

February 1, 2009

Scripture: 2 Kings 5:1-13; Mark 1: 40-45

Title: "A Little Help Here"

As many of you know J.R.R. Tolkien is the author of many best sellers as well as the inspiration behind the block buster trilogy, The Lord of the Rings. What many of you may not know is that Tolkien was a Christian. Not only was Tolkien a Christian but many of his works contain classic themes of Christianity.

For those of you who don't know The Lord of the Rings is an epic story about a small creature, about child size, called a hobbit named Frodo. Frodo is in the middle of celebrating his uncle's birthday when he is charged with the task of destroying evil itself. Frodo is told that he needs to take a ring, and throw it into a volcano behind enemy lines. Can you imagine? Being told that you have to destroy evil! Frodo is told to keep the ring safe and to keep it a secret. He is told that for anyone else to know about the ring is for them too to be at risk of death. Frodo is being charged with not only protecting and then destroying the ring but he has to be careful who he tells because those he keeps dearest to him, if they know about the ring, will also be in danger.

At one time or another we have all felt like Frodo. Whether it is chores around the house, things to do at work or even grief; we feel as if there was too much of a burden to bear. We often feel like this. Maybe the boss expects us to have eight projects finished within the week or teachers don't seem to understand that you do indeed have other classes. At one time or another we all feel like the cause is hopeless or greater than ourselves and I will argue that we're not wrong. Sometimes the task is greater than one person but we'll get to that in a while.

When Frodo receives the task of destroying evil he does not ask for help but help comes to share the burden of the ring. At first he is accompanied by three of his fellow hobbits, Merry, Pippin, and Sam. Later on in the story a fellowship is formed. These creatures choose freely to help Frodo in his task. They know that this is not an easy task and one that some of them will not survive but still they are by his side. This fellowship is called the Fellowship of the Ring. The purpose of this fellowship is to help Frodo on his way to Mordor where the ring, the source of all evil, can be destroyed. Each of the creatures in this fellowship brings something different to the group. There are great warriors. Those who can speak different languages. Those who can make alliances. And even those who are simply good at lightening the mood. Although Frodo has many friends his task is for him alone. Only he can carry the ring, the other members in the fellowship are there to help in whatever ways they are able.

You see Frodo's task was too great for him alone to conquer. What would he do without the gifts of those around him to give him aide. Even when Merry and Pippin seem to be up to no good something useful comes from their curiosity. And we all know Sam ... good old Sam who kept "Mr. Frodo" going the whole way through and refused to leave Frodo even when he told him to go home. Sam was the first to find out about the ring, he was the first one to help Frodo and he never left Frodo's side. You see, Sam didn't have any particular gifts. He wasn't a skilled warrior, he didn't know the countryside, and at less than four feet tall he wasn't much of a match for any evil that might come their way. But still Sam felt that he was needed it was his job to encourage and protect Frodo in anyway possible. Sam's responsibility was the most valuable, it

was his job to keep up the morale of his leader and friend. He was the keeper of Frodo's resolve and he kept it well. When Frodo cried out that he needed help the fellowship came to his aide. When Frodo essentially said "a little help here" there were several creatures from all across the land there to pull him through until his burden was lifted from him.

What struck me about today's text was the way they speak to those times when a man or woman realizes that the task at hand is too much to bear God gives us aide. We turn to the story in Mark where Jesus chooses to heal a leper from his disease. The leper knew that Jesus could heal him and rejoiced in the newness of life provided for him. How often have we felt that we simply could not go on and when we ask for help and receive that aide do we also jump for joy and tell the whole world? Or we look to the text in 2 Kings where Elijah comes to the aide of the King of Israel who is faced with an impossible task and is grieving the inevitable battle to come. How often when we ask for help do we not take it? We think that the solution is not nearly what it must take and end up coming back to the advice. It's the forest through the trees mentality my father used to tell me when I would get too bogged down at school. These stories are stories of those who called out in their most trying times for a little help from the divine and the divine answers "I do choose".

Fellowship.

When we think of church fellowship we often think of church camps or cook outs. We think of laughter and fun and of course, fried chicken. But you see the fellowship of the church is to help each and every one of us to fulfill our purpose.

Like the fellowship of the ring we are all here for one common purpose. To somehow speak the good news and ease the pain of God's people.

