

Prayer and Meditation

Julia Alberg-Burbank

"I am one with the Force, and the Force is with me." This mantra is used by the rebel warrior Chirrut Imwe. It is his guide into and out of battle, it strengthens and centers him.

Perhaps this morning and in the coming days it becomes our mantra: I am one with the Force, and the Force is with me.

pause

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Sermon

May the Fourth Be with You: Covenant and Community

Today is May the 4th: Star Wars Day, so I say: May the Fourth Be with You...and if you are formerly a Catholic or Episcopalian or some such, you just might think: "And Also With You" in reply. Of course this is a play on the phrase used frequently throughout the movies, "May the Force be with you", which was intentionally written to echo "The Lord is with you".

"**The Force** is a [metaphysical](#), mysterious, and [ubiquitous power](#) in the [Star Wars fictional universe](#). Characters refer to the Force as an energy that interconnects all things in the universe, maintaining cosmic balance. Particularly "Force-sensitive" characters, usually through rigorous [self-discipline](#), training, and [mindfulness](#), are able to connect to the Force and thus access and wield certain [supernatural powers](#).

Heroes like the [Jedi](#), a peacekeeping group of warrior-monks, largely seek to "become one with the Force", matching their personal wills with the will of the Force. This is evidenced by their ability to channel its powers, which they do towards selfless goals. Meanwhile, the [Sith](#) and other villains try to bend the additional abilities gained through the Force toward their own selfish and destructive desires. Throughout the franchise, this distinction is referred as the light side versus the dark side of the Force. Characters'

actions are often described as either helping to bring balance to the Force or, its opposite, causing a disturbance in the Force.

The Force and the [Jedi](#) religion have been compared to aspects of several real-world religions, such as [Buddhism](#) and [Taoism](#).” Wikipedia

Previously, I likened the Force to the spirit of community and covenant we create here at UUCOD. I am still comfortable with this idea because the Force is the Love we bring to all things. I believe that is because my focus lies in using the Force for good as a tool for maintaining our strong covenantal connections to one another. A grounding and centering spirit that enables us to draw strength from community when we need it to persevere in our efforts to love this world and each other. A vehicle for welcoming others into what Gregory Boyle calls “Cherished Belonging”.

We are at a time in our world where it seems that the Dark parts of the Force are on the rise and have ascended to power. It is discouraging and wearying to think about. And yet, here we are- together and facing it. While I drew inspiration for today from the series of movies about a spirited group of rebels who rely on their promises to one another and their commitments to the cause of defeating evil, I also found other sources for this moment we face.

Jemar Tisby is a trained historian and minister. He is a Black man who attended Catholic schools while not being Catholic and discovered that a reformed tradition of Christianity resonated with him. In his online biography he speaks of his journey from being invited to the table, finding a seat at the table, to flipping the table in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, to building his own table, because as he says:

“In 2016 when Donald Trump descended the elevator in his New York City Hotel to announce his bid for candidacy of the President of the United

States, we learned how egregiously connected white evangelicals are to racism and Christian nationalism – exit polls showed that 4 out of every 5 white evangelicals who voted pulled the lever for this man.

It became undeniably clear that there really wasn't space at this white, Reformed and evangelical table for a person to be present as their whole self- Black, and Christian and all. This table was never built for people like me and I couldn't justify spending so much time and effort trying to make myself or others like me fit. Sometimes you have to flip the table you're at and start building your own. (<https://jemartisby.com/about/>)

He is a man who uses the Force to build community and writes a substack called Footnotes, as well as a series of books on Justice.

In the wake of the LA Fires, he attended a talk by Reverend Traci Blackmon. As part of this talk, Rev. Blackmon shared a picture of a home in Los Angeles that was untouched by the fires due to its particular construction and landscaping. In the midst of so much destruction there stood a home, intact. What Jemar Tisby took from this was an urgent call to stop saying, "We've been here before" when reflecting on the state of the world. Things are different than in the past, even if there are historical echoes. The corruption of evangelical Christianity, the racism, the corruption of those in power and technology moving these messages at lightning speed, all thrust us into a situation with historical parallels and stinging differences. Tisby says our response should be, much like the house that stood, "We were built for this". When I think of our community, here, I think, we were built for these times. We have the tools that ground us in love: we rely on each other, we are willing to be transformed by each other and our relationships. We are generous with each other and the wider world, we are committed to justice at all levels and we speak out about

that- online, in person and to our lawmakers. We cherish equity and pluralism in a manner that preserves and protects the marginalized as well as works to keep democratic institutions truly democratic. So when we keep love at the center of our covenants with one another and grow our community this way, we are using the Force for good and building capacity to face the situation as it is, speak plainly and clearly about it and resist the darkness that has gathered. From now on, I remind myself, we are built for this. (Footnotes on Substack)

In that same talk with Rev. Blackmon was another Christian minister. She, too, saw the picture of the house that withstood the fires. Diana Butler Bass reaches people where they are: online via web site, substack and socials. She also frequently appears on television and in print media. Again, she holds a Christian perspective and is friends and colleagues with Jemar Tisby. As she sat in this same talk and gazed upon the photo, she was inspired to ask herself, “What are we going to do?” Realizing, as well, that the house was built for this, she wondered how to make sure her own house, spiritual house, could be remade to withstand the fires we now face. This reflects the Star Wars reminder from Rey that rebellions are built on hope. However, hope is not a plan, so Butler Bass came up with the ten W’s, and I’d like to share them with you because I find them immensely helpful, in that they are things that strengthen us and have a positive community impact:

- Wake Up (every day)- be on a schedule and stop doom scrolling as much as possible.
- Welcome the day (everyday): with gratitude.
- Walk (everyday): Get on your feet and move, paying attention to the world- notice the little things.

