

**February 1, 2006**  
**7 a.m. Holy Communion**  
**Rev Timothy A Leitzke**

**A Reading from Mark**

And they were going into Capernaum. And straightaway on the Sabbath, after going into the synagogue, he was teaching. And they were amazed by his teaching, for he was teaching them as one having authority and not as the scribes.

And straightaway there was a person with an unclean spirit and crying out he was saying, “What is it of you and me, Jesus Nazarite? Come to destroy us? I know who you are, the holy one of God!”

And Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Silence! And come out of him!”

And convulsing him the unclean spirit with a great voice came out of him.

And they were all amazed so that they sought among themselves saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! And he commands the unclean spirits, and they hear and obey him!”

**The Word of the Lord**

## Homily

I had just seen the movie *The Two Towers* three times when I first translated this passage in seminary, so that is the story of how the unclean spirit got the voice of Gollum. It certainly seems to fit. In *The Lord of the Rings* the young person called Smeagol becomes ensnared and enticed by the evil, powerful, lost ring of the Dark Lord, Sauron. The ring drives Smeagol to murder his brother, then consumes him, twisting him into Gollum, a wicked shadow of the person he once was. He is the most pitiable character in the story because it is not as though he asked for any of this.

The man in the synagogue that day that Mark describes didn't ask for an unclean spirit. Unclean here does not denote moral impurity but means some sort of bodily shortcoming. Cripples, eunuchs, menstruating women, shellfish, and shaved faces were all unclean. Such things required purification. Of course, if you were blind or missing a limb you were perpetually unclean. So who knows what's wrong with this guy? He is, like Gollum and like you and me, somehow broken.

All of us are in the grasp of Sin, stricken by things unclean for which we did not ask. Jesus does not step onto the

scene like some cosmic Mr. Fix-It; he comes with authority. John the Baptist described Jesus as “The One Who is Stronger”, and now Jesus is living up to that. Jesus commands the imaginations of Galilean fishermen, making them disciples; he commands the crowd in the synagogue; and he commands the unclean spirit. Jesus has authority. In a world that is unclean and profane, Jesus is invincibly clean and holy. Jesus purifies and sanctifies. We cannot do these things; God does them for us in Jesus. Jesus is God’s authority in the world, calling us, teaching us, and showing us God’s good news: “Sin is not in charge of this world; I am.” Jesus restores the man in the synagogue to wholeness. He makes him right. Jesus teaches in the synagogue, not just knowing the scriptures but understanding them and living them. Jesus, the One Who is Stronger, reveals to us that God is in charge, God has arrived, indeed God was always here, restoring us to wholeness.

Gollum needed restoring to wholeness. He was cast out of the community. He was despised by many. He was miserable in his sinfulness, consumed by his lust for the magic ring, and haunted by the terrible crimes he had committed. There is no divine grace in *The Lord of the Rings*, but Friends of Christ grace is what Gollum needed. He need

the One Who is Stronger, the one who had authority even over the ring and Sauron. He needed the reckless, self-giving love of God in Christ, and he needed that love manifest in others. He needed to be brought back into fellowship. He needed people to love him regardless of what he did. He needed forgiveness.

Friends of Christ we are all Gollums, but we get God, because God gives us God's self freely. God draws us into this community of forgiveness, this family of faith, this meal of God's reign over all that is. God builds us up. God makes us whole. God breaks the bonds of Sin and Death because God is stronger, and we belong to God. Amen