

## Welcome

[Force Awakens Poster] It didn't feel right to do a sci-fi series without talking about one of the biggest sci-fi stories of all time - Star Wars! I specifically want to dial in on Episode VII, *The Force Awakens*, which was the first new Star Wars film in years, and relaunched the whole Star Wars movie empire. It is also one of the biggest box-office hauls of all time. So I'm assuming most of you saw it.

Pretty much everyone who saw it loved *The Force Awakens*, but if there was a constant critique, it was this: the movies are basically the same. Anything you can say about *The Force Awakens* can basically be applied to several other *Star Wars* movies. Talking about good vs evil or the daddy issues that plague the Skywalker family or any other theme - they're all in all the films.

As a culture, we crave familiar stories - like Star Wars, like the nostalgia wave that's hitting Netflix. Everything's getting a sequel, remake or reboot. We're looking backwards, reaching for something familiar. That's a sign that, as a people we feel unmoored. We're looking for a time when life made more sense because the stories we've built our lives on have begun to crumble. We called that story the American Dream and you all know it: if you work hard, you can be anything you want to be. You can achieve whatever you want. It gets more specific: follow the rules, graduate, go to college (being a little rowdy is acceptable), get married, have kids, get a job, work your way up, retire.

That story has taken hit after hit over the last generation. People my age and younger have seen that the only thing going to college guarantees you is crippling debt - there are fewer and fewer jobs available. We've seen in the past decade that not everyone has equal access to the American Dream - that many of us are disadvantaged from the start. Add in a decade and a half of never-ending war on terror, the increasingly sharp divisions about what exactly the American Dream even *should* be and you have a recipe for feeling lost. Depressed. Cynical.

We find comfort in old, familiar stories. Even our scifi, which is suppose to be about visions of the future, is about nostalgia and reliving a vision of the future from 30 years ago. We want a vision for our future that is framed by our past. We want to be able to say, "Wait, haven't I heard this before?"

[Picture with quote] That's actually what J. J. Abrams intended with *The Force Awakens* - he knew he was hewing closely to the original Star Wars. He said in an interview, "*The Force Awakens was a bridge and a kind of reminder; the audience needed to be reminded what 'Star Wars' is, but it needed to be established with something familiar, with a sense of where we are going to new lands, which is very much what 8 and 9 do.*"

Something familiar that sets us up to go somewhere new. We'll have to wait until Episode 8 comes out to see if J. J. is right about Star Wars. But we'll see Peter doing the same thing in our Scripture today. For

those of us feeling adrift, those of us feeling lost, uncertain about the future, their kids' futures, the Story of God gives us a framework to understand how God is working in our world here and now. The story of the Bible makes sense of our world here and now.

### Message

This is Eastertide, the season in the Church year where we explore the implications of the Resurrection for our lives today. This year, our series is called *Strangers in a Strange Land*. We're comparing the vision of human destiny we find in science fiction stories to the letter of 1 Peter.

[Scripture Slide] Turn with me to 1 Peter. This same problem faced those first Christians in the Roman empire. They lived in an Empire whose story was "Might makes right". The Romans declared peace only after they had crucified everyone who resisted them. And now these Christians had found new life in a man who was crucified by Rome, and then raised from the dead. But following Jesus made them outcasts in their culture. They were weird now... strangers in their own land.

[Christians surrounded by Romans] Last week, we saw that many of these Christians were at the bottom of the social pyramid. Because they suffered, they were tempted to slip back into the old Roman stories, to follow the way of Jupiter and Mars rather than the way of Jesus. Peter encouraged to them was to live into the person God called them to be. To live like Jesus. Today, Peter goes on to explore exactly what that means: that they're part of something much bigger than themselves.

Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness.

Peter begins by comparing them to infants - they are newly reborn into God's new life, so it makes sense. Peter challenges them to cry out for nourishment - they need to grow strong in faith. What does that look like? This is where the story begins to take shape. Peter quotes from several Old Testament texts (which for those first Christians was all the bible they had). He's going for some nostalgia, finding some stability in the familiar:

You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor.

And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God. As the Scriptures say,

"I am placing a cornerstone in Jerusalem,  
chosen for great honor,  
and anyone who trusts in him

will never be disgraced.”

Yes, you who trust him recognize the honor God has given him. But for those who reject him,

“The stone that the builders rejected  
has now become the cornerstone.”

And,

“He is the stone that makes people stumble,  
the rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they do not obey God’s word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them. But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God’s very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

“Once you had no identity as a people;  
now you are God’s people.  
Once you received no mercy;  
now you have received God’s mercy.”

