

## UU Kids and Redemption: Turning Back from the Dark Side

from Kerri Meyer, Director of Religious Education

Okay, it took five years of waiting and watching, but I've finally found the moment of intersection between UU theology and a childhood obsession. Chase, Jacob, Gregory, and Mirabeau: pay attention. It's time to talk about *Star Wars*.

Honestly, I tried to think of a better, easier inroad to the topic of redemption than *Star Wars*, but I couldn't. These six mythic movies (none of which qualifies as legendary filmmaking) tell a two-generation-long story of one human life redeemed in a galaxy far, far away. Released in seemingly random order across three decades, they have become an archetypal narrative that spans generations here in our own galaxy.

If you haven't seen any of the movies, don't worry: the story is hardly original. Here it is, in a nutshell: Anakin Skywalker was born into slavery, but because of his gifted relationship with the Force ("that which surrounds and penetrates us and binds the universe together..."), he is rescued from his destitute beginnings and taken in by the Jedi Knights. The Jedi train him to use his powers for good; adventure and love ensue, as do motherloss, corrupt mentors and the seductive power of empire. By the time you hit the sixth/third film, Anakin

has gone over to the "Dark Side." Now become Darth Vader, erstwhile Anakin wields the power of the Force to devastating, evil ends, destroying even the people he loves.

Rewind to 1977. In a grittier film, Anakin's son Luke Skywalker discovers that his destiny lies beyond his boondock desert planet: he must learn to use the Force and help those who rebel against the aforementioned Empire. On

this journey, Luke rescues his sister and discovers that Darth Vader, agent of the Empire's evil, is (of course) his father. Luke alone is convinced – even as Vader hands him over to the evil Galactic Emperor – that his father still has good in him. In the end, Luke's faith in his father pays off. He is able to persuade Vader, once thought to be wholly "twisted and evil, more machine...than man," to return to the Good Side. In the climactic scene in the final installment, Vader destroys the Emperor to save his son; this fatal act of love returns Anakin Skywalker to himself. He is reclaimed, recovered – redeemed.

How to draw meaningful spiritual discussions out of *Star Wars*? Kids and youth will have ready answers to questions like these (but they'll want to know what you think, too):

- Does Darth Vader save himself from the Dark Side or does Luke save him? Could the movie end this way if Luke wasn't there? What if Luke was there, but he didn't believe that Vader had any good left in him?
- At what point in the movie is Vader really back from the Dark Side? How do you know?
- Vader kills the Emperor. Is this violence part of his redemption? How can that be? Wasn't killing the bad thing he did in the first place? Why does Vader destroy the Emperor? Is it to end the war and save the galaxy? Is it to save Luke?
- Does this one final act, right before he dies, make up for all the terrible things that Vader did during his life as a servant of the Dark Side?
- Do you think Luke believes his father was redeemed at the end of his life? Do you think Leia does? Do you think that everyone in the galaxy feels that Vader redeemed himself? Does that matter?

- In your life, how will you know if you are on the "Good Side" of the Force or the "Dark Side"? What do you think people who care about you should do if you ever go over to the Dark Side?



I'll grant that not everyone is going to leap up, (re-)watch the series and adopt it as redemption's authoritative text. But you have to admit, it's a good place to start, especially with kids and especially if you're a modern UU parent with virtually no context for a theology of redemption. Try these same discussion questions on other films and stories in which a character is redeemed. Oh, and...May the Force be with you.

## Youth Notes

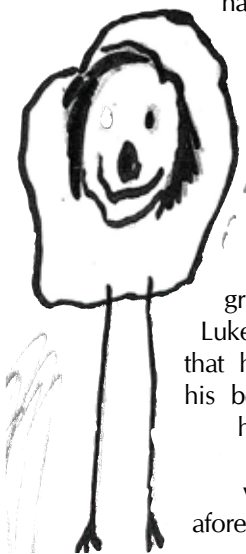
### 9th Grade

This April our Coming of Age teens will roll up their shirtsleeves and move their annual service project to Lilydale Park. Unity member Grit Youngquist has invited our teens there to pick up litter and reflect on the role of service in our lives on April 18.

### Tower Club

On April 24, several teens in our congregation will participate in "Night on the Street," an annual event at Plymouth Congregational Church in Minneapolis in which teens learn about homelessness by experiencing it for a night: sleeping outside in a box, standing in a soup line, hearing stories from real teens who are homeless. Our eyes are prepared to be opened wider.

Also, special thanks to the people who donated books toward—and shopped at—last month's Used Book Sale! Proceeds especially help this fall's Boston pilgrims.



"Good Anakin Inside Darth Vader's Helmet" by Lily, age 4