

Notices,

Start Course, Christmas Eve, Christ Day.

‘The Force Awakens’

Nothing will stand in our way, I will finish what you started

There are stories about what happened, it's true

The force is calling to you, just let it in

Quotes from the latest Star Wars – The Force Awakens. There is a force that is older than time itself, there is an empire that outlasts all empires, and yes, there are stories about what happened and they are true. Christmas awakens within us a force that lies deep within all of us, the need to loved and be loved.

Now, I'm not saying that Jesus is actually Luke Skywalker, nor that God is Darth Vader. But we are all part of an extraordinary story in which we are called to love our world and love its creator.

Instinctively,

We crave a better world than this, and sometimes we feel like aliens and stranger amongst the familiar.

There is a force within all of us, an internal struggle between good and evil in the same way that there is in the world, whether visible or invisible, physical or spiritual – there is a dark side to life which we sometimes choose to go over to. But, the promise is, that in the end, and often despite appearances, light overcomes darkness, goodness overcomes evil, God is all powerful and in control and his Son Jesus came to finish what his Father started. Jesus, light of the world, that light ... shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The difficulty with believing that God is in control is a combination of factors: we live in an instant success-oriented culture – we don't cope well with failure or having to wait, so when God doesn't turn up when we think He should we start to doubt Him. Our culture demands protection from all pain, and so when pain visits us we refuse to believe in a God of love. Our culture insists on a solution to every

problem yet some things can't be fixed. And lastly, our culture believes only what it can be proven.

We're encouraged to choose either explanations of the world as science or fiction.

Science is about proof; it attempts to explain the how but cannot explain the why? We can launch people into space but can't say why is there something rather than nothing, why are we here at all? Many scientists are practising Christians, our own Bishop Lee is a biologist and the author of Luke's gospel was a doctor who gave a careful account of the events of Christmas he recorded from eye witnesses to Jesus' life. To have faith we don't need to leave our brain to one side, neither do we have to choose between God and Science. That said, we must accept that not everything in life makes sense. There are forces at work beyond our comprehension.

My daughter Jasmine doesn't remember her first Christmas last year and this year, it still makes no

sense that her parents have put a tree inside the house and put sparkly bits on it.

No amount of thinking about it will help her get to the explanation that it's for joy and celebration, nothing else. She might even conclude that mummy and daddy are just a bit wacky. The arrival of a tree in your house is just like life – stuff happens; we might form theories why there's a tree in our house but maybe there's a bigger story we just can't know about or understand yet! Faith is about trust and hope where gradually God reveals bits of himself and his empire to us. One day will it all make sense.

God stands outside of time and beyond explanation, He is mystery, He is other. But, remarkably He came at Christmas, leaving his spiritual home, that we might find ours. In the person of Jesus, He came to finish what His Father started.

God joined the chaos of first century Palestine in order that humanity would know God in the flesh and that the world would be drawn inexorably to a force more overwhelming more permanent more

radical than anything it had ever seen. Since then, goodness and mercy have been pursuing us all whether or not we're awake enough to notice it. The force of love and justice is calling you – just let it in.

But is that what we see around us in the world today – surely things are getting worse not better? On the face of it, God has abandoned us to get on with it ourselves if He ever existed at all? Hasn't He? The dark side is winning, nothing will stand in its way.

But, if we pay attention, if we wake up, there is reason to have hope that God is in control and working with us to bring about a better fairer more just world. God has formed us with a keen sense of justice and a desire for a better world, the issue is whether or not we respond to that strong force calling us, to come home, to see that, the light shines in the darkness and overcomes it.

Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook, wants his daughter to grow up in a better world and so has given 99% of his shares to children's charities worldwide. I think most people would agree that we do need a better world. We have a desire to improve to bring more justice more honesty so that future generations don't make the mistakes we continue to do. Do you have any hope or expectation that this is possible? What about the hidden epidemic in our society of loneliness?

John Lewis 'Half the world away' Oasis

I would like to leave this city

This old town don't smell too pretty and
I can feel the warning signs running around my
mind

And when I leave this island I'll book myself into a
soul asylum

'Cause I can feel the warning signs running around
my mind

So here I go still scratching around in the same old
hole

My body feels young but my mind is very old
So what do you say?
You can't give me the dreams that are mine anyway
You're half the world away
Half the world away
Half the world away
I've been lost I've been found but I don't feel down
*Show someone they're loved this
Christmas*

This year's John Lewis advert had 8 million views in just two days. Its theme is connecting us to people we don't know – half a million old people will be alone this Christmas. At the parish luncheon club, I was told by one of the regulars, 'I look forward to Junk Mail – at least someone's written to me'

We want to live in a better world it would seem, but do you hope that this is possible? Can we start with addressing the core issue, the world isn't ours but God's and He knows how to run it better than we?

Self-centeredness

Putting Christmas under the microscope for a moment might help us discover what makes the perfect celebration so elusive. I suggest it's our desire to impose our own preference on how Christmas should pan out. This highlights the heart of the dilemma we each face. We cannot all have it our own way and have everyone happy with the festivities. Sometimes you just have to eat sprouts!

And for a society not just a family at Christmas we also need to sign-up to some ground rules, like we do when playing monopoly – do you pay fines into the bank or put them on Free Parking?

The need to govern

If we accept that for a better world, for the common good, someone needs to make the rules and enforce them. Trouble is, who can be trusted to govern us – who do we put in control – a JEDI?

God came at Christmas throwing out the rule book

He came to show us a way out of the internal chaos and darkness in which we suffer and cause others to

suffer. We struggle most when we doubt that God is in control, when hope vanishes, when justice disappears, when mercy is absent. But God promises to journey with us through the valley of the shadow of death and the light of love and hope will dawn in our hearts no matter what happens. The light has overcome darkness and will never be put out.

When God came in the person of Jesus He didn't overthrow the political system, he threw out the personal rule book created by people of power and influence. God chose unremarkable people to teach the world that the kingdom of God turns reverses our value system. In God's economy, mercy overcomes justice, love overcomes hatred, light overcomes darkness, corruption is banished to outer space.

By letting the force of God's love into our lives we don't need rules. To live God's way is not to lose freedom but to gain it. In accepting Him as the author and perfecter of our life, we will begin to

make sense of a world that otherwise seems to be increasingly out of control, chaotic and governed by a darkside, a death star.

God is full of surprises and Christmas proves that love is meant to last...but hang on

I thought love wasn't meant to last, I thought you were just passing through, If I ever get the nerve to ask, What did I get right to deserve somebody like you? I wasn't expecting that

Like James Watson, the people who walked in darkness, hundreds of years before Jesus was born weren't expecting that love lasts, but they saw a great light to which the prophet Isaiah testified. Even more surprising we, like those ancient Jewish tribes, can do nothing to deserve it, simply accept that the God of priceless gifts such as faith hope and love made His purposes crystal clear at Christmas.

'What did I do to deserve somebody like you?'
Nothing, we did nothing to deserve God's love. He

chose since before the world began to love and entrust us to love his world.

There is light that enters our darkness that will guide us into a path of peace, that will illuminate God's kingdom of mercy and justice evident.

Sometimes in history there have been outrageous extravagant divine interventions which act as a protest against evil and a signpost to God's kingdom, events which are truly unmissable – like Christmas day.

'The Force Awakens'

Nothing will stand in our way, Jesus will finish what His Father started

There are stories about what happened, they are documented more than any other event in history

There is a dark side and it's real, but in the same way light overcomes it.

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