through the life of David in my devotionals. Just when I got to the end, I found a book by Eugene Petersen on the same texts and decided to read through again accompanied by Petersen's comments. Ziklag is in there.

It was not long ago that I read this passage with the commentary. Helen as you know had a mysterious amnesia attack and was hospitalized. We came home and after a couple of days rest, went to New Wine which was according to Helen the best ever – (I thought perhaps 1st=).

I don't know about you, but I don't hear Ziklag mentioned often, yet at New Wine, I met a man whom I had prayed for perhaps 4 years ago. He wanted to tell me what had happened afterwards. He had had some tough times in his business and mentioned the story of David at Ziklag helped him through.

Then another person, I had prayed for two years ago, told me her story and again Ziklag was mentioned. The main speaker gave a teaching on facing trials using this story as the basis. On the last night, the conference host, mentioned Ziklag in her talk.

God is trying to tell me something! So, it is for me, a current topic! I would not have preached on it yet, because I have more to learn, except that it comes up in two of our readings. Let me first remind you of the story.

When David was on the run from King Saul he first retreated to the wilderness to escape the murderous attentions of his deranged king. Saul was insanely jealous of David and was determined to kill him.

While in the wilderness, David makes a base at the Cave of Adullam and there outcasts of Israel are drawn to him. We find in 1 Samuel 22:2:

"All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered round him, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him."

All those in distress, debt or discontented – these are they who are not making a success in the world, things have gone wrong such that they are distressed or in debt. They are not satisfied with their lot so they choose to go to the wilderness. The wilderness is a hard place, a dry place, a hot place, a killing place yet it was better than where they had been.

Petersen says, it sounds to him like the church: the distressed, indebted and discontented are drawn, looking for something else. With tongue in cheek he writes, “It’s hard to get over the disappointment that God, having made an exception in my case, doesn’t call nice people to repentance!”¹

Don’t expect everything to be rosy in church – we are those who have discovered we need help. We are those who know we fail on our own. We are those who have said to Jesus, “Help me, save me, rescue me! I am not adequate by myself.” So don’t be surprised if others here are broken or limp or need help – we are being rescued, healed and helped by the body of Christ.

After a time and details we shan’t follow for now, David, his (now) 600 men and their families base themselves in the town of Ziklag. One day, the men return from a raiding party to find their town has been raided. Their wives and children have been taken away as slaves, all their flocks and herds taken and the town burnt.

1 Samuel 30:4 So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep.

These are warriors and they weep until they are exhausted! But then the mood turns bitter.

⁶ David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the LORD his God.

Hear that again: **But David found strength in the LORD his God.**

We are not told how he did that. He goes on to seek guidance about what to do. He rallies the men and they do indeed find their enemies and bring back all the families and their flocks and herds without any loss.

Can you imagine what David faced? His own family had been abducted. He had lost his wives, children, possessions, home. He had lost all his men’s possessions, wives, children and homes and how 600 guerrilla soldiers are muttering about killing him because obviously it is his fault.

“But David found strength in the LORD his God.”

How did David strengthen himself in the Lord? We aren’t told here, but the psalms give us great insights. Take that psalm set for today as an example:

Psalm 147:1–11

Praise the LORD. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him!	Praise
² The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers ² the exiles of Israel. ³ He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds.	Care of people Ziklag? Church?

¹ “Leap over a Wall”, Harper Collins, 1998, p100

⁴ He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. ⁵ Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit. ⁶ The LORD sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground.	Mighty Creator
⁷ Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make music to our God on the harp.	Thanksgiving and Praise in song
⁸ He covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills. ⁹ He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call.	Remember his provision
²⁰ His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor his delight in the legs of a man; ¹¹ the LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.	Awe for God, Hope in God

Although, that particular psalm is probably not by David himself, we see the same principles that do appear in those psalms ascribed to him: Praise, Thanksgiving, Worship, remembering the promises of God in the face of danger and despair and so rising to hope and positive praise.

Most of you will remember the film, "Chariots of Fire." It told the story of two British athletes, Harold Abrahams and Eric Liddell competing in the 1924 Olympics in Paris.

Eric Liddell was a strong Christian, the son of missionaries to China and a Scottish athlete. His strongest race was the 100m sprint, however the heats were held on a Sunday. Because of his convictions, he refused to compete on a Sunday and so had to withdraw from his best chance of winning. A fellow athlete gave his place in the 400m race to Liddell although Liddell's performance at that distance was modest by international standards.

