

John 15:12-13 *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”*

My favorite book of fiction by far is *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien. I have read this book at least 10 times in my life and have required all my children to read it when they are old enough. I love the language, the vivid descriptions of the make-believe landscapes with all its creatures and inhabitants. The author writes these stories in a way that makes the reader believe that they are real.

In the year 2001, the groundbreaking film trilogy came to theaters: *The Lord of The Rings* which is the further adventures of the Baggins family (the main character in *The Hobbit*) and the quest to destroy a ring of power that an evil ruler wanted to use for diabolical purposes. These films captured the hearts of fantasy fans across the globe. They remain some of the most celebrated and cherished films of all time.

One of my favorite scenes in the entire trilogy was in the first film. Frodo Baggins, nephew of Bilbo Baggins, was setting out alone to destroy a ring and break away from his traveling companions whom he had journeyed with for quite some time and through many life-risking situations. The group had been attacked by an army of monstrous orcs (Huge goblin-type men) that were seeking to find Frodo and the ring to bring back to an evil wizard. At one point during the attack, Frodo was being chased and was obviously outnumbered. As it looked as if he would be captured, two of his companions, Merry and Pippin (Two relatives of Frodo) saw that Frodo needed to escape. They jumped out from their hiding place and distracted the Army of Orcs to chase them so Frodo could escape. This led to the capture of Merry and Pippin and then they were taken from their friends and safety and would be taken to the evil wizard instead.

If you are fans of these films, you will know this scene very well. If you have no idea what I am talking about, I think the lesson will ring true either way.

The Bible says that true love will lay down their life for a friend. I must ask myself: Is my heart soft enough to my brothers and sisters in Christ that I would prioritize them over myself? I am not saying we need to risk our lives or put ourselves in danger for others, but do I love my brother and sister enough to put their preferences before my own?

I know that I, for one, can be very selfish at times. I like things my way and my way alone. I enjoy my preferences and prefer not to deal with the inconveniences of anything else. But Jesus shows us another way.

Jesus loved us even while we were still sinners and loved us so much he died on the cross. He surrendered his comfort, his dignity, his preferences, his family, his relationships, and so much more on our behalf. He suffered and died for our sins. He did this to model what love for one another looks like.

Next time we are losing our patience with a brother or sister, or maybe we are not getting things our way, let's remember that Jesus put all of humanity before himself. That he loved us enough to be uncomfortable even to the point of death because he loved us. And because of that love, he created an eternal home for us and an eternal and complete relationship with God.

Here are some things to consider this week: What can I surrender or let go of to benefit someone else? How can I let someone else have an opportunity that maybe I would like for myself? How can I show this kind of love to others and put them first?

If we could figure this out, the church would be an unstoppable force against the kingdom of darkness.

I love you and God loves you!

Pastor Eric Lundberg