I know that doesn't sound like much of a story to our ears. But for an ancient Jew, a couple of images jump out - at the beginning, Peter calls Jesus the "living cornerstone of God's Temple" and at the end refers to those of us reading his letter as "royal priests, a holy nation". For an ancient readers, that was as good as a Star Wars opening crawl.

[World → Red Sea → Jewish Temple] The story of God opens with Genesis 1, the story of God bringing life and order out of chaos. In the beginning, the earth is formless and empty, just raging, meaningless seas. Then God parts the waters and creates spaces for life to flourish. God puts people in the midst of it, and the cosmic temple is finished. God lives with the people in the world.

Eventually, God's people end up in slavery. So God comes to them, living under the evils of the Egyptian empire, their lives empty and meaningless. God leads them out, parting waters. God makes life flourish even in the desert, and the Exodus ends with the building of the Tabernacle, Israel's portable Temple. God lives with God's people in the wilderness.

Finally, God's people make it to the Promised Land. God parts the Jordan River, and the people cross from the empty and meaningless desert into a lush, fertile land. God establishes them there as a people, and eventually they build the Temple in Jerusalem. God lives in the Promised Land with God's people.

Does all of that sound familiar? It should. It's the same story, told over and over again. Which brings us back to Jesus, to Peter.

[World → Red Sea → Jewish Temple → Jesus] Peter claims that Jesus is the cornerstone of God's Temple - the Temple that is creation itself. In construction, the cornerstone is the most important stone. It's laid first, and all the other stones depend on the cornerstone. Whatever its character is defines the character of the whole building. Peter points out that both the Jews and the Romans rejected Jesus, but God chose him to build the cosmic temple.

[World → Red Sea → Jewish Temple → Jesus → Christians] This is particularly good news for all those Christians who are being rejected by their neighbors. Peter tells them *they* are part of God's heavenly temple as well. In fact, they themselves are living stones God is using to build the temple. The reason they're facing persecution is because their cornerstone Jesus did (and as goes the cornerstone, so goes the building).

Peter takes their sufferings, their hardships, and zooms way, way out. He says, Don't forget you're part of this big, epic story that stretches back to the very beginning of creation. You're not just some random person, stuck in the middle of a mindless culture, trying your best to get by with a little Jesus sprinkled on top.

You're God's children. You bear God's image. You're royal priests, called to unite with God in ruling the world. You're part of the cosmic temple, the place where heaven and earth overlap. And you take your cues from Jesus, which means even if you're suffering, you're becoming more like him.

Peter sums it up like this: **you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.**

Friends, I know it's difficult to connect the stories of the Bible to daily life today. The world of the Bible is strange to us - the customs, the beliefs, the perspectives. The people we encounter there are foreign, and so the way God interacts with them is foreign. It's no wonder we struggle to engage these stories, to see more in them than a moral or principle we can apply to our lives.

But if we step back to see the big picture, we'll find that same pattern emerging again and again:

Movement from darkness to light.

From chaos to order.

From slavery to freedom.

At every turn, God is building a people who will be God's image in the world, a people who rule, who act as God's agents in the world, a people of justice, of mercy, of compassion.

When we're confused about where to go, what to do, who to be, we need stories that sound familiar, that help us know what to expect.

Something familiar that sets us up to go somewhere new. This is exactly what we see in the life of Jesus: every time, the story ends with God living with God's people.

In Jesus, the Spirit of God comes to live within and among us, creating light out of our darkness.

The Jesus story - which is the story of God, the story of the whole of human history, makes sense out of our stories. Do you wonder where your life is going, what your purpose is, what you're called to?

God calls us out of darkness into light. God shapes the chaos of our lives and our world into beauty and order. And God makes us into a people who bear God's image in our world. We are called and formed to join in with God in rescuing, redeeming and restoring the world. God is with us.

It's the same story, over and over.

### **Communion + Examen**

[Communion Slide] At the Communion Table, God enters into our darkness, takes it upon himself, and forms us into light.

1. When in the last week did I sense God with me?
2. When did I experience chaos and disorder?
3. When in the next week will I experience chaos and disorder?
4. How can I look for God's presence this week?

### **Assignment/Blessing**

The story of God is not a dusty old fairy tale that makes us feel better in a night dark and full of terrors. The Story of God makes sense of our world, orients us within it.

The Story of God is not irrelevant or opaque. Rather, God invites us to find our place within the Story of God, the Story of Humanity, the Story of the Scriptures that we might see how every area of our lives matters to God and is part of God's kingdom.

*Lectio on Jesus' Call of Peter and Andrew*

Friends, this is where we are going. God has wrapped us all into the Story that began with "Let there be light" and will continue until Heaven and Earth are again one, and God has made all things new.