

## “Force Full”

January 21, 2018

*Faith in Film series – Star Wars: The Last Jedi*

I did some crowdsourcing on Facebook for this series. I asked people to share their favorite film and tell me why it's their favorite. As you might expect, the responses were varied - some classics, some more modern, but all ages of people responded. Right away, a college friend replied with “When Harry Met Sally” because “the most important people in your life are right there if you take the time to look.” A seminary classmate said “The Breakfast Club” and proceeded to reference chapter 2 of Acts: “people who are different can come together and see how their struggle is similar. The Holy Spirit brings us together and helps us understand.” His spouse said, “Chocolat. But I think it's because I'm actually hungry for chocolate.”

A couple of people said “The Sound of Music” not only for the love story and the music, but also a spiritual story of relationships, loyalty, perseverance and love. Glenn Chilson said “Enemy Mine” because “two people become friends despite their significant differences and doing everything and anything for the love of a child.” (I'll have to see that one.) There were a couple people who offered “To Kill a Mockingbird” and “Lord of the Rings.” Pastor Susan Hagans, who served here at Lake Harbor said, “I loved Avatar, because of my compassion for our First Nation peoples and the horrors we brought to their beautiful homeland.”

It was my mom's cousin, whom I affectionately call “Aunt Jean,” who replied, “I have always liked the *Star Wars* movies (just saw *The Last Jedi*) because good always conquers evil. And, of course, she added, “Heard a good sermon years ago about that after the first movie.”

The first movie *Star Wars: A New Hope* was released in 1977 with two others through 1983. The second set started in 1999 through 2005. And now we're in the third set, which started in 2015 with *The Force Awakens*. *The Last Jedi* follows on its heels picking up with Rey finding Luke Skywalker and asking for his help.

If you're not a super fan - or much of a fan - I don't know what to tell you except that there's something about this saga that touches people. The total gross income from all of the movies combined stands at almost \$9 billion worldwide. That doesn't take into account revenue from other products like action figures, video games, and everything else!

*The Last Jedi* keeps the theme of good versus evil, and yet it's not so cut and dried anymore. It's complicated because the good guys (the Rebels/the Resistance) can't overtake the bad guys (The First Order) so easily. It's not ever been easy, but this time, it's a bit messier with more interaction between the good and the bad. When I asked a friend, the biggest *Star Wars* fan I know, about his reflections, he pointed me to

an article that talked about how the line between good and evil isn't so clear anymore - or at least we see more struggle with risk and failure.

So there's something deeper here. *Star Wars* has lasted a long time - as long as I've been alive. It seems to speak to generations and challenges us to consider the "good versus evil" story that's always a part of our lives. But it's a part of our faith, too. Josh Larsen says that *Star Wars* is a lesson in obedience. Luke is called to trust "the Force."

*The Last Jedi* has a lot of characters, but I was most drawn to Rey's story. Rey finds Luke on an island as he's trying to get away from the rest of the world. He's given up on sharing the ways of the Jedi and thinks that the days of the Jedi are over, but Rey shows strong signs of the Force. She says, "Something inside me has always been there. But now it's awake, and I am afraid. I don't know what it is, or what to do with it, and I need help."

Luke identifies it as "the Force." He's even a bit fearful because he knows that the power of the Force can change lives. The power can be used for good or evil. He's seen his nephew, Ben Solo (son of Han Solo and Princess Leia - Kylo Ren), fall victim to the Dark Side.

I wonder if we might consider how Rey's comment about something being awakened (or at least her realization of it) as an explanation of God's grace at work in her life through the Holy Spirit.

Rey says, "I need someone to show me my place in all of this." As we were talking about Rey's plea, Carole Koch's response was "don't we all?" There's a sense of the need for others on the journey to discovering who we are and who we're called to be. We need each other; living our faith isn't a solitary experience. We learn from each other and grow in our love for God as we share life together.

