

Pastor's Page for July 2016

Dear Saints,

In the movie *Star Wars*, the popular phrase was: "May the Force be with you!" The Force was this power in the universe to help each person. You could use it to help fight your battles, move heavy objects and look into the future. It could make you powerful to overcome adversity.

Today some of us have a "Star Wars Theology." We see God as a power or a force which we can use to make our life better. We can use Him to make us rich. We can use Him to "have our backs." We can use Him to heal our infirmities. But it seems a lot of people don't grasp the accountability to a God who is to be praised, worshiped, and obeyed.

American filmmaker George Lucas released "Star Wars" in 1977, a surprise science fiction hit, winning 6 Academy Awards. It started a trilogy, followed up by "The Empire Strikes Back" in 1980, and "Return of the Jedi" in 1983. It became a cultural phenomenon, weaving a highly personalized storyline of family struggle with cosmic forces and intergalactic battles, dosed with spiritual overtones and imagery. In 1999, 2002, and 2005, another trilogy was released as a "Star Wars" prequel, not nearly as popular. In December of 2015, the first of a sequel trilogy was released: "Star Wars: The Force Awakens."

The Spring Grove 4th of July parade has chosen "Star Wars" as its theme, which will be a curious mix with patriotism. Well, as we have signed up to have a float as part of our outreach and identity in the community, let's reflect a bit theologically to take some ownership. Our banner will proclaim: "May His Force be with you!"

In the first film, young Luke Skywalker is coming of age, and yearns to find his place in the universe, raised in a remote location without a father figure, discovering aspirations of becoming a Jedi knight in battling the evil empire to restore the rightful Galactic Republic. It's a curious mix of imagery, incorporating Medieval knights of the Round Table from King Arthur, Monastic traditions in Christianity and Buddhism, Old & New Testament Bible imagery, Zen philosophies, futuristic science fiction technology and fantasy adventure. The spiritual overtones refer to a prayer-like blessing: "May the Force be with you." It can be described as an interacting God, present in all good things of Creation in the universe. Christians might interpret this as the Holy Spirit. This God Force is the energy which unites and inspires people, healing and strengthening the wounded, and the "bright light at the end of the tunnel" when a person dies.

In the midst of overwhelming struggles, temptations and distractions of life's battlegrounds, we may observe how people can be their own worst enemy, succumbing to destructive powers of darkness. We are reminded of the John 1:5 verse: "The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." People need hope and renewal. Like every storyline of good and evil, we encounter twists and turns which bewilder us, discovering unexpected allies, as well as betrayals of those closest to us.

The movie features duels of light sabers, and characters reveal the duality of their own nature as sinners and saints. Is this a saga set in a galaxy far, far away ... or descriptive of our own struggles? There are generational battles in families, and we're tempted to demonize those frustrate us. Perfect parents and children are in short supply. We healthiest in making ourselves accountable to a Heavenly Parent ... Creator ... Force. Rejecting and rebelling against Force brings destruction and evils of selfishness. We need to discover and be reminded of who and whose we are meant to be.

The alien Jedi, Obi-Wan Kenobi, tells Luke: "The Force is what gives a Jedi his power. It's an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together". His words are a slightly different twist of the First Article of our Creed. The only allusions to the Second Article may be in fulfilling one's destiny to help save the people and restore the Kingdom. The Third Article is spiritual Force which calls, gathers, enlightens, heals and empowers us to "fight the good fight, finish the race, and keep the faith. (2 Timothy 4:7)

Spiritual warfare ... the eternal combat of the forces of light and darkness ... cosmic struggle ... the need for discipline, balance, and communion ... all themes which resonate with our faith, hinted at in the "Star Wars" series. In Psalm 14, David describes not only the beauty of the stars in the Heavens, but tells us these proclaim God's presence. In the midst of the struggles in life and faith, do we claim and share His Force? Romans 8 declares: "We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Jesus said: "I am the Light of the World." (John 8:12)

May His force be with you!

Pastor Nathan

