



National Benevolent Association

XPLOR
FAITH, JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY

A Long, Long Time Ago, In a Galaxy Far, Far Away

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I recently watched the new Star Wars movie, *The Force Awakens*, and I absolutely loved it. You could probably put almost anything Star Wars in front of me, and I would still love it. I screamed like a little kid at the opening crawl; I wore a Chewbacca onesie into the theater and didn't take it off when I went out to eat beforehand. I watched *The Force Awakens* on December 19, and of course I had to re-watch the other six films and the cartoon series because I watched *The Force Awakens* again on Christmas Eve with my family. I love Star Wars, I love lightsabers and Wookiees and blasters, and I can't get enough of the force and the mythos that goes along with it.

I also can't help but notice how many times well intentioned "good guys" screw up because they are uninformed, alienate someone because of their stringent rules and views, or completely get something wrong but keep to their dogmatic view.

The Failings of "Hokey Religion"

In Episodes One through Three, the entire plot is driven by the Jedi constantly keeping Anakin uninformed, telling him to ignore the feelings he has. For the uninitiated, Anakin Skywalker, a young slave boy on a remote desert planet, is freed by some Jedi, or mystical space samurai, and taught the ways of the Jedi and the light side of the force. Part of the code of the Jedi is to feel no attachment to other people, and this specifically is what Anakin struggles with. He feels anger and pain when his mother is killed, and he falls deeply in love with a senator. His attachment, forbidden by the Jedi code, alienates him from the Jedi order, driving him into resentment and hatred towards the order. The Jedi order disavows his love and the emotions he feels, drives him away from the order, and causes him to turn to the dark side, an ideology as radical and hurtful to others as the dogmatic Jedi teachings have been for Anakin.

In the Star Wars videogame video game "Knights of the Old Republic," there is a militant group of people called the Mandalorians. The Mandalorians are going from civilization to civilization destroying their people and culture and wreaking war and havoc wherever they go. Victims of the onslaught caused by the Mandalorians plead the Jedi order to come and protect them, to lend them aid, and to fight off the tyrants destroying their ways of life. Members within the Jedi order itself question the higher-ups as to why they won't lend their aid and assistance. The Jedi Masters refuse to act and leave millions of innocent people to die. This prompts a group of Jedi to fracture away from the Jedi order and to go off to fight the Mandalorians.

How many times has the church been too much like the Jedi order? How often is the church full of well-intentioned people who claim to be serving a greater good but ultimately fall short? How often have we made outcasts of people because of who they love, told people to stifle their emotions and to deal with whatever has happened, fractured the church because of our hesitancy to act? When we call people to an open table, are we open to their anger, their shame, and their sadness as we are open to their exuberance and joy? How often does our adherence to dogma outcast people who are looking for love and acceptance? Han Solo refers to the force and the Jedi as a "hokey religion," and I can't say that I haven't felt the same way about the church before.

The Power to Transform

But I've seen the transformative power of the church. I've seen the church act in the name of love and through ways of peace. I've seen the church feed the hungry, take in the outcast, question dogmatic views, and break its silence. I've seen people create new paths from broken roads with the help of the church, and shed skins of cruelty and hatred and realize that what Jedi Master Yoda says is true: "Luminous beings are we... Not this crude matter." In a lot of ways, I see NBA XPLOR as a vehicle of such restorative and active faith. Both sides of our faith are true, all of it.

Every moment we live is a defining moment for us and our faith. Every action we take defines us to ourselves and to the world around us. In these moments where racism and hate are politically savvy and "telling it how it is," we have a chance to be inclusive and celebrate the diversity we have. When gun violence tears apart our country, we have a chance to spread peace. When refugees seek asylum, we have a chance to take in the outsider.

In whatever endeavor we take, we have the opportunity to make it a faithful one. One that is faithful to the call that God has for all of us, to show God's love. When Master Yoda explains the force to Luke, he describes it in a way that sounds much like the Holy Spirit: "Life creates it, makes it grow. Its energy surrounds us and binds us... You must feel the Force around you; here, between you, me, the tree, the rock, everywhere, yes." From the intentional, like a year of service through NBA XPLOR, to the mundane, like buying groceries, we have opportunities to be faithful to the spirit that binds us all. You, me, the tree, the rock, everywhere.

May the Spirit Be With You

So now, in these moments, will we feel the Holy Spirit between us? Will we let it surround us and bind us? We know the transformative power of the church and the influence that it has on our lives; let it not be understated by our inaction and inability to be malleable. We are called to act, so let us act. If we become dogmatic and stale, let us find the courage to change. Let us be well-intentioned people in action who seek to accept and to encourage. Let us shed our image of "hokey religions" and avoid the dogma that pervaded the old Jedi order.

We can be rid of our crude matter and reveal our luminous beings. The world can be dark, but through God we can be brighter. The world can be hateful, but through God we can be more loving. The world can be divided, but through God we can live in harmony like the billions of stars in the sky. We will not let that go to waste.

May the Force be with you, and may the Spirit be with you.

*NBA XPLOR is a 10-month service residency opportunity for young adults ages 21-30, with the purpose of empowering young adults to discern and develop a "heart for care" as they live together in simple community, engage in direct service and justice work, engage in leadership development, and discern their vocational calls to honor the various communities they are called to serve. **Learn more and apply at nbacares.org/xplor.***