



Star Trek: Into Darkness **Shaping Resilience**

From the message series *SpiritFlix*

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Edited Transcript

Today, we begin our annual Summer series here at WellSprings, that we call Spiritflix. Spiritflix is based on movies that Rev. Ken Beldon, ministerial student Robyn Evans, and I will use as the basis for our messages. In our weekly email, you can see a list of some of the coming attractions, which includes *The Great Gatsby*, *Silver Linings Playbook*, *Man of Steel*, and *The Pursuit of Happyness*.

Some of those films are in theaters now. Some are available through DVD, Netflix, and a host of other delivery means. We encourage you to organize a group to go see some of these together, or invite some fellow WellSpringers to your home for a viewing. One of the opportunities this series has is to give you a fun reason to connect to one another.

Now, on the one hand, you all might think that our main purpose for this message series might just be to let Ken, and especially Robyn and I, escape out of our heavy theological tomes and into a couple hours of "mindless" entertainment.

Only it doesn't have to be mindless. One of the core beliefs we hold here at WellSprings is that the "burning bush is blazing everywhere." To put another way, "revelation is not sealed." At WellSprings, we find that inspiration, that truth, is an ongoing process. The divine, the holy, the sacred is available to us in our everyday experiences: in the music we listen to, in the conversations we have with our neighbor, in the aisles of the grocery store, perhaps even when perusing the Internet. And yes, even on the big screen, whether that screen is at home or in the theater.

Movies are, at their core, stories. And, if we are mindful of those stories, if we cultivate our spiritual awareness in listening to those stories, we continue to build our spiritual capacity to fully engage our lives.

So, in that spirit, I'd like to begin this morning with a story not from a movie, but from the Zen Buddhist tradition.

A big, tough samurai once went to see a little monk. This monk was smallish in stature, elderly, and frail. The samurai found the monk sitting in meditation, with his eyes cast down, and in a voice accustomed to instant obedience, he barked, "*Monk! Teach me about heaven and hell!*"

The monk slowly looked up at the mighty warrior and, after studying the samurai for a moment, replied with utter disdain: "*Teach **you** about heaven and hell? I couldn't teach you about anything. You're dumb. You're dirty. You're a disgrace, an embarrassment to the samurai class. Get out of my sight. I can't stand you.*"

The samurai got furious. He shook, red in the face, speechless with rage. He pulled out his sword, and prepared to slay the monk. As he held the sword in the air and began to swing it toward the monk's neck, the monk said softly, "That's hell."

The samurai froze, the sword just inches from the monk's neck. He suddenly understood. Realizing the compassion of the monk who had risked his life to show him hell... he put down his sword and fell to his knees, filled with gratitude.

The monk cast his eyes down, returning to his meditation, and said softly, “*And that is heaven.*”

This story, I think, illustrates a couple of the themes in this week’s film, *Star Trek: Into Darkness*. Now, I am guessing that there are few people here today who would identify themselves as Trekkers (which is the preferred term for fans of the Star Trek franchise, as opposed to “Trekkie,” which is not.) And while I probably would not openly identify myself as a Trekker, the fact that I know the preferred term, coupled with the fact that I have seen all the *Star Trek* movies, probably the entire original TV series, and much of the subsequent TV series, might indicate my affinity towards this particular cultural icon.

A few years ago, the *Star Trek* movie franchise was rebooted by director J.J. Abrams, who took us backwards on the science fiction timeline to reintroduce the original crew of the Enterprise as they were when they were just coming together for the first time.

In that film, we meet a young, brash loner of a man named James Kirk. This young Kirk is, for various reasons, isolated from any real human connections: getting drunk, hitting on women, and lashing out at nearly everyone in his path. How this young man became captain of the Starship Enterprise is the subject of the first of the reboot films.

Today’s movie, *Into Darkness*, is the second. Here, we find Kirk continuing his journey from his youthful arrogance and isolation into a deeper connection to those around him. Yet he is still a rule-breaker, and he holds firm to a sense that his good intentions, his goodwill, is sufficient to take on all comers, all situations.

We also find Kirk to be fiercely loyal, connected to his crew and those that have pulled him out of his psychic isolation. He is beginning to trust more than just his gut feelings. He is beginning to trust and rely upon the crew of the Enterprise. He has discovered his community, and he has become deeply connected to them, defending them and protecting them at every turn. He is on a journey of humility, learning that his strength lies less in his good intentions, his intelligence, his skills, and more in his connection to those around him.

This journey is interrupted by a trauma that threatens his life, the lives of his crew, and in fact, takes the life of his father figure. Acts of a terrorist threaten the fragile identity that Kirk had begun to form for himself and the security of those around him.

Derailed from his journey of humility, Kirk falls back on his isolation and arrogance, in pursuit of revenge, perhaps believing that such revenge serves the cause of justice. If not justice, then at least security.

And here, I want to take us back to our samurai warrior. The monk, in apparently refusing to cede to the demands of the samurai, insults him, derails the warrior’s sense of identity, of who he wishes to be. The samurai’s response is to immediately move to rage and violence in defense of his honor, his identity. But this response, removed from the human connection, removed from compassion, and empathy, removed from love ... it is hell, a hell of our own making. But one we do not have to live into.

In the moment of the trauma, or the insult, or whatever the attack on our identity, we have a choice. But in order to engage that choice, we have to build the muscle — intellectually, emotionally, spiritually — that will give us the resilience to make the choice.

