
The Dunadan: Bilbo's Friend

A Monthly Reflection on Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*

In Tolkien's trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*, the defeat of evil happens, and many good things - including Friendship - happen because Bilbo took pity on Gollum, who had once been a hobbit named Smeagol.

So let's go back in time to see what happened. To do this, we summarize from J.R.R. Tolkien's wonderful book, *The Hobbit*.

Bilbo is helping Thorin Oakenshield and his thirteen Dwarf companions to recover the Dwarf treasure of gold from Smaug the Dragon. While wandering through the mountains, Bilbo falls into a huge cavern. There, groping around in the dark, Bilbo finds the Ring and a miserable creature named "Gollum." Bilbo and Gollum have a riddle-contest that is just a delight for the reader though somewhat frightening for Bilbo. Quite remarkably, Bilbo wins the contest. At this point, Gollum, feeling quite dejected goes back to his dark little island and finds that his Ring is gone. It had slipped away, but Gollum thinks that Bilbo has stolen it from him. (Actually, Bilbo has found it quite unexpectedly.) In a rage, Gollum hurries back to murder Bilbo, but cannot see him because the Ring is now on Bilbo's finger. Gollum thinks that Bilbo knows the way out and has headed for the back entrance. So Gollum heads for the entrance and Bilbo secretly follows him. When Gollum arrives at the entrance, there is still no sign of Bilbo. Perplexed, Gollum crouches down and gloomily wonders what to do. Now Bilbo has his chance. He could use his sword to slay Gollum, and Gollum would never know what hit him. Yet now we must stop and let Tolkien take over the narrative.

"Bilbo almost stopped breathing, and went stiff himself. He was desperate. He must get away, out of this horrible darkness, while he had any strength left. He must fight. He must stab the vile thing, put its eyes out, kill it. It meant to kill him. No, not a fair fight. He was invisible now. Gollum had no sword. Gollum had not actually threatened to kill him, or tried yet. And he was miserable, alone, lost. A sudden understanding, a pity mixed with horror, welled up in Bilbo's heart: a glimpse of endless unmarked days without light or hope of betterment, hard stone, cold fish, sneaking and whispering. All these thoughts passed in a flash of a second. He trembled. And then quite suddenly in another flash, as if lifted by a new strength and resolve, he leaped." [J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966) 92-93]

Bilbo took pity on Gollum, and so Gollum was there "at the end of all things" to unwittingly save Frodo from his failure at the Crack of Doom. And so, all Middle-earth was saved, thanks to the pity of Bilbo.

So let us be patient and kind and merciful. Let us forgive one another as Christ has forgiven us. We might never know the effects of pity and kindness toward our brothers until the Final Judgment. What a glorious day that will be!