- (Be) With Others (everyday): do not isolate. Connect, like here at church. Volunteer. Spend time with people you trust.
- Work: (most days): Do what you love, follow your calling, tidy your space. In particular Butler Bass notes: “You may be challenged in the future to go far beyond your comfort zone. But it is far more likely that the work you do will be your primary arena of acts of assistance, democracy, and justice on behalf of others. Be an everyday hero wherever you are.”
- Write: (everyday, weekly, or often): This one is about creativity. Fully expressing yourself on the page or with a craft. We think we won't want to remember these times, but writing and art can capture them clearly and tell our story.
- Watch the news (as able): **“The arsonists want you ignorant”** to what's happening Butler Bass says, and I think that is incredibly true. Find reliable news outlets and ways to digest in smaller bites. I have found newsletters and daily diaries to be helpful. We also changed our subscriptions to smaller outlets doing truthful work.
- Wide-Sight: (a practice to develop): This she adapts from Parker Palmer, the noted writer and Quaker, in which he reflects that in our anxieties our vision is narrowed in. By softening, we can take a wider view and see the periphery of the world, as well, and look for what is hopeful, helpful and healing.
- Weep: (whenever): Embrace your emotions as they arise. Do not feel guilty about joy. Talk to others about how you are feeling.
- Wonder: (as much as possible): Nature, museums, music, books, poetry, space...anything that connects you to beauty and inspires awe for you. Awe, she says, is pro-social. (The Cottage on Substack)

In doing these practices regularly, we strengthen ourselves and deepen the community we have here...we are building ourselves up to respond to our reality. Much like the Jedi and other rebels, who were determined and disciplined, while also taking time for joy and community.

Perhaps the most challenging and impactful practice that I have encountered is found in Fr. Greg Boyle's book *Cherished Belonging*. This book became part of my daily meditation practice and a challenging one at

that. Each day and with each reading, I was challenged to see the Force in all people, and to hold people in positive regard. In Star Wars, our Jedi friends recognize the power of the dark side of the force and work to overcome it in themselves and others. Boyle has written, in his newest book, that belonging is the only way through these deeply divided times. Can I look at those who seek to oppose and oppress and remember that only love and belonging are powerful enough to overcome the divide of our world? That I must engage and work towards the end of the “dark side” by standing firm in the belief that liberation is not one-way and it is for everybody? Real love, the positive Force, is not one and done. We have to renew the commitment with each breath we take. Could I do what is asked of me, by the Universe and “find that undying fidelity to the quickening” in my heart by remembering that love always comes first and that love wants what the universe wants: the well-being of others? Boyle goes on to challenge me further: saying that love doesn’t allow for “us and them”, love is the only thing that burns away that distance. Can I remember to move through the world as Roshi Joan Halifax advises: with a strong back and a soft front? The call to love others and live with a deep sense of belonging requires both strength and softness.

Fr. Greg works with and lives among Los Angeles’ gang members. He roots himself deeply in the community and lets all who turn up at Homeboy Industries know they belong. Of his work he says,

“We seek to help folks become, more and more, their truth in love by loving them, by choosing to brighten, and this builds loving societies. **Systems change when people do.** People change when they are cherished. We propel our intentions away from our own self-absorption, and we choose to forget ourselves on purpose. Our awakened heart sees that everyone

gleams with the splendor of God, and being a constant reminder is our joy. Living life fully is what Zen Buddhists call 'the supreme meal' a life without limits. Our habitual practice, and our choosing to cherish with every breath, is a decision not to break faith with our awakened heart. We choose to live , all over again, and daily, at the solitary core of our being. We abide in the oneness and in the longing...in the love that rests within us."

I believe that continuing to develop a deep spirit and sense of belonging here in our community, not only strengthens us as individuals, but develops our capacity to show up in the wider world. He goes on to say that to become whole we need living connection with the whole. The universe, or God, whatever your preferred language, wants us whole: all of us.

So we work to create wholeness in ourselves and the community. That's one of the reasons our welcome words are so important: all of you is welcome here in this community. Similarly, in the Star Wars universe, all were welcome to join the alliance of rebels. The rag-tag collection made them stronger and united them, because they showed up with their various talents, used the force for good, and lived lives in common cause with one another.

We here, are able to use our version of the Force- love and covenant- to deepen our connections and sense of belonging with one another. As we do this we are building a house that is made for these times, a house that can withstand the attacks on the marginalized, democratic institutions, the Constitution itself. From our strong, carefully crafted "homes" we will be able to stand together and stand up for ourselves and others. May the Force be with you.