Christmas, 2015

To my sisters and brothers in Christ, in the Episcopal Diocese of East Carolina,

Somehow, I’ve managed to miss seeing a single “Star Wars” movie from beginning to end. I’m not entirely clueless about the movie franchise, however. I’ve seen the trailers for some episodes, know the names of some of the characters and recognize the theme song. I even have a vague idea that throughout the movies there is an ongoing battle between good and evil, between light and dark. With the latest movie in the series launching tonight, I’m expecting to hear lots of friends sharing their reviews. I’m even expecting that there will be some who draw comparisons between the underlying storyline of “Star Wars” and the real time battles between good and evil that we see all around us in the world.

If I understand correctly, each movie begins with the same opening crawl featuring the words, “A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away ....” In a strange way, whenever I hear these words I am reminded of a verse from St. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians: “For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6:12 – NRSV) Perhaps this connection comes from the retreat I led with a group of teenagers back in the eighties, when we read from this passage on a dark and windy evening, gathered around the light of a single candle, and reflected on the battles of good and evil that they encountered in their own lives.

I look forward to hearing the opening words of John’s gospel each Christmas, preferably as they are proclaimed in a dark, candle lit church.

“In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”

(John 1: 1, 5, 14 – NRSV)
Each Christmas, and this one particularly, we can look at the world in which we live and see signs of battles that are being waged all around us. Some are battles of blood and flesh and some are spiritual battles of good and evil. Sometimes these battles are distant from us. Other times they are very close to home. For me, the good news of Christmas is that in the birth of God’s son Jesus we have been given a light that has never been overcome by darkness. In faith, I trust it never will!

In whatever way we will celebrate Christmas, whether with lavish family gatherings or in solitude, let us remember the light of Christ that burns in our hearts and in our world. Let us nourish that light where we find it, and point others to its presence. Let us be people who reject fear and despair when we encounter it, knowing that both Joseph and Mary heard the words “do not be afraid” from the angel, and that in his life Jesus often spoke these same words. May our lives reflect God’s glory in real and constructive ways, as we work for justice and peace in our time, and as we seek to build the body of Christ in our own communities of faith. This Christmas, I pray that the light of God’s love will dispel from our hearts all of the darkness that threatens to overwhelm us on every side.

Our Diocesan House staff joins me in wishing you God’s blessings for a light-filled Christmas and for a happy New Year!

Yours in Christ,

Rob

The Rt. Rev’d Rob Skirving
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