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St. Elisabeth's - Glencoe
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Easter 5A: Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 23; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14

Get a life.

It's a city neighborhood scene. An older man, shabbily dressed, has a flea-bitten pushbroom and he's methodically sweeping the sidewalk before a storefront window display. A spring wind gust disturbs his comb-over hairstyle and threatens to mess up his carefully swept-up pile of last year's leaves and discarded food wrappers.

A car approaches, shiny fast and big, with the passenger window more than halfway down. A scrubbed face pushes out of the window, exhilarated by the spring temperature, smiling with youth and energy. The old man with the pushbroom looks up. The car zooms fast. The face in the window yells out to the man: GET A LIFE!

OR, another scene. This time we're indoors. A teenager's home from camp or college and the world is all mopey. Depressive hours pass slumped on the sofa with only the monotonous hard-driving house music of a violent Xbox game.

Flickers of light from the game are the only illumination. A parent comes home, flush with the victory of a work deal sewn up, eager to don the cycling suit and attack the suburban streets by bike. The parent sees the child and frowns, "Are you still playing that game, Honey? You really need to *get a life.*"

Truth be told, we all want to get a life. We want everyone to get a life. I want a life, and you want a life, and we all want that life to count for something, to *mean* something. We want a life that matters.

Jesus said, "I am the Life, I am the Truth, I am the Way." God, who had become human in Jesus, knew what that felt like – to yearn for a Life with a capital L – and he, the night before he died, related to his disciples that he understood their yearning. I am that Life you yearn for.

J.R.R. Tolkien's marvelous trilogy made into movies by Peter Jackson finds its first climax in the first of the three works called "The Fellowship of the Ring." For those of you who don't know the story, it has come to pass that a humble little hobbit, a Halfling man, has been the caretaker of the Ring of Mordor.

The Ring is a substantially heavy burden, since within this ring lurks the darkest of powerful forces of Middle Earth. This little hobbit Bilbo has been humble enough, and wise enough, during his whole lifetime to never let the evil power of the Ring corrupt him. But he is losing his grip. And the evil Sauron, the forger of the Ring, has also begun his siren song to call the ring back to himself. All the peoples of Middle Earth are in danger of losing everything that is good and true in the world.

Bilbo's hobbit nephew Frodo is now on the verge of adulthood. Frodo becomes aware of the Ring in his Uncle Bilbo's care, and Frodo and his friends, who have never been far from home, come to understand that the Ring must be taken back

to the faraway fiery mountain from whence it came and it must be plunged back into the molten lava lake from which it was forged, an impossibly perilous journey that takes three full-length feature films to make, 900 pages of novel to read.

At this first climax of the trilogy, Frodo finds himself hiding in the bushes at the Council of Elrond, where the Elves, the Dwarves, the Humans, and the Wizard Gandalf are gathered to decide who will go on this trek, who has the mettle, the might, the courage, the fighting skills, and the self-discipline to take this powerful object to the Mountain of Mordor. Small, quiet Frodo listens from outside as the circle of powerful elf, dwarf, and human warriors debate.

Tolkien writes, “the noon-bell rang. Still no one spoke. Frodo glanced at all the faces, but they were not turned to him. All the Council sat with downcast eyes, as if in deep thought. A great dread fell on him, as if he was awaiting the

pronouncement of some doom that he had long foreseen and vainly hoped might after all never be spoken. An overwhelming longing to rest and remain at peace by Bilbo's side in Rivendell filled all his heart. At last with an effort he spoke, and wondered to hear his own words as if some other will was using his small voice.

'I will take the Ring,' he said, 'though I do not know the way.'"¹

The disciple Thomas asked Jesus, "How can we know the way?" And Jesus said, "I am the Way." To have eternal life, to have a Life with a capital L, I am the way that you must follow.

It is not the easy way. On the way to eternal life, Stephen was stoned to death.

More modern prophets have been shot to death. Others have poured out their lives in service, to end spent.

You see, the hobbit Frodo might not have had a map, but –deep down-- he knew the way already. The apostle Thomas would have watched Jesus' manner and followed his path and would have seen where it led. That's why Jesus said to him, "If you know me, Thomas, you know the way."

And you and I also know the way. The way Frodo took was to go right through his fear, right through the desolation, and straight into the heart of the hardest possible place, to emerge diminished and yet whole. Jesus tells his disciples that where he is going they cannot come...yet. But they did, and we all do. We are invited straight into the hardest place. Sometimes we find ourselves on the edge of the Abyss where we meet fear and danger face to face and do not back down. Our companions are never far away, pulling for us, and we do emerge on the other side with our life enriched and our heart humbled.

¹ Tolkien, J.R.R., The Fellowship of the Ring, p. 354.

The Way, the Truth, and the Life is what we all seek. And those of us who follow Jesus have been shown that Way very clearly and have been assured of the Life that awaits us in God. The life enriched and the heart humbled are the rewards that greet us.

Do we know the way?

Let's see.

The Hapsburg emperors, as per custom, were entombed in the burial vaults at the Capuchin Monastery in Vienna. When Emperor Franz Josef died, the grand burial procession made its way from the palace to the monastery. The herald knocked at the closed gate. From within, the Abbot said, "Who are you? Who knocks?"

"I am Franz Josef, Emperor of Austria, King of Hungary," the herald replied.

“I don’t know you,” the Abbot responded. “Who are you?”

Again, the herald exclaimed, “I am Franz Josef, Emperor of Austria, King of Hungary, of Bohemia, of Galicia, of Dalmatia, Grand Duke of Transylvania, and Margrave of Moravia.”

“We still don’t know you,” the Abbot replied. “Who are you?”

The herald looked puzzled, but then, in a moment, he knelt down and said, “I am Franz Josef, a poor sinner, humbly begging God’s mercy.”

The Abbot’s resonant voice replied, “Thou mayest enter then,” and the gates were flung open.