That realization about the need for one another resonated with me, and that's a part of what Paul seeks to do with his letters to the early church. We hear it in Romans as he tries to explain life lived in the Spirit versus life lived in the flesh. Living in the Spirit keeps us focused on spiritual things. Living in the Spirit gives us life and peace. Living in the Spirit means looking beyond ourselves and using the power we have for good.

Henry Ward Beecher said, "Greatness lies, not in being strong, but in the right using of strength; and strength is not used rightly when it serves only to carry a man above his fellows for his own solitary glory. He is the greatest whose strength carries up the most hearts by the attraction of his own." "The right using of strength" is a phrase worth chewing on. We see that in those we admire - people we call great. But we also experience it in Jesus - whose strength was shown through the depth of his love for others.

We might consider Rey's experience of the Force as a reminder and challenge. Yes, there's always a battle between the First Order and the Resistance, but there's an

underlying spiritual battle, too. Perhaps that's why this story has lasted for so long. We love our heroes, but they're not without humanity and struggle. We understand the good versus evil part, but we also understand the struggle to figure out who we are, how to live out our calling, and how we relate to others in the midst of all of it. How do we trust in God? How do we love well in the name of Jesus? Maybe most importantly as it relates to *The Last Jedi*, how do we use the power we have?

I don't talk about fighting the devil in my personal faith language, but the struggle against evil is real. It's real in us - as we struggle with our personal tendency to sin, to turn away from God's will and way and go our own way. It's real around us.

We see evil in obvious ways: news stories of abuse that we can't stomach, violence planned and perpetrated, and so much more. We know that people abuse their power and authority in unimaginable ways. We continue to hear reports of people in power using their position for selfish gain and at the expense of others' welfare. Testimony from survivors of abuse rocked my community this week as Larry Nassar stood trial. I realized as I watched and listened that many of these young women were my age and from my community.

We hear evil in damaging rhetoric, negative and hurtful comments that perpetuate racism, sexism, the fear of others who are different in culture or lifestyle, and the list goes on. It's easy to call out the obvious, but I found myself thinking about how I use my position and power for good and how I rely on the Holy Spirit to guide and direct me.

I thought a lot about the difference between "forceful" and "force full." If we're seeking to live as followers of Jesus, then we're living by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are full of the Spirit, and we can trust the Spirit to guide us and help us. Jesus called the Spirit an Advocate and a Counselor and promised that the Spirit would be given when he ascended into heaven. The Holy Spirit isn't a feeling we have, though we might say "I feel the Spirit." The Holy Spirit is a part of the Trinity - a way that God is truly present with us.

And it's important to remember that the Holy Spirit was promised to a community of people and came to a community of people. Part of the draw of *Star Wars* is the Resistance (a wide and varied group!) working together toward a common goal. One of the characters, Rose, has a great line after she saves Finn, a fellow Rebel: "This is how we win. Not by fighting what we hate, but by saving what we love."

Our victory comes because of Jesus who came to love and serve. We commit to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves, and we do it in the name of Jesus, whose new command begins with love. We trust in God's grace. We promise to serve Jesus as Lord and Savior - and see one another as a part of God's family.

Today you received a sticker that says “The Force is with me.” It’s a small thing, but what would it be like to put this somewhere where you’ll see it and remember that you are not alone.

Friends, the Holy Spirit is with us, but we have to let the Spirit lead. So wear your sticker - not with pride - but with thanksgiving and with humility. May we be not full of force, but “force full.” May we allow ourselves to be guided by the Spirit. AMEN.

#### PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

##### **Force Full/ Star Wars: The Last Jedi precepts:**

- “Do a deed of simple kindness; though it’s end you may not see, it may reach, like widening circles, down a long eternity.” Joseph Norris
- “Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest.” Mark Twain
- “A tree is known for its fruit; a man by his deeds. A good deed is never lost; he who sows courtesy reaps friendship, and he who plants kindness gathers love.” St. Basil
- “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.” Galatians 6:9
- “<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Ephesians 6: 10-12