

# IN THE SPIRIT

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January 27, 2019

Epiphany 3

[1 Corinthians 12:12-20](#)

[Luke 4:14-21](#)

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(prayer)

What better way to end January than with making Star Trek reference.

The series finale of Star Trek: The Next Generation follows Jean-Luc Picard in shifting back and forth between three separate time lines:

- There is the current Picard (the one living in the timeline that the show is occurring – if it helps: in the opening scene, we learn that it is Stardate 47988: on our calendars, 2371).
- A Picard of the past – on his first mission after taking command of the USS Enterprise: year 2364.
- And a future Picard (no stardate is ever mentioned, but the captain is much older - long retired and suffering from late stage “Irumodic Syndrome” – a degenerative ailment that causes confusion and delusions.

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The current Picard is aware that he is moving back and forth through time. He soon discovers that there is a special anomaly common to all three time frames: curiously it is larger the further back in time Picard goes.

But, Picard does not remember this anomaly the first time he lived in the past. In fact, as he time shifts, the existence of the anomaly changes what occurred in the days right after Picard became the Enterprise’s captain. They never go on the *Farpoint Mission* that Trek fans would remember from the series premier.

In that first TNG episode, Picard (and fans) are introduced to Q: a near omnipotent being with incredible powers over time, space, the laws of physics, and reality. *All that without an Infinite Gauntlet.*

In the very first Next Generation episode, Q puts humanity on trial accusing them of being “a dangerous, savage, child race”: with Picard as its representative.

Although the events of the pilot episode seem to bolster humanity’s case that it has changed from its barbaric past, Q leaves with the warning “we’ll be watching you”.

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Fast forward to the finale episode, Picard learns that his time shifting has actually been Q’s doing – that “the trial” never ended and that he is now ready to pronounce the verdict – guilty. The punishment: humanity is to be erased from existence. The confusing part is that Picard is not just a representative of humanity – Q tells him that it is, in fact, Picard (personally) who causes humanities destruction.

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Did I say “All Good Things” had three time periods? It was actually four. There is a [scene](#) where Q takes the *current* Picard back to primordial earth to watch the beginning of life on our planet: about three and a half billion years earlier (give or take an eon or two).

Q describes a group of amino acids moving closer together about to form the first protein on earth – an essential first step for life to later evolve.

*“Interesting. Everything you know – your entire civilization – it all begins right here in this little pond of goo.”*

But, nothing. The amino acids slip by each other and no protein is created.

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“It” doesn’t happen in the ancient past, and therefore life would never emerge on earth.

Something Picard did in the future forced this destructive retroactive non-event in the past; therefore Picard (somehow) carried out Qs judgment against humanity.

*I won't spoil the whole plot. All of the ST:TNG episodes are on Netflix to enjoy.*

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We are complex beings, living complex lives, in a complex world, in an almost incomprehensibly complex universe.

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But, even complex things start out small. No matter how close we look, we invariably find out that the building blocks of the obvious is made up of more basic, smaller things. We have yet to invent a microscope or even create a theoretical mathematic theorem that gets us down to the smallest level possible.

When I first took chemistry and physics, we spoke of electrons as the smallest bits of matter (a fact discovered in 1897 – before that, Atoms (*discover around 1800*) were thought to be the smallest forms of matter). Science now tells us that protons and neutrons are made up of really smaller things too – quarks.

Someday, we will probably learn that quarks and electrons are made up of even smaller things.

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As I mentioned last week, the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Corinthian church was in response to reports of unhealthy divisions in that early Christian community. Paul states his case right at the start of his letter: *“It has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, ‘I belong to Paul’, or ‘I belong to Apollos’, or ‘I belong to Cephas’, or ‘I belong to Christ.’ Has Christ been divided?”* (1Cor1:11-13)

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As I mentioned last week, the heart of the First Corinthian letter provides the church with a teaching on a general attitude that could be an overarching context to avoiding future divisions in the church. Paul calls it “a still more excellent way.” (1Cor12:31). The core of the corinthian correspondence are **chapters twelve and thirteen**. They are some of the most well-known verses in all of Paul’s writings. These chapters are rich in metaphor, and deep in meaning. The lectionary suggests that we take three weeks to engage this teaching.

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Last week, we focused on the first part of chapter twelve: *“A variety of gifts [coming from] the same Spirit”* all of which serve the common good. (1Cor12:4)

Today, we heard the last half of chapter twelve – Paul’s well-known parable to make his point about how a variety of gifts can serve a common good.

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The body is only the body because it is the sum total of its varied parts. On their own, a particular part might appear insignificant, but without it.. the whole would be *less whole*.

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Some of the Corinthians focused on the bigger most obvious parts of the church – like its prominent leaders. If everyone simply behaved and thought like them, the church would be united.