We pick up the film on the Sunday morning of the 100m heats when Liddell would have been running but instead speaks at the Presbyterian Church in Paris. He reads the text from Isaiah 40 which is also our OT reading for today.

<https://youtu.be/ZjF59VB0h6g>

On the morning of the Olympic 400 metres final, Liddell was handed a folded square of paper, by one of the team masseurs. Reading it he found the message: "In the old book it says: 'He that honours me I will honour.' Wishing you the best of success always." Recognising the Biblical reference, Liddell was profoundly moved that someone other than his coach believed in him and the stance he had taken.

In the 400m, the norm was to race hard around the first bend and ease up on the back leg before a final sprint. Liddell used a different strategy: he said, "The secret of my success over the 400m is that I run the first 200m as fast as I can. Then, for the second 200m, with God's help I run faster." He broke the then Olympic and world records with a time of 47.6 seconds.

"...those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

^{2:35} Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else--to the nearby villages--so that I can preach there also. That is why I have come." He travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

How did Eric Liddell strengthen himself in the Lord? We don't know the whole of it but we can see that:

- He was faithful to God's commandments.
- He worshipped God and put him first. □ He praised and thanked God.
- He trusted in God's promises to him.

I said this principle was in two of our readings. In the gospel, we find Jesus ministering in Capernaum.

Jesus had a whole town gathered to hear him and he walks away. He has been aside early in the morning to pray. In John's gospel he is recorded as saying, "I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me."³ He needed clear communication with Father God. He needed time aside to pray. But his mission was clear, at this stage he needed to get around the villages of Galilee and announce to them his good news.

Jesus needed time to pray alone. He needed to hear what Father God had to tell him. Can we say he strengthened himself in these ways?

How do we strengthen ourselves?

I am currently reading, Bill Johnson's book on the topic so there will be more to come. But, here are some ways and we may all learn more as we press further into God.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

a. Give thanks in all circumstances

In all circumstances. When you face tough times, give thanks to God for what he has done before, for what he will do and for what you trust him to do. Give thanks for the mercies you do have. Show him your trust in him by faith before you see the answers.

God is always good. You can always thank him for his goodness. You may not see it at present but it remains true. Thank him!

b. Rejoice always.

Do you remember the Praise books by Merlin Carruthers? He had found the secret of praise in all circumstances – it is a way of expressing trust in God whatever our feelings, whatever faces us.

c. Pray continually.

- a. **Hebrews 4:16** Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

We have a right of access to the throne room of heaven because we are heirs of God. Better yet, we are in Christ, so we are seated with him in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). And at that throne – in the presence of God, we are assured of mercy and grace in our time of need.

- Mercy is not getting what you deserve.
- Grace is getting what you don't deserve!

³ John 8:28

- b. Then Jude 19 tells us, "...build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit." Praying in the Holy Spirit is often understood as praying in tongues. Paul tells us when we pray in tongues, we edify ourselves – that is build ourselves up. I find when I pray in tongues, my mood lifts sometimes from despondency to high praises of God. When I then pray in English, I am boldly declaring God's goodness, his power and majesty. It makes a difference.

d. Testimony

Another way to strengthen yourself is to remind yourself of what God has done already. Recall answered prayers. If you keep a journal read over what he has done for you. We forget easily, so remind yourself. Testimony is not just reminding yourself – it has a greater power.

While we were at New Wine, one of our prayer team, Nep, had a Word of Knowledge in which she saw the inside of a spine and knew that there was problem where the spine was attached to the pelvis. We gave that word out in the meeting and a man came forward who had chronic pain there. Nep and a couple of others prayed for him. The next day, he came forward and said he had had no pain there since they prayed and he had not woken in the night in pain as he had every night for 41 years!

As a direct result of his telling that story, five other people were healed of back pain. Testimony engenders more of the same work of God.

e. Promises of God.

When God promises things to us, they are still future. So we have to hold onto those promises while we wait for their fulfilment. To stand strong, we need to remember what God has promised to us. So rehearse them to yourself. Speak them out loud. Tell yourself, remind God of them. They were given to encourage you and direct you. So let them do their work.

Eric Liddell strengthened himself physically and mentally before the Olympics in his training regime. At the time of the race, he was also strengthening himself spiritually in the moment. What I mean is that there is preparation and there is the crisis.

I, you, need to use these disciplines ordinarily, to strengthen ourselves spiritually. It is part of being spiritually fit. When a crisis hits, I, you, need to use these disciplines again to recover and rise to the occasion.

Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 3:13

May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

Amen.

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