

STAR WARS: A NEW HOPE

Week #1 of a 3-Week Series, "Metaphysical Movie Fun"

Rev. Stacy Macris Ros

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Well, hello, everybody! Welcome! We are starting our three week series: "Metaphysical Movie Fun." I take a classic film that we've all seen and loved, and I uncover the spiritual lessons/messages in them so that we can apply it to our daily lives. That's the point, right?

Because in Unity, we can see and find a spiritual gem, lesson, insight in *anything*. Whether it's a song like Rev. Richard Maraj's "Songs of Life" series ... Whether it's a TV show; fairy tales I've done ... A trip to the grocery store could be inspirational. That's the beauty of Unity! We can find spiritual insight from any experience and any source.

So, today's film to kick off our series is the 1977 blockbuster film, "Star Wars." It is 48 years old, everybody! Can you believe that? I know! Now, for some of you, this is the first and original "Star Wars" movie. For others of you -- mostly those born after 1997 -- this is "Star Wars" Episode IV: A New Hope."

For me, it was the first "Star Wars" movie. I was seven years old when it came out. I can still remember the excitement of wanting to go see "Star Wars." Everyone around me seemed to have already seen it. I was desperate to see it. And then I was playing at a friend's house one day, and my parents came and picked me up to go for a drive. And I thought, "*That sounds boring*" ... right? [Congregants laugh] When you're seven, you'd rather play with your friends at their house than go for a drive. But they convinced me. And lucky for me, because that drive was right down into Hollywood to the very famous Chinese Theater on Hollywood Boulevard to see "Star Wars" ... you know the theater where they have the celebrities' handprints and footprints? So here we are in this historic movie theater when suddenly the words scroll up on the screen: "*A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away,*" with John Williams' music booming over the scroll. And it was a magical moment. It's a wonderful memory of this movie for me.

Well, the director is George Lucas. And he was coming off his surprise hit, "American Graffiti." Do you all remember that movie? Yeah. And so, when he tried to then sell a space fantasy to the studios, no one was really buying it. They didn't think it was going to be successful. But, of course, it went on to be a worldwide pop culture phenomenon to this day, right?

Here's some interesting numbers. The film was originally made for only \$11 million. It earned \$775 million dollars in its original release. That is -- adjusted for today's numbers -- \$3 billion. That studio got their money's worth, right? And then, when it was re-released in 1997, it made another \$858 million.

So, beyond the box office success, the epic battles in space like we'd never seen before -- it became a story that really spoke to all of our hearts because of the blood beloved, right? We all love these characters so much. And it's also that story of a hero's journey. It also has a timeless spiritual message. Whether you really realize it or not, everyone really at some level resonated with that spiritual message of this Force.

So, I thought I would start with just refreshing our memories of the story of "Star Wars" for anyone who hasn't seen it since 1977 ... or in many decades ... or maybe at all. So here's a summary of "Star Wars."

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, the galaxy is under the iron grip of the Empire, enforced by Darth Vader, a fearsome figure who once was a Jedi, but fell to fear, anger, and the dark side of the Force. Hope sparks when Princess Leia ... Remember? [Forms hands in the shape of Leia's iconic double hair buns -- congregants laugh] ... a brave and determined leader of the Rebel Alliance. (The Rebel

Alliance is the good guys.] She steals the plans to the Empire's ultimate weapon, the Death Star. She hides them in the loyal droid, R2-D2, who escapes with his anxious, ever-worrying companion, C-3PO.

The droids end up with Luke Skywalker, a restless farm boy on the desert planet of Tatooine, who feels destined for something greater. Luke meets Obi Wan Kenobi, a wise Jedi master who's been in hiding, and he comes out to train Luke in the ways of the Force.

Luke, Obi-Wan, and the droids enlist the help of Han Solo, a charming but cynical smuggler, and his co-pilot, Chewbacca. Remember: Bigfoot-like. He's a fierce but loyal Wookiee.

So, together, our heroes: they rescue Leia; they survive countless dangers; and bring the Death Star plans to the Rebel Alliance. And in the climactic battle scene, Luke listens to his intuition, makes an impossible shot, and destroys the Death Star ... proving that even a single spark of hope can light up the darkest of galaxies. Right? And scroll. [Congregants whoop and applaud]

So, the first thing here that is very central to this story and the subsequent stories is the Force. And if you don't remember anything else about this story, you probably remember the Force and the words, "*May the Force be with you,*" right?

