

J.R.R. Tolkien was born in 1892 and died in 1973. At the start of WWI he would have been 22. When war was declared on Germany in 1939 he was 47 years old. He was a man who witnessed first-hand the battle field and trenches of 1914 to 18. He was an Oxford Scholar who would have seen many young men go to war, and not return – who had been Oxford Students in the late 30s and 40s.

In January 1997, Tolkien's epic fantasy "The Lord of the Rings" was voted the greatest book of the 20th century in a readers' poll conducted by Britain's Channel 4 and the Waterstone's bookstore chain. A book that created an imaginative world that so vividly captured the epic struggle between good and evil. A book centering on two unassuming hobbits, Frodo and Sam Wise Gamgee, who in order to stop the advance of Mordor and the machinations of Sauron to control and dominate Middle Earth, have to take that one ring and destroy it in the fires of Mount Doom.

The inscription on the ring read:

One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,

One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them

Although this book was not an allegory, Tolkien had a disdain for that literary genre, we are drawn to think of the parallels between the Ring and Hitler's Third Reich. A Reich that envisioned a 1000 year reign of an evil ideology, that like Sauron's intention for Middle Earth, would have bound the world in an evil dragnet that would have meant a very different world for us here today.

Imagine if Hitler had been victorious.

It is therefore telling that the "Lord of the Rings" was voted by the majority of Britons the greatest book of the 20th century and that Peter Jackson's movies were some of the most popular films in the history of cinematography.

Tolkien's concentration on unassuming Hobbits, whose courage and will to accomplish their task, against seemingly insurmountable odds, is I think, a tribute and testimony to the anonymous soldiers and civilians who, not only in 2 World Wars, but in countless other battles and entrenched in evil regimes – like Soviet Communism – resisted the forces of evil, to the point of their own deaths.

Today we honour and remember them. Today we also give thanks for all those who continue to serve courageously and sacrificially in our military. We recognize that cost they pay and the consequences of their exposure to warfare often resulting in PTSD.

Today may we allow for what we know of Tolkien's story help inspire us as we remember those who worked tirelessly to defeat the dark forces of Nazism and other evil ideologies.

May we also be ever aware of how precarious and tenuous peace is as today's very complicated Gospel teaches. Here Jesus is looking forward to an event that rocked the ancient world – the destruction of the City of Jerusalem in 70 AD. He compares the horrors of that impending and cataclysmic event to the days of Noah and the days of Lot and ends with this very cryptic saying:

“Where the corpse is there the vultures will gather”

The word for “vultures” is the same word as “eagles”, for ancient writers thought vultures were a kind of eagle. Here is a reference to the Roman legions with the eagle as their imperial badge. Those forces that upon entering the City, killed hundreds and thousands, with their corpse left there to rot and decay like a vulture before its prey.

The peace we enjoy as Canadians, the peace we have known in this country, is a gift that we can never take for granted. For as happened in 70 AD, 1914, 1939, and in Middle Earth –the Shire can all of a sudden be turned upside down.

May we never have to see such days and never forget the horror of battle and the all destructive nature of premediated evil.

Tolkien has left us a story that is a constant reminder of this truth.