

Midnight Mass 2016

On Saturday, my family and I went to watch The Force Awakens, the new Star Wars movie. If you haven't seen it yet, I would strongly encourage you to do so. It is extremely good. The special effects are brilliant, the carry on from previous episodes is well managed and the humour is just as quirky as in the original movies.

But, of course, the thing which makes the Star Wars movies even more attractive, is the way that they mirror so much of our own experience of our universe.

The same battles for survival are mirrored in our everyday lives. This year, we have seen destruction on a huge scale and just like the backdrop to so much of the new Star Wars movies, we have seen whole communities displaced and killed as a result of appalling violence and millions living without enough water or food as a direct result of climate change.

The Star Wars storyline rests on a moral narrative about a fight between good and evil –the light and the dark-side. Sound familiar? Well, as we look around our world there can be no question that we too are caught in a struggle between good and evil in just the same way.

In the movie, we see the main characters not only fighting an external battle for goodness, but an internal battle too. Even those committed to the good force, regularly feel the pull and attraction of the dark-side. And many of the baddies are individuals who themselves once fought for good, but have become corrupted by the lure of evil.

As we look into our own lives, we see the same battle going on. We are just as prone to allowing evil to win out as any character in Star Wars, and yet we are just as likely to choose good too.

The battle between good and evil, is not resigned to a continent thousands of miles away any more than a galaxy many lightyears from our own. People of all political persuasions, Atheists and Religious are all just as likely to do good and just as likely do evil – irrelevant of what the Daily Mail may have us believe.

Our God governs our universe with a force for good, a force keeping all things in balance. And increasingly, science shows us what happens to our world when we act contrary to God's force for goodness.

The cost of violence in our world is sadly too obvious. But we now can no longer deny that Human behaviour is causing our climate to change at an alarming rate too. Whole continents are being

plunged into drought whilst others see increased rainfall and flooding. It would seem that our consumer habits have to be restrained if we are to avert the greatest ecological disaster ever witnessed by humankind. Each of us has a moral responsibility here. But this is just one example of the battle between good and evil that is happening before our eyes.

But it is not just in external things that we witness this battle taking place. Within ourselves, a similar struggle is ongoing. Our responses and reactions to situations are not always as they should be and resulting harm, great and small, can lead to great distress within our families and communities.

Sometimes, it can feel like the Dark-side is winning through.

But we are people of faith. We know something better. We believe in a universe governed by a force for good – and that force is love. We have faith that, no matter how many times we get things wrong, the goodness of God will win through. Our faith gives us confidence in our own abilities to fight the battle against injustice, greed and selfishness. We trust that we belong and our belonging rests in faith and love.

Many people today don't understand faith. Sometimes people ask me why I am a Christian. When I am on the ball, my response goes something like this:

I'm a Christian because in Jesus I see the God who didn't say, "This is how you lot have got to behave, and I'm going to watch you and judge you."

Instead he came alongside us and lived in the middle of absolute poverty, chaos and mess. He was born to a single mother, in a messy-dirty stable. His family were refugees. I see a God who came to live in an occupied territory, where the oppressors of the people were both a foreign force and its own authorities. In Jesus is a God who witnessed and was subjected to absolute barbarity and died unjustly young in great agony, and bore the worst that the world could throw at him. He absorbed all this evil without complaint, so that his goodness could shine through. I see a God who does not try to paper over the cracks of grief or loss, with simplified answers – but instead simply understands what it is like to lose a son.

I'm a Christian because I do not believe God keeps a record of our wrongs, but that he does store up the power of our good deeds. I'm a Christian because, I look around our world and see the battle between good and evil taking place all around us, in

wars, in hospital beds, in villages, in homes, in my own personhood – and I want to do something positive in response.

I see a God, who allows me to choose my own path in that battle and every time I step out of the light into a wilderness of darkness and despair, welcomes me back when I am ready to return to him. In my own experience I've run away and God has met me and yet never been angry with me. When I've failed he's picked me up and healed and strengthened me, ready to fight the good fight once again.

I know all I need to do to please him, is to belong. And I know the belonging that I seek is not behind me, but is ahead, in the future.

I'm a Christian, because Christ has no hands on earth now but ours, he has no eyes, no ears, no feet, no body, but ours. We are the Body of Christ and together we are a force for good in our world.

And so I'm a Christian because it makes sense to me, and because we need God's goodness in our world today, more than ever. And so this holy night is not just about presents or chilling out or even enjoying ourselves – as important as these things might be. This blessed night is about Jesus and the goodness he brings. A child born in a stable, beautifully precious, and with infinite potential. A child born of absolute goodness, in spite of the

evil all around him. A child who sets us free from the self-imposed shackles that bind us.

That is the message of Christmas, that is why I am a Christian and that is the reason for this blessed season. And so it is with great pleasure and a huge privilege that we are all called here to celebrate these holy mysteries, this Midnight-Mass on the Eve of the birth of our Lord.

And so Merry Christmas to you all, and may the force be with you!

Amen.