Why are we here? Why do we come to church every morning? We come here every week to find healing. I believe that that healing comes when we realize that we cannot do it alone. We come to those times in our lives every day when we just don't see a way to carry on. We are like Frodo and like the King of Israel when we hear our neighbors cry out for help we cannot see how we can aid them. We tear ourselves apart and fall to the floor and that is why we are here. We come to this community every week because we know that here we will find fellowship. We will find the kind of fellowship that picks us up when we have fallen. We will find the kind of fellowship that will not let us down even when we ourselves have given up and lash out and say, "Go home!"

There have been times in my life when I have felt like I was not able to lead the church. When I was quite young I stuttered; because of this I still to this day get nervous when asked to speak publicly. I have a reading disability, I can't always remember what I read; because of this I was told that I would have a difficult time in high school and it would be a miracle if I could survive college. I was homesick and timid; and because of this I was reluctant to go to youth camps that required me to stay away from home and fellowship with other youth. And when I got into my later years of college I was afraid to work in a church I thought "How could I lead a church? I'm only twenty years old and have had no formal training!" There were times when I was tired of spinning my wheels and I wanted to do some good in this world where evil is happening every

day; but could not find my voice. When those times have come, the church responded with fellowship. The church responded with the kind of fellowship that gave me the courage to pursue my purpose. When I was homesick my counselors and my fellow campers would show me how rewarding camp can be. My first camping experience, oh dear. My parents arrived at the church just in time for them to put me and my things in the church van and to drive away. I was so homesick that week and it was unbearably hot to the point of heat stroke. But my counselors, who were also members of the church took the time to show me what it was like to have friends at camp and to grow closer to God. My parents said I came back from camp every year a changed person, every year I matured a little bit more and grew a great deal in my faith. It was at camp that I first felt my call to ministry and answered that call. I can't imagine my life without camp and the friends and experiences I had there. When I needed some words of encouragement or guidance, when my speech impediment or learning disability frustrated me, I have had my mentors and many Sunday school teachers come to my aide. I remember this one time we were having our annual Christmas Pageant and I was one of the angels. When it came time for me to sing my solo I got so nervous that I passed out right there. Now I'm not sure what that says theologically, but what it said to one of the older ladies in our church is that I needed some confidence building and practice. So throughout the next year she helped me with my reading ability and my "stage presence" and she helped me to gain confidence. And you better believe that the next year I got up and sang my solo. Mind you, I was still nervous, but I could do it. I remember being stressed in school and the school teachers of the church would tutor me and help me with my homework. When my prayer partner knew that I had a test coming up she would send me a card wishing me luck and telling me how proud she was of me. It was those people who came to my college graduation to support me in my accomplishment. When I was too timid to preach the church supported me with fellowship that gave me that extra push to step up and preach. I know a preacher? Timid? It's true. I remember the first time I was placed in a church, I was terrified but Nevertheless I was placed in a church as an assistant to the preacher there. I gave my first sermon, very reluctant and extremely nervous. At first I couldn't think of a topic and one of the elders of the church told me to just listen and when ideas came to me to write them down on a piece of paper and my sermon would come to me. Sure enough it did, during the super bowl of all times but it did. And when I finally gave that sermon, a delivery that I was sure was horrendous, there my church family was, encouraging me all the way, and telling me what a good job I did. And even now when I am away wherever the good Lord decides I need to be, I know I can always call on the fellowship of the church. I've said this to many people but I think it is one of the most true statements there is "The family and friends that you have in the church are going to be the family and friends that you will have as long as you live." This is so true. Each and every one of you at one time or another has strengthened one another. Through your fellowship you have given many the courage to go on and to complete the task they were put on this earth to do. That, brothers and sisters is what true fellowship is.

Fellow believers, today we have a challenge set before us, to recognize that we cannot do our task alone that we need this fellowship just as Frodo needed the fellowship of the ring, just as the leper needed Jesus' healing touch and just as the King of Israel needed the prophet Elijah to heal. Always be near one another in body and in spirit. Be attentive to the needs of your fellow man. Be there to support one another in their purpose because we all are working to fulfill the common good. We are all servants of our lord Jesus the Christ.

Please join me in an attitude of prayer.

Creator God, protector of all creation we come to you as humble spirits. We come to you because we know that we cannot do our task without you. Yours is the breathe that fills our lungs and the compassion that fuels our hearts. Help us to realize that it is not through our own will great works are done but through yours. Help us to have faith in your holy spirit and let it work through this fellowship. In your son's name we pray. Amen.

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