And here's how Obi-Wan Kenobi explains the force to Luke. It's on the slide. He says, "*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.*" And he also goes on to explain that it will guide anyone who listens to it.

So, in Unity language, the Force is that omnipresent life energy of God expressing as love, wisdom and life, itself, underlying all of existence. It's not separate from us; it's the very essence of our being. So, if we get quiet through prayer and meditation, we too can be directed by this energy: this Force. And the Force, like God, is really, again: it's our essence And we just need to learn how to trust it; to listen to it.

Obi-Wan knows the Force is accessed through listening to it. And so, he actually ... there's this great scene where he is training Luke in the way of a lightsaber. Remember those swords that light up, right? And he's training him and he puts a helmet over Luke's head. And then, of course, Luke protests and says, "*I can't see.*"

And Obi -Wan responds, "*Your eyes can deceive you: don't trust them.*" Very wise. Your eyes can deceive you; don't trust them. In other words, trust your inner guidance. Not just your outer senses, but trust that voice within you that will guide you to your highest good; towards your next steps; towards your destiny.

So, this idea of the Force is not only central to the theme of the story, but it's the first lesson that we take from the story. To know that you're connected to a Greater Power -- a power greater than yourself -- that you can trust and that will guide you in your steps forward in life.

Well, one of the other big lessons and themes in this movie ... You know, it's interesting that the film's title got changed when they updated it to "A New Hope." Because hope, in its simplest form, is our desire for a better future.

So, the Rebel Alliance -- again, that's our heroes -- they're hoping to restore peace after nearly two decades of oppression. And I was thinking about how we all long for peace, don't we? Peace in the world; peace in our lives; peace within us, in our own inner being. So our heroes' hope is to restore peace and harmony in the galaxy.

Now, faith begins with hope. Hope keeps us moving forward. It keeps us visualizing what we want. And faith grounds us and sustains that hope. So, they go together. See, faith is our ability to believe even when we can't see the outcome yet. It's our spiritual confidence.

So our heroes: they see, they know what they want. They want galactic peace.

And so, it's that faith -- that spiritual confidence -- that keeps moving them forward. That can keep moving all of us forward. We may not see it yet, but to know it. To keep visualizing it and knowing it.

Hebrews Chapter 11, Verse 1 says, "*Faith is the assurance of things hoped for; the conviction of things not seen.*" And Unity minister Rev. Martella-Whitsett says, "*Faith is the power that realizes: that makes real images held in mind.*" Faith is the power that realizes -- or makes real -- images held in mind. In other words, when we hold images in mind of what we want, faith tells us "*Yes; it is so.*"

So, what do you want to hold in your mind? Because we can place our attention on faith or on fear. And that's very clear in this story. Because in the story, each character is approaching the mission towards this hope for a peaceful future differently. We've got Luke with his youthful, naive optimism and exuberance. We have Leia, calm under pressure. She even resists the Empire's mind probe, her mind is so strong. We have Han Solo: again, self-serving, but gradually gets drawn into the greater good and into community. R2-D2 is our loyal, very mission-focused friend. And then we have C-3PO, who's convinced that disaster is imminent. [Congregants laugh] He is always worst-case scenario of going to happen.

And so, no matter which character you are most like -- or tend to be like -- when it comes to approaching a goal, all of our heroes save the galaxy. It's just: How do you want to make the journey? Because you can constantly be looking out for the worst to happen, like C-3PO. Or maybe your hope looks like Luke's enthusiasm or maybe it looks like Leia's quiet strength. But it's that faith that lets you keep going when the outcome isn't visible yet.

So, at the end of the movie, in the climactic scene where all seems lost, it's just Luke. It's up to him to destroy the Death Star. And then he hears Obi-Wan's voice say, "*Use the Force, Luke.*" And then it's his faith in his newfound intuition -- it's his faith in knowing about this Force, this connection -- that he succeeds in destroying the Death Star. See, it didn't look possible. But he held on to that faith, and it was.

So, that's the other takeaway from Star Wars: is that it takes that spiritual attribute or power of imagination to imagine what's possible -- to visualize what's possible, what we want to manifest -- and then that fuels our hope, which is sustained by our faith.