Paul’s parable was intended to help them appreciate that the less noticeable parts, even the less

honourable parts, deserve to be appreciated to what they add to the whole.

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That is a pretty simple sermon – the metaphor makes an obvious point: the variety creates a better whole than uniformity ever could.

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You may have heard me say that on any given Sunday, the congregation gathered together for worship is unique to that point in time. Add one person, take one away, and we would be different.

Have the exact same people together on two different days and they would be different congregations – because, we are not static beings: we are works-in-progress – evolving children of god.

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The Body of Christ that we are is a sum of our parts. This is why, a central message of the gospel (as the Apostle Paul preaches it) is that how we view each other is how we view the totality of our Christ.

It is essential to this gospel that we see the heart of Christ in each person – even those whom we imagine are not connected to us in a anyway.

First Corinthians, chapter twelve invites us to not categorize anyone as being outside the family of god's beloved children.

Paul challenges us to definitely look deeper than first impressions or learned assumptions.

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We all got a lesson in the two weeks, when news broke of a confrontation on the National Mall in Washington DC on January 19<sup>th</sup>. The first news story was a video of an indigenous elder singing and drumming in front a high school student wear red Make America Great Again hat (the clothing item of choice for fervent Donald Trump supporters).

The first stories were that of a disrespectful teen and an invasive elder. It was then learned that the elder chose to fill the space between the teen's group and another group (not seen on the original video) who were loudly disagreeing and taunting each other. Video then emerged (courtesy of this *other* group) that showed them confronting almost everyone for more than an hour (including both the indigenous and school group, and others) – they were a group of religious zealots, who (in the long and sad tradition of evangelical street preachers) believe that the way to win converts is to tell them how evil (and therefore condemned) they are. They used insulting, even racist, language with everyone – of every hue of humanity that walked by. Yup, I watched the whole video.

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The complexity of the full picture ironically, did not bring people to a common understanding. Instead, people focused on the bits that supported their own thesis of who is honourable and who must be condemned.

My conclusion: there is plenty of blame to go around: as are examples of restraint and respect throughout the crowd. Some people's actions were noble others, not so much.

The lesson – only focusing on the value or disdain for one part, does not help us appreciate the complexity of the whole.

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Jesus grew up in Nazareth. The biblical record of his early life is sparse, but it is strongly implied that Jesus lived there from a relatively young age and that (presumably by his teenage years) he was

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working as a carpenter: a skill that he learned from his father, Joseph.

Jesus continues to live in Nazareth well into middle age. He and his extended family are fixtures of the local community.

People would have (logically) felt like they knew him pretty well. Jesus ben Yoseph's life was an open book.

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We have no idea how people reacted when Jesus disappeared for a while. Did the rumours spread that he had joined up with an eccentric Judean preacher? Did they hear that he had hung up his saw and hammer and moved to Capernaum and was living as a sort of rabbi to a band of fishermen disciples?

As we heard this morning, Luke's gospel tells us that Jesus went around to various towns and taught in their synagogues.

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Whatever rumours had spread and whatever people thought about what they heard came to a head when the former local carpenter showed up at the Nazareth synagogue one Saturday, with his "new" friends.

The scripture reading for the day was (what we label as) Isaiah 61:

*The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour.*

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After the attendant put the scroll of Isaiah away, people watched Jesus intently, waiting to see the rumours of his new found skills as a teacher come to life. Jesus began by saying:

*Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*

Luke doesn't tell us what else was included in Jesus' impromptu sermon, but the next verse does say that *all spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.*

It's at that point where someone connects these wise words of the moment to the Jesus that they thought they knew.

*Is this not Joseph's and Mary's son? Don't we know his brothers and sisters? Where did he get all those things?* (Mt13:56, Mk6:3, Lk4:22)

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The old assumptions about the Jesus they knew did not allow them to hear the Jesus in front of them. All three of the synoptic gospels proclaim some version of "*No prophet is accepted in their hometown.*"

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Two parts of Jesus were in conflict in their eyes – they could not reconcile them into the same person. They couldn't imagine these parts being contained within one whole.

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The Christ is more than any one moment in Jesus' life. And yet all of his experiences before and after his day of preaching that Saturday in Nazareth have value and add integrity to the whole.

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So, it is with the full family of God.

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Paul invites us to strive for gifts beyond what any of us can offer individually.

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Next week, we will hear how Paul says we can do this: what he calls the most *excellent way*.

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We (individually and as community) are the sum of our parts.

With the Spirit's help, maybe even more.

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Let us pray:

Holy Spirit, help each of us to live authentic lives: true to who you have made us to be. We have a place in your world and in Christ's church. We are grateful for your holy compassion, O God. Amen.

#402VU "We Are One"

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