I want to talk about this word, resilience. On the barest surface, the word refers to the ability to recover (quickly) from difficulties. I’m not sure that I like the idea of recovery. That implies a restoration to the way things were. In the case of any trauma, or truly any change, it seems unlikely — regardless of our response, we will be shaped differently.

I prefer the word “heal,” which evokes a sense of wholeness. Not unscarred, not unaffected, but a new wholeness. So perhaps our definition of resilience would be “the ability to heal from difficulties.”

Now those difficulties might be traumatic like the tornadoes in Oklahoma this week, or the death of a hero like our Captain Kirk suffers in the movie, those circumstances that threaten our security. Or the difficulties

may not rise to the level of trauma, but still shake the core of our identity. Perhaps like losing a job. Or like our samurai, an insult that questions our integrity.

The question that arises is, Who do we become in those moments? Who do we wish ourselves to be?

And in those moments of choice, particularly when we have not developed a sense of resilience, we risk becoming exactly that which we do not want to be. The samurai loses control and very nearly murders the monk. Kirk is set off prepared to blindly kill the terrorist in revenge, forgetting his own values of justice, his own values of humanity.

Now, we (you and I) might not fall into a murderous rage, but when our identity and security is threatened, we *might* act against our better natures, our strongest values, without compassion, without empathy, without regard for and love of the people and the world in which we are a part.

What we need is the strength, the muscle memory, to make a choice between our base selfish instincts of protection — which will leave us as broken as ever — and healing, which will restore our sense of wholeness.

So the question becomes, how do we shape our resilience? How do we build the capacity — intellectually, emotionally, and particularly spiritually — to recover, to heal from those moments of trauma, or simply change?

One of the practices in shaping our resilience is humility. I have described Captain Kirk's journey through the last couple of *Star Trek* movies as a journey of humility. That is, he is transforming himself through admitting that he does not have all the answers, that his good intentions alone are insufficient ground — and perhaps dangerous ground from which to act. The other characters on the Enterprise act as foils: Spock's as the often cold rational voice, Bones as the compassionate one, Scotty as the brilliant engineering miracle worker. Through them, Kirk realizes that he does not (and cannot) have all the answers needed to protect himself and his crew. This shift into humility and vulnerability is key, I think to shaping the resilience necessary for Kirk to respond to change and grow spiritually and emotionally.

Let me offer a more personal, more down-to-earth example. As some of you know, I used to be an architect. I had spent a great deal of time, energy, and money to get to where I was in my career. I had begun to build an identity as a professional architect. I left that career about a dozen years ago to be a stay-at-home dad. This choice was a risk. To set that aside, to stay at home and care for my children, was to disrupt the security of that identity.

At the time, I had remained in contact with my academic advisor from graduate school. When I told him of my plans, he responded with great concern. He told me, "Be careful, Greg, If you do this, you'll end up being a nobody." (Yep, he really said that.) Now, intuitively, I had a sense he was wrong, of course. And yet, there was that nagging fear that he might be right. I certainly felt vulnerable — exposed to the fact that I was no longer on the path I had planned for myself.

Now, of course, I am not saying that raising kids is traumatic. Well, at least not often (thankfully). But for someone like me, who had a particular career path in mind, it was a change that was an affront to who I thought I was.

And I was certainly humbled by the experience. I think anytime someone like me tries to negotiate *anything* with a two-year-old, we will touch deeply the inadequacy and uncertainty of who we think we are.

So there I was, vulnerable and humble, sure. But what then? My sense of who I was in the world was uncertain. While I wouldn't say I was "broken," I think there was some healing to be done. Some way of restoring my sense of self, of connecting me back to being whole.

I found that healing, that restoration, in community. Specifically in religious community, where my vulnerability and humility were protected and held to be of value. Where I found a way of building up my own resilience, my strength to heal from whatever change might happen.

I found my resilience in a Unitarian Universalist church in Iowa. I connected with people there, they became part of my larger family, just as you all have. These communities have taught me to be attentive to the relationships in my life, to cultivate them, to let them shape who I am. For me, that meant moving through an identity as an architect to a stay at home dad and now to ministry. I have learned that when I am humble and vulnerable, it is the beloved community that heals me, that restores me to the path I am truly called to walk.

In our WellSprings values, beliefs, and mission, we make the bold claim that we are a community of deep listening, that we possess the humility and vulnerability necessary to make positive change. “We honestly evaluate where we are in the hope of courageously going where we are called to be.”

We refer to this value as “living with integrity.” It is living a life that is whole and complete, a life that is resilient to the inevitable changes that arise in our living.

And we have these opportunities for deep listening (particularly through our small groups, our Springboards), but also in the hospitality we share with one another every time we gather.

Every Youth Spirit class you mentor, every team you engage with, every Fun and Fellowship Gathering you attend, you are shaping your resilience even as you help shape those around you. And as you do so, as the inevitable change occurs in your life, whether traumatic or not, you will have the capacity to choose exactly who you wish to be, the kind of life you are called to live: whole and complete.

The samurai in our story, realizing the risk the monk took to teach him about hell, falls to his knees in gratitude. I imagine him trembling, overwhelmed with compassion and love for this monk who would risk his life to transform the samurai’s.

I believe that heaven and hell are states of being, not post-life destinations. We can choose which state of being we want. Our capacity to do so mindfully is grounded in our resilience — our willingness to be vulnerable and humble; to deeply connect to those who hold us and shape our journey.

To be whole, to be healed, to be gratefully alive. “*That is heaven.*” Amen.