Another theme in this movie is, of course, the enemy. And really, the enemy is fear. See, the opposite of faith isn't doubt; it's fear. And fear, if left unchecked, will shape your life.

Darth Vader's story is a great example of this. He was once Anakin Skywalker, a great Jedi. But he had a great fear of losing his wife. He was trying to save her. He had these visions that she was going to be dying. But he had a fear around that -- that he couldn't do it. He had a need for control. He was trying to control the situation. And because of that fear -- and that need to control it -- betrayed everything he once stood for as a great Jedi. So, his fear literally turned him into this monster machine that wants to destroy other planets. Because that's what happens when we keep trusting our fear over our faith. It eats us up. And we know that, whatever starts to grow within us, also starts to show up outside of us as our own Death Star.

That's a big reason I think also that we love these heroes in this story. Because they sense fear and they do it anyways. Their hope is so strong that it's turned to this faith that overcomes the fear.

Did you ever have a situation -- I'm sure you did; bring it to mind -- a situation that was scary, but you did it anyway? Just think back: a situation you had that was scary, but you did it anyway. And just reflect upon what allowed you to take that step. When you look back and see your bravery in that situation, what is it that helped move you forward?

See, because usually within that situation -- whether we're conscious of it or not -- it's a trusting of yourself. It's a trusting of the Force: this invisible energy guiding you and knowing that it's supporting you. Knowing that something greater than self is there: that God of your own understanding.

So, now bring to mind maybe something currently that you'd like to do, but you're finding scary to do. Maybe it's a big dream or goal or a change in your life. And you're coming up against it and you're feeling like it's scary. And now I want you to remind yourself with that -- seeing that in your mind's eye -- remind yourself that there is this invisible energy: a loving and wise Presence that's supporting you and that you are a part of. And so, see that. See yourself surrounded by and supported by this loving and wise Presence, guiding you as you accomplish this goal.

And fear can show up in small, subtler ways, as well. In different ways it creeps in. Because Luke's uncle ... Now, see; Luke's uncle knows what happened to Luke's father. Luke thinks his father died, but the uncle knows that Luke's father used to be Anakin Skywalker that turned to the dark side and became Darth Vader. So, Luke's uncle refuses to let him join the rebellion ... not because Luke's not capable, but because his uncle is afraid of what might happen to Luke.

So, sometimes the voices that hold us back from going after our goals -- they're not our own. They're a family member; they're a former teacher; they're society's messaging. So, that's why, whenever somebody comes to and tells me of a limiting thought that they might have towards trying to do something -- something that they want to do -- I always ask them: *"Whose voice is that?"* Whose voice is that? Because it's not Spirit's voice. It's someone else's voice. It's the voice of limitation, but it's not Spirit's voice.

And there's other ways that fear creeps in and gets in the way of our goals. So, Obi-Wan explains that Darth Vader has been seduced by the dark side. Well, we can all be seduced by the dark side, right? An example of that is when I choose to scroll on Instagram instead of doing my meditation practice. [Congregants laugh] That is some serious seducing by the dark side. Because it's a choice!

If I'm on Instagram too long -- and studies prove this -- I start to get sad and depressed and not feel good about myself. On the other hand, my time in meditation calms my nervous system; calms my soul; helps my mind chatter decrease; reminds me that I'm one with One Presence.

So, we can create our own dark side and dark side temptations. It doesn't have to be as dramatic as blowing up planets. Sometimes it can look like continuing a habit or a thought that you know doesn't support you, but you keep doing it anyway. Or you keep going back to that partner or that friendship that you know is toxic or draining on you. Or you allow that fear to hold you back from going after your goals and your dreams.

But ultimately, you know, it's about looking at what's the feeling behind that fear. What am I trying to avoid? Because that's what really will ultimately lead us to: Am I going to choose the Force or the dark side?

See, for Darth Vader, it was his anger and grief that he was trying to avoid that made him then so consumed with the dark side. He didn't want to look and feel all of that anger and grief. So, instead, he held it all in. So, it could be hard to look at, *"Hey, what's behind this habit or this thought?"* But it's so important that we do so. Because it influences the choices we make. Because one choice -- the dark side, which is avoidance and fear -- leaves us feeling disconnected and restless, sad, depressed. And the other -- the Force, the remembering of our oneness -- grounds us in peace, clarity, and reminds us of our divine nature.

