

**The Power of Faithfulness**  
**Proverbs 3:3-8; Romans 12: 17-21**  
**February 3, 2013**  
**(Wesley Merger Celebration)**  
**Rev. Dr. Charles Parker**

## **I Introduction**

This Christmas, my wife Jeannine and daughter Julia and I had a chance to go see the new *Hobbit* movie, and there's a scene in that in which the wizard, Gandalf, is talking to an Elven lady, Galadriel, and she's pushing him a little bit on why he's invited this little unassuming hobbit, Bilbo, on this grand quest that the dwarves are involved in. And Gandalf says to her, "Some believe it is only great power that can hold evil in check. But that is not what I have found. I have found that it is the small everyday deeds of ordinary folk that keep the darkness at bay. Small acts of kindness and love."

This month we are exploring the gospel through the eyes of J.R.R. Tolkien, and this is a recurring theme in Tolkien: that in the vast span of this epic work, that the ultimate work gets done, not through great deeds of heroism and epic battles, but through the tiny, small choices that everyday folks make all the time, choices for kindness and love.

## **II. Staying Small**

This is, of course, also a recurring scriptural theme at the heart of the two passages we heard this morning. Listen to the language from that passage from Paul: "So far as it depends on you," he says, "live peaceably with all. If your enemy is hungry, feed them. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Small, little things that change the tide of history."

Over and over again in *The Lord of the Rings*, the great goals of this epic journey are not fulfilled through heroic deeds but little small things: Bilbo deciding not to kill Gollum in a place where many of us would have let fear take over; in the chaos of the Council of Elrond trying to decide what to do with the ring, his small nephew, Frodo, standing up and saying, “I will take the ring, though I do not know the way;” the hobbits Merry and Pippin fleeing from the Orcs, running across the forgotten Ents in Fangorn and befriending them, and in that small act of friendship, turning the tide in the battle against Saruman and Orthanc.

That’s an important message for us, particularly today as we reflect on this merger that we’ve just engaged in with Wesley and echoing back to the merger that we finalized with St. Luke’s a couple of years ago. These are big changes in the life of our community. It’s a different way of doing church for us and, frankly, for our whole denomination as we’re exploring different models for how to be the church in the 21st century. Those are big things for us. But I want to suggest that the success of this enterprise is not going to be a function of the grand vision and mission statements that we make for ourselves. It’s not going to succeed because of the structures that we put in place to run this big operation. It’s going to happen because each of us made a decision to engage another person with acts of love and kindness, little, tiny things that build relationship and make possible the work that we’re trying to do. It’s going to boil down to speaking a word of love to someone who inadvertently has been offensive; it’s going to be trusting someone that you don’t know that well; it’s going to involve what we’re doing today, getting out of our pews and going someplace else to celebrate and

worship or do a mission project or have a meeting, getting out of our comfort zones a little bit as we seek to extend some radical hospitality to the world.

### **III. A New Voice at the Table**

One of the small ways that we will be living our new life together is looking at how we welcome new voices to the table. In *The Hobbit*, Gandalf sort of imposes this little hobbit, Bilbo, on this company of dwarves and they're not particularly happy about it, because, you know what, he doesn't look like them and he doesn't act like they act, and he doesn't have any of the qualities that they value. And yet, over the course of this quest, they come to love and trust him, and he essentially becomes their leader.

So, how do we welcome new voices to the table? Because that's what we have, right? We have a table now with people who don't look like us necessarily and don't necessarily act like us, who may not have some of the gifts that we have come to value, who may dance to a different rhythm or from my standpoint, to even dance at all! But, how do we go about inviting those new voices to be heard? Can we do better than the dwarves in bringing their ears of cynicism and doubt, and engage people that we don't know with a sense of expectation that God is seeking to speak a word? Can we build relationships with people who maybe are a different age than we are or a different ethnicity than we are or a different sexual orientation than we are or a different gender than we are, a different socioeconomic background or a different educational background, and know that God is speaking to us through their voice.

### **IV. Conclusion**

It's easy when looking at *The Lord of the Rings* to get swept up in the epic grandeur of that tale, but J.R.R. Tolkien over and over again reminds us of the gospel message that God's great plan will get done not necessarily through deeds of great heroism and sacrifice, although those sometimes are involved, but through the little, tiny everyday decisions that we make to extend ourselves in love and kindness.

Amen.