



* "AWAKENED TO LIGHT, LOVE, AND LIFE"

Biblical Text: Ephesians 2:1-10

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(* denotes frame change on screens)

*When Ann and I got married, I was about to become a "green as grass" new United Methodist minister from, well lets just say "a lot of years not being one." It was about the time when the first **Star Wars* movie came out. Uh, oh!

*She really had no idea when I took her to see it, or worse yet, when she said "I do," that she had just married a science fiction fan/nerd. Have mercy on her!

I had read all the **"Dune"* novels I could find. I'd been hooked on **Star Trek reruns* since high school. At the point we watched *Star Wars*, I could probably have told you more about **"The Death Star"* than I could *"The Star of Bethlehem."*

Some things you never outgrow! So when **"The Force Awakens"* came out last Christmas to reprise of the *Star Wars* franchise, I convinced her to see it with me.

*Like many others, I was reminded of what I loved the first time around. Great heroes and heroines who were back from the first films *like *Han Solo* and *Princess Leia*! But also new ones, that represent a more diverse world, like **Poe*, *Finn* and **Rey*. And no more really stupid ones like *Jar Jar Binks*!* Thank God!

*Best of all, the new film returned to the themes that made the original series of films rich in spiritual content. Yes, I said spiritual. I mean, think about it, the main story is really about the conflict between good and evil. In the original films, and this one, a Savior figure emerges from dubious parentage. And there is a power that conquers even death. **All these are directly sourced from Christian theology.**

Even that famous phrase, "*may the force be with you*" — is a direct grab from the tradition of Christian worship. Or have you never been in Church when the pastor said, "*The Lord be with you,*" and the people answered, "*And also with you?*"

And the New Testament could be the inspiration for a Jedi manual. Full of stories of the faith of our spiritual ancestors – an invitation to learn the way of discipleship - and timeless wisdom. And, look at Paul's final words in the last verse of Romans 12, verse 21. They are the story line of every *Star Wars* film ever made.

* **"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."**¹

¹ Romans 12:21, New Revised Standard Version. Copyright © 1989 - National Council of the Churches in the USA. All rights reserved.

Great stories in film, literature, or Scripture, don't touch the deep part of our hearts, unless something in them rings true. *I think that the things that ring true in *Star Wars* are because those truths have been expressed for thousands of years in THE epic story of the Bible, which is ultimately more important than any film.

Like *Luke, and Leia, and *Finn and Rey, in *Star Wars*, we Christians are marked and chosen by God. We are invited into the new life in Christ. *And as Christ's followers, we are to turn away from darkness and follow a pathway into light, and love, and his abundant life. And, finally, we are compelled by the force of God's love and grace - which is all around us - to use our abilities for good in the world.

*We see this clearly in our text from Ephesians 2:1-10, if you'll turn there with me, we'll see how the Apostle Paul describes the movement from darkness to light.

The first three verses describe the difficulties and struggles of our lives and our world, when we are without guiding principles, and are still walking in darkness.

¹*You were dead through your trespasses and sins² in which you once lived, following the course of this world ... following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient."²

There it is, the hard bad news that makes us most uncomfortable. But that uncomfortable truth is an essential part of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Unless we acknowledge how often we blow it, go our own way, follow the wrong pathway, temptations, or influences - how will we ever find freedom? *Like the character Finn in the movie, *The Force Awakens*, we need to find a better way.

And there is no room for arrogance, or to claim moral superiority. We each have our own sins. (*Remember - I said I haven't always been a preacher?*) Look at verse 3.

****All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses ... and were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.***"³

But that's it – that moment of truth, painful as it is – is all the bad news there is, **for us.** *There is, and there always will be plenty of bad news, battles to be fought, dark forces - wrong, prejudice, deceit, fraud, you name it - in the world. But God is at work in us by his mercy and grace. Look at verse four and five!

*** *But God, who is rich in mercy ... made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved.*** (And verse 6 adds...) ***And he has raised us up with him...***"⁴

² Ibid. Ephesians 2:1-2, New Revised Standard Version.

³ Ibid. Ephesians 2:3, New Revised Standard Version.

⁴ Ibid. Ephesians 2:4-6. condensed by the author from the New Revised Standard Version.

As Christians, we center our lives around that story—the ancient story of the Bible, the story of God’s people and of Jesus of Nazareth who came to save us.

*Despite what some churches preach, it is not a fixed, constant, unchanging story, but rather one that has been retold in every generation and culture, one that has room for each of us in it. And we should use all the tools of our culture to tell it.

Look at verses 8-9. *“It is by grace you have been saved and * this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God - not the result of works, so that no one may boast.”*⁵

There is no room for acting “holier than thou” in the Christian faith. *We all are saved by grace! One of the things that I love most about the Star Wars films is that they remind us that good and evil are internal forces that we all struggle with. Sometimes good guys mess up, and even bad guys can be redeemed.

I love the point in the film, where the bad guy, the primary villain, *Kylo Ren, kneels down, almost as if in prayer, and says, **“I feel it again. The call to the light.”*

That call comes to all of us. * I believe that people still long for the kind of truth, guidance, and direction that the best of religion, not just spirituality, has always offered. It tells us that God has a plan for every life. And he invites us to find it.”

How do we do that? We start by believing. At a critical point in the lives of the young protagonists in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, *an aging Han Solo tells them, ** “I once thought it was all a bunch of mumbo jumbo ... good and evil, the dark side and the light. Crazy thing is, it’s all true.”*

The faith of this story (point to Bible), this story (gesture to Church) is true - it is all true. God had a life of faith in mind for you, for all of us from the very beginning.

Look at verse 10 of our text.

** “We are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”*⁶

We are what God makes us by his forgiveness and grace. Once forgiven, we live in his grace and love and light, and give his love and light and life away to others!

And that kind of faith leads to a life worth living!

Let us pray.

⁵ Ibid. Ephesians 2:8-9. condensed by the author from the New Revised Standard Version.

⁶ Ibid. Ephesians 2:10. New Revised Standard Version.