So, your choice becomes more clear when you start looking at what's behind the fear. And then making the next choice to stay connected to the Jedi ways.

And the other theme in this movie is one of courage and community. You know, the journey on any spiritual path is about courage and community. No matter what the choice is, our journeys are going to contain an amount of courage and the need for community.

So, there's this scene where -- in the process of rescuing Leia off the Empire's space station -- we have Leia and Luke and Han and Chewbacca. And they jump into this room. And it turns out to be a gigantic trash compactor, and it starts to squeeze them in, too. And it's this great reminder that sometimes our spiritual journey and the path to our goals means getting dirty; getting smelly; getting pushed and squeezed a bit.

Because spiritual growth can be uncomfortable. It can be uncomfortable at times. But that's exactly when we need spiritual community the most. It's in those times when we're going through those challenging times that feel like we're getting squeezed -- that's when we need community.

See, again, this theme of the Force that ties us to others ... We have R2-D2 and C-3PO in a whole other room helps stop the compactor from squeezing those others so that they can get out of the muck. They needed their friends to help them stay on the path of the mission; to help get to their goal; to help get them unstuck.

That's why it's so important that we come together for positive connection. Because, as we bring our individual lights together, the light gets brighter; it shines more brightly so that we can express more good in the world. That's what spiritual community is all about, including here at our church. We have small groups. We've got circle groups. We have the social time in the courtyard. We have our "Out & Abouts" to connect, but also our "Out & Abouts" to serve the larger community.

See, it's about belonging to others and knowing that we are all connected to help each other individually, but then also, as a collective, keep moving forward on the spiritual path. Because the truth is: we need each other.

Han Solo is all about being Well, solo. Initially, he doesn't want to help out, especially with the big fight. He's like, *"You know what? I delivered Obi-Wan and Luke to where they needed to go. I got my money; I'm outta here!"* But then, in the moment when Luke needs him the most -- when it's just Luke; it's up to Luke to kill or to destroy that Death Star -- suddenly Han Solo comes from behind in his famous Millennium Falcon to help Luke with the mission.

Because we need each other. We need friends, We need neighbors. We need community. We can't do life and our goals and our purpose on our own. We need each other.

Father Greg Boyle: he started Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles in 1992. It's a fabulous, fabulous organization. They take gang members who are literally at war with one another. And they bring them together and they reform them; they give them job skills. And he says the motto -- his motto of why this is so successful -- it's here on the screen. He says the motto that has kept us successful is this: *"We belong to each other. No exceptions."*

Let's all say that together: [with congregants] *"We belong to each other. No exceptions."* Yeah.

See, "Star Wars" reminds us that, when we work with a common positive purpose, we can create peace and harmony and connection. And when we work off of fear, it can destroy us.

Here's a great reminder from Buddhist monk Thích Nhất Hạnh. He writes this (on this slide): *"Humans are not the enemy. It's the forces of fear, anger, greed and delusion that, when they take over, cause suffering."* It's not humans.

So, in a galaxy far, far away, it is the forces for good -- the rebellion, our heroes -- that band together in collective community. Even though they're made up from different planets, different species, different ways of life ... but they come together knowing that they're working together for a shared vision of peace and it's worth it. In the end they succeed. Because why? Because we belong to each other. No exceptions.

So, I think one reason "Star Wars" resonates so deeply is that we love -- again, we love -- this hero's journey. Right? From a humble beginning on a desert farm to saving the planet. It also carries a very timeless spiritual reminder that, in life, we have a choice. We can let anger and fear guide us and diminish us, or we can follow our inner loving awareness.

So, here's the invitation for us. Trust the Force: that divine energy that binds all creation within you, around you, always. Let hope grow into faith: faith that goodness will prevail, even if you can't see it yet. Name and release fear's voice. Ask, "*Who's voice is that?*" and then choose Spirit's voice, instead. And lean on your community, because we're not meant to do life alone.

So, this week I have some soul work/homework for you in the spirit of "Star Wars." I want you to take one step towards something that you've been afraid to do. Take one step towards something you've been afraid to do, and act from faith and not fear. And to remember that a loving wise Presence is with you every step of the way. Because as Obi -Wan says, "*The Force will be with you always.*"

May the Force be with all of you, my friends. Blessings!