

Jedi Christians

Matthew 14:22-36

Everybody loves a superhero. Just look at the movies. Our kids' heads are filled with dreams of superhero-dom, and we fill their toy chests with action figures, costumes, and props so they can pretend to be the latest champion of the universe.

18 years ago Episode II of George Lucas' Star Wars saga hit the big screen: Attack of the Clones. And once again, many of us "kids" longed to be Jedi Knights empowered by the Force, mysterious and wise, armed with way-cool light-sabers, and wrapped in swirling cloaks.

Who wouldn't find such characters attractive? Everything they do seems so galactically important, so star-shatteringly significant. And they seem to do all they do with such utter confidence and ease.

But I found the Jedi in that movie to be a bit annoying. Young Jedi Anakin was something of a child prodigy and all his Force wielding, light-saber swashbuckling seemed to come to him naturally, instinctively, effortlessly.

I preferred the hero of the first Star Wars movie, Luke Skywalker, who tended to overstep his abilities, mess-up with misplaced enthusiasm, and have the patience of a bull facing a flapping red flag. Luke was a hero, but he wasn't too "super".

Remember when Luke traveled in search of Yoda, the short, green, goblin-esque Jedi Master, in order to study and learn the way of the Jedi from the Order's greatest teacher? In one scene young Luke is slogging through a dismal swamp, on some kind of forced exercise regime, running, jumping, climbing, gasping, while Yoda rides piggyback on him giving orders. Clearly this is not the romantic, heroic, powerful image Luke had in mind when he decided to follow the way of the Force.

Eventually there comes a time in the lives of disciples - those studying to be Jedi Knights, and those studying to be lawyers, doctors, firefighters, teachers, cabinetmakers, fathers, mothers, husbands, wives - when they realize there's a difference between believing and following.

Believing can give you dreams. Following can give you blisters.

It's one thing to believe in the goodness and rightness of being a physician. It's another thing altogether to accept being on-call for 24 hours on Christmas Eve/Day. It's one thing to believe in the goodness and rightness of being a lawyer. It's another thing studying for and taking the bar exam three or four times;

It's one thing to believe in the goodness and rightness of being a teacher. It's another thing facing a roomful of bored, destructive, mistrustful, even hostile teenagers – or trying to teach a class through a virtual classroom.

Believing can give you dreams. Following can give you blisters. Or as Peter finds out in today's gospel text - wet feet!

Believing in Jesus got all the disciples to obediently climb aboard their boat and to sail off in advance of their master's own departure. But it was Peter's momentary insight into the deeper meaning of true discipleship that got him to throw his leg over the side of that boat and start walking on the water as he followed the liquid pathway that Jesus was blazing.

For an instant Peter throws caution to the wind and lets his feet take him where his heart knows Jesus is calling him to be. And as long as Peter looks to Jesus and is wholly focused on him, his feet stay dry and his future is secure.

But, typical of Peter, even as he's the first of the disciples to grasp the power and freedom that are his when he follows Jesus, he's also the first to draw back, retreat, and put the brakes on his faith journey.

When Peter noticed the strong wind, he lost his buoyancy. He became frightened (verse 30), begins to sink, and his following turns to flailing. Yet Peter still believes in Jesus' power. So, in desperation he cries out to Jesus, "Lord, save me!"

As Jesus reaches out his hand to the sinking Peter, he succinctly defines the difference between belief and faith. Peter's belief got him rescued, but his lack of faith got him wet.

It was the wind that distracted Peter's fleeting faith and tripped him up. The wind howled around his head, shouted in his ears, whipped up froth and foam, slapped waves upright against his chest. But all this raging and rampaging had no effect on Jesus and had no effect on Peter's watery journey until Peter allowed the wind to draw his attention, claim his calm, and shift his focus away from Jesus.

Jesus continues to call all of us to be his disciples, to follow him, to forge new and unexpected paths with him. Jesus' travels have always been to unusual, unlooked for places up mountain tops, into the wilderness, on the water itself, onto the cross, down to the tomb, all the way to the depths of hell, and ultimately up from the grave.

Do we dare to follow? Will we turn our belief into faith and start out on the journey that true discipleship undertakes?

If so, travelers, and followers, need to heed two cautionary notes as they set out on the discipling path. The first is to **take a lesson from Peter and refuse to listen to the wind**. The winds that howled and wailed around Peter finally drew his attention away from Jesus and onto the forces trying to assault him. Today's followers face the same peril.

Those winds might be the winds of *Ambition*: getting ahead no matter what track you're taking; *Greed*: like Lotto fever, like double orders of Big Macs; *Addiction*: seeking fantasy a world blurred over with the haze of alcohol, drugs, food; *Helplessness*: believing in that nasty little voice that disclaims "what can I do all by myself?" *Busyness*: compiling to do and done lists, accomplishing tasks instead of transforming yourself and others.

These are just a few of the many "disturbances in the force," the gales that seek to distract us from following, that blow us off course, that push us off Jesus' path out into the middle of the world-weary, well-worn ruts waiting to halt our journey. A Jedi Christian will know how to use the Force to shut out the sounds of those winds and keep their eyes on Jesus.

But it's not just the winds of the world that can blow a follower off track. There's a second, more subtle means that can pull us off the road of true discipleship. **Instead of getting windblown, we get lazy and coast along not following, but mindlessly, soullessly tracing a track.**

In the 1970s, when the gasoline shortage was at its height, any possible proposal for increasing the miles per gallon ratio was taken up with enthusiasm. One popular but not

terribly effective scheme was to tuck your car behind any large truck barreling down the highway.

The conventional wisdom was that the draft created by the truck would help drag your vehicle along thereby reducing the air friction on it and increasing your own gas mileage.

For many Christians, following in Jesus' steps has become its own kind of spiritual drafting, riding in the wake of Jesus' own first-century actions in order to relieve some of the responsibility for making our own twenty-first century responses.

But we're not called to draft behind Jesus. The risen Christ who lives today wants to make, through us, new wakes in the world through our faith. Jesus was not simply a good man and an outstanding moral teacher whose past actions can be followed like a law. Jesus is an indwelling living presence ready to live today in new and creative ways in this always changing world.

Our Scripture this morning challenges us to turn our belief into faith that we all might become Jedi Christians. Are we ready? Can we become a Jedi Christian who is single-minded in their commitment to deny self, take up a cross and follow Jesus?

A Jedi Christian who will obey the great commandments (Luke 10:26-38), master the weapons of spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:10-20), and produce the fruit of the spirit in daily life (Galatians 5:22-26)? A Jedi Christian who will mentor others and develop the disciples of the next generation?

If so, Colossians 1:9-12 might just be the prayer for a Jedi Christian. It goes like this:

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

Amen. And may the Force be with you.