

NAME

Star Trek Picard - Sunday Service for August 30, 2020.mp3

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DURATION

47m 5s

START OF TRANSCRIPT**[00:24:27]**

Good morning, I'm Chris Chapell, my pronouns are she and her, and I'm delighted to be preaching today.

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The subject of this week's installment of our Spirit Flicks Message series, in which we explore the spiritual wisdom in the stories we watch on our screens is Star Trek Picard, a 10 episode streaming series which was originally released from January through March of this year.

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No, I was really excited when I found out about this series. To understand why, I'll give you a little context, I was born in 1974, several years after the original Star Trek series had ