"Taking a Stand"
Judges 15:1 – 17

So that is our reading this morning…

Who recognises this photo?



Tiananmen Square protester in 1989. For those unaware, in 1989 there university students held democracy in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, China.
I remember seeing the footage when the tanks attempted to go one way around him, and so he would move in front of it. And then when it went the other way, he would do the same.
Do you know his name?
Actually, no one does to this day.

Who's this?



Where's she sitting? At the front of the bus where she refused to give up her seat for a white man.
Her name was Rosa Parks, an African- American woman who live in Montgomery, Alabama in the 1950's.
On December 1st, 1955, Rosa Parks did something she was not supposed to do.
She sat down at the front of the bus on one of the seats reserved for whites.
In a community known for its racism this was a dangerous, daring and provocative act.
After she had sat down at the front of the bus for a while, the police came aboard and said, "You know, if you continue to sit there, we're going to have to throw you in jail!"
Rosa Parks replied, "You may do that."
Legend has it that student came to Rosa and asked, "Why did you sit down at the front on the bus that day?"
And she said, "I sat down that day because I was tired."
She did not mean that her feet were tired. She meant that her soul was tired. She had had enough of playing by racist rules."

Who's this and what's happening?



This is Martin Luther at his trial for heresy in 1521. His was asked to recant his teachings found in books and pamphlets.

In them Luther argued that the Pope had no special authority to interpret the Bible, was not the supreme head of the church, and was exploiting Germany financially and spiritually.
His final statement at the trial was this:

> "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason… I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. Here I stand I can do no other. May God help me. Amen."

So here's my first question, ***what's the connection this morning between our reading and these people we've just talked about?***
Tell the person next to you.
Well, what did they all do?

All of them drew a line in the sand and *took a stand.*
On the street, on a bus and in the courtroom.

And Samson, for all his faults, he does the same.

Now you may find the story of disturbing, and you should.

Enraged by the fact the his wife is given to a friend (some friend) he becomes what someone called him, an eco-assassin, destroying much needed the crops and livelihood of the Philistines.

By the way this wasn't a spur-of-the-moment attack.
I would think that it would take a bit of time to catch three hundred foxes, let alone tying their tales together and along with the torches.
So this is a pre-planned, pre-meditated, well-orchestrated plan of attack.

But remember this: Samson, he's in a war zone.
Israel is under enemy rule – the Philistines.

And for whatever reason the Philistines have opposed and oppressed the people of God simply because they are God's people.

Not only that but the Philistines have already shown their hand at being cruel and they served cruel deities.
So he takes a stand!

I mean, if you were in Samson's situation, what would you do?

So my next question:

"Have you ever had to take a stand?
How did that feel?
Was it difficult, and if so, what was difficult about it?"

If you feel comfortable, tell the person next to you.

(Does anyone feel comfortable sharing their story this morning *and* can you do so in an abbreviated way?)

One of things that does come through is that there is a cost involved when people take a stand.

> In the communist Soviet Union Christians were repeatedly imprisoned for their faith in Christ. One story is told of an old woman whose crime was to host the bishop of the Orthodox Church for a night in Moscow. She was thrown into prisoner but slept little. Every night her interrogators grilled her for the whereabouts of the bishop.
> She replied, "I know, but I won't tell you."
> They shook their fists in the old woman's face, and she replied, "There is nothing you can do to me even if you cut me into pieces. After all, you are afraid of your bosses, and you are afraid of each other... but I am not afraid of anything. I would gladly be judged by God right this minute."

There is a place for taking a bold stand in life.

But I also think that at times some Christians take a stand for the right things in such a wrong way.
They get angry, agitated, unnecessarily aggressive and shouty.
They adopt the ways our fallen culture and society rather the way Jesus.

You know, every Biblical character has had, at some stage, had to face drawing a line in the sand to take a stand.
Paul tells the believer in 1st Corinthians:

> "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain."[1]

[1] 1 Corinthians 15:58

It could be in any area of life.
It could be in the workplace.

You may remember this but I read about a car salesman by the name of Don.
The typical idea for a car salesman is to sell each car for the highest price you can, and so sales people are rewarded for identifying and persuading the highest paying customers.
But Don had a different vision: the value of a good vehicle to each and every customer.
But he discovered a problem: women and minorities were paying more for their cars than the more negotiation-savvy males.
So Don thought to himself, "This isn't right. This is not good. I need to do something."
What he didn't do was take the streets or make scene at the chamber of commerce or business roundtable.
So Don decided that the best way to approach this was by setting a flat rate on all cars – no negotiating – to effect equal opportunity pricing.

It could in the home or around family life.

Families and marriages are good yet the primary intent of Christian marriage, the New Testament marriage, is that together you will seek to see the kingdom of God come on Earth.
Sometimes I do think we overlook how Jesus will at times, take priority even over some of our most sacred family customs… so we need to take a stand.

It could be on the sports field or in the realms of education.

At some point if it hasn't happened already – and will probably be more than once – you will have to make a stand.

To be a follower of Jesus – someone who calls Jesus King – is to take a stand.
It is – there's no escaping it.
And it may cost you – but it's worth it.

Let us be a people who take a stand.
There are areas, times and seasons where we need to take a stand.

But how do you do that?

"What enables us to take a stand for God?"

Does it come down to have exceptional personal fortitude?
What do you think?

I just wonder if sometimes the stands we need to take today are in the smaller places of life.

You may not remember but Samson had been strict instructions – rules to live by – to guide his life.

"No Booze, Bad Food and Barbers"

Nazarites were governed by three practices and each of them have a point.

They had to abstain from wine and intoxicating drinks.
This was a protest against the surrounding culture where, like in many places today, overindulging was endemic and related to sexual worship practices.

They prohibited from cutting their hair.

Hair was believed to be the symbolic abode of the Spirit, of the supernatural.

And finally in Samson's case, he was prohibited from eating anything unclean.

Specifically anything that was dead. God is the God of life and holiness. Contact the dead, even animals, was being in contact with the consequences of sin.

All of these – in there small ways – were taking a stand for God.
(It's interesting to note that when he failed in the small stuff it impacted the big stuff)

By nature I am or was and sometimes are, timid.
So for me taking stand wasn't about being loud or taking to the streets, it was found in my own backyard.

Coming a non-Christian home it the first stand I took was announcing my decisions to peers and family that I had become a follower of Jesus.
That meant for those who didn't understand, I had become "one of them".
I remember overhearing one of my friends say, "What's happened to Reece???"
That was followed by the call to take another stand and be water baptised.

I'm fairly sure my parents thought it was 'phase' I was going through.

All along there were these other moments: the first time I prayed out loud in a group (it was terrifying!); the first time I talked with someone about my faith; the first time when I believed I had a word from the church.

In the age of outrage we live in I wonder if we are being called to take a stand in the everyday, the ordinary areas of our lives.

There was a newly ordained pastor who was called pastor church.
At this church pressure was placed on this young pastor by one person in particular to wear certain clothing, to dress a certain way, because that's what "everyone" wanted.
It wasn't him but this young pastor caved. He gave in.
But as the following week went on he thought, "Nope, this is stupid. I'm not being myself. This is actually wrong."
So I didn't dress that way again.

What it cost for a time was the ill will of another.

What can happen though us you read something in Scripture or you hear a message, a sermon, and you think, "Oh no."
You know God is speaking to you.

Then all the mental traffic kicks in:
"Don't rock the boat"
"It's not that important"
"Someone else can do it"
"I'm sure it will work itself out"

"I don't know if I can count the cost. I just don't have what it takes to takes."

But here's the good news for all of us – Samson didn't.

When you read the story, you have this phrase that is said of Samson more than any other person in the book of Judges – " the Spirit of the Lord fell powerfully on him".
Whenever he did his mighty deeds it was in the power to the Spirit.

And Jesus did all he did in the power of the Holy Spirit, and was this same Spirit that Jesus also promised his followers.

When Jesus talked about Holy Spirit He said He would be a teacher, a counsellor, a comforter and He also said that when the Spirit falls on you, you will have power.

Paul talked about being empowered in your inner being through the Holy Spirit.

I don't know what you may be facing this morning.

It may be that God is calling you to make a stand and the thought makes you churn up inside.
And if you're honest, you're not up for it, but you know it's right.

If that's you, as we close, receive the enabling, empowering of the Holy Spirit.

And if you would like prayer please come and chat with me afterwards.

Let's pray.