

I'll bet most of you have either seen the movie *Lord of the Rings*— or have read the books.

If you haven't, it's about a group of people who commit to taking a Ring, a ring that has the power to enslave every being on the planet, to take that ring to be destroyed by fire where it was forged— in a place appropriately called "Mount Doom".

It's an odd group of people who commit to this task-- people of all different races, and philosophies. They call themselves the Fellowship of the Ring. These 9 are making a stand against the evil that could destroy life as they know it.

The thing that becomes very clear during the course of the story-- and the movie-- is that each person has a pivotal role to play— from the powerful wizard Gandalf -to the gardener of the small hobbit, Frodo. It's clear by the end of the story that when you're about to embark on saving the world, there's nothing like surrounding yourself with people who are committed to the same thing.

In the reading from the prophet Isaiah this morning God gives words of hope and power. He is speaking to his people who have been conquered and forced to relocate to a different country. Now, after 70 years of powerlessness at the hands of a foreign power, they are finally being allowed back into their homeland. And it's time for them to begin to change the world.

Sometimes words of hope can only be heard when we're at our lowest. That's the time we really need to hear them. So that's when God speaks to us.

*I have put my spirit upon the people who follow me;  
they will bring forth justice to the nations.*

*they will faithfully bring forth justice.*

*They will not grow faint or be crushed*

*until they have established justice in the earth;*

*and the coastlands wait for their teaching.*

*I have given you, my people, as a covenant to the people,  
a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind,*

*to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,*

*from the prison those who sit in darkness.*

God expects a lot from us. We are expected to take on this adventure of changing-- of *saving*-- the world. God is expecting us to prove that the way of love can change society, our country and the world! And if you don't believe that—how will others? Now, alone—this quest may seem insurmountable.

It's hard to be a fellowship of one. Frodo had his 8 companions, Jesus had the 12, *and we have each other*. Sometimes as a single individual, we can feel overwhelmed, but when we support each other when we struggle, and even carry each other when we feel like can't go on- that's community.

This got me wondering about John's long time alone in the desert. Did he miss having folks around? Was he lonely? Was he one of the people who need people?

I mean there he was—eating candy covered bugs and ruminating—when suddenly he's the holy man to see. It just made me wonder if he secretly loved it. Felt he was part of something bigger.

Maybe John's message only really came together when everyone was united.

Maybe Jesus' gospel of peace, justice and love only took off when the 12 worked together.

And maybe this new fellowship of Christ only works when we commit together. Division tears us apart.

Sometimes we can only *be the light* after we've seen what the world looks like when the light is dimming. It's then that the need for the light of Christ sparks inside us, and we realize that—like it says in the BCP-

*We are truly members incorporate in the mystical body of Jesus, the blessed company of all faithful people;*

And..God assists us with grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship.

This is our quest. And we are stronger when we are surrounded by people who are all committed to being peace, committed to loving justice, and we are strongest when we realize that even the least among us wears the face of Christ. Amen.