

The Last of the Jedi came out on Friday and surely, somewhere in the script is the phrase familiar to all Star Wars fans, “May the force be with you.”

Its counterpart for Star Trek fans is Spock’s “Live long and prosper”, with the Vulcan salute forming the Hebrew letter *shin*.

Many believers in God have likened these phrases to the benedictions of the synagogue and church.

Indeed, the Vulcan salute stems from an Orthodox Jewish blessing observed by Leonard Nimoy as a child.

The Hebrew letter *shin* is the beginning of the words:

- *Shaddai* as a title for God,
- *Shalom*, meaning peace, and
- *Shekinah*, the glory and power of God.

So, perhaps it is not so far flung to consider that the Force and the Holy Spirit function in very similar ways, as does Spock’s salutation.

The fundamental difference lies in the intent of the blessings.

“Live long and prosper” is meant to convey enhancement of the life of the hearer.

“May the Force be with you” is meant to empower the hearer to accomplish the hearer’s goals

– be it to defeat the stormtroopers,

rescue an ally, or simply survive for another day.

These blessings serve human purpose, my purpose.

The faith-filled blessings, on the other hand

- “May the Lord be with you” or
- “The Lord bless you and keep you”
- **serve God’s purpose,**

and seek to empower the accomplishment of **God’s goals.**

The Holy Spirit – the Spirit of God,

- gives us power to do what **God** wants,

We are not like Luke Skywalker who controls his x-wing starfighter –
we are like flutes or clarinets that *someone else* plays and controls what music comes out.

- **We are instruments for God’s music and the Holy Spirit is the musician.**

...

- So what is God’s music?
- What is the **purpose** of God’s involvement in our world?
- What are the **goals** God wants accomplished?
 - to bring good news to the poor;
 - to bind up the brokenhearted,
 - to proclaim liberty to the captives,
 - to announce the unlocking of prison to those who are bound;
 - to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,

- and to announce the day of vengeance of our God;
- to comfort all who mourn;

This is what God's realm is

– **this is what God has been doing all along.**

We are the instruments through whom these goals are fulfilled

– because by baptism, **we have been anointed with the Holy Spirit of Jesus.**

- We have been chosen by God for this life-changing and life-giving action.
- We have been chosen to *be* the love of God in our world
 - because Jesus was first anointed for this work
 - and we belong to him.

Jesus comes into our world to bring about God's goals.

That is his purpose – and therefore, **it is the Spirit-filled church's purpose in this world.**

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The **church** – the fellowship of Jesus followers

– **is a community of action.**

It is tempting to look at God's agenda for us and shrink back, intimidated by its scope.

But like any guru would tell us, let's break it down into manageable steps.

- **Bring good news to the poor**

- – our Community Meal brings Christ to the poor.
- An offering for Iyunga Parish is good news for the poor.
- A cart full of food and a listening ear makes Jesus' love real for those who need it.
- The conviction that the day will come when
 - all who trust in Jesus will be rich in the treasures of God's kingdom,
 - is good news to the poor.
 -
- **Bind up the broken-hearted**
 - Surround with compassion those who have lost their place in life,
 - whose dreams have been shattered
 - And those whose life circumstances have left them at the mercy of strangers
 - Forgive others
 - Rub the salve of mercy on those whose bad choices have alienated them from others
 - and restore them to friendship
 -
- **Announce freedom for captives and liberty to those imprisoned**
 - Support recovery journeys
 - Remind addicts that God still loves them
 - Remember that true freedom for all of us is given by Jesus who burst the bars of death's prison forever.
 -
- **to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,**
 - When people bemoan the state of affairs, we believers can remind them that even now, God is acting to restore the goodness of creation and the human community

- We can rejoice always and speak a word of hope in the name of Jesus

- **and to announce the day of vengeance of our God;**
 - We have a message of conviction that God acts to deal decisively with the enemies of life and goodness.
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 - It is Jesus' death and resurrection that has rendered all of God's enemies powerless to defeat God's people.
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 - The day is coming when Isis will cower before the Lord God, when N. Korea will find its nuclear missiles of no use;
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 - The day is coming when those who encourage racism, sexism, ageism,
 - and all the other "isms" that separate people into greater and lesser
 - **will find themselves like ants at the feet of the Redeemer.**
 -
 - Even though we do not yet see these things,
 - we know God is at work to do it
 - and Jesus is coming to complete the work.

- **to comfort all who mourn;**
 - We have a message of hope for all who grieve: **because of Jesus, death is not the end, not the final chapter.**
 - We can tell of the resurrection of Jesus that is shared by all who trust in him.

- We tend to the needs of the grieving and by our loving actions show them the love of Jesus for them.

As the church, **we are visible as a community** that

- rejoices,
- prays,
- gives thanks in all circumstances,
- gives room for the Spirit to lead in surprising ways,
- that listens to the challenging words of prophets
- and the gracious words of the Lord;
- that refuses to do evil and
- clings to what is good.

These are all ways of being the music God is playing;
of accomplishing God's goals in this world

– of participating in God's mission.

...

The other week, I was in a grocery store and passed a guy in the aisle. We were both strangers to each other.

As I was headed to the checkout, he caught up to me and asked if I would **give him a blessing**. (Yes, I was wearing my collar)

I asked if there was anything in particular to put before God. That led to him telling me –briefly – his **life story of pain and struggle**, bad choices and their current consequences.

I laid hands on him and we prayed for healing and God's blessing.

I can assure you, that encounter was music only God could play. I was the instrument, but the Holy Spirit was sounding the melody.

As we await the promised return of the Lord Jesus,

let us take action as those **whose purpose is**

- 1. to accomplish God's goals,**
- 2. to be the visible Christ in our world,**
- 3. to be good news to the poor and hope for all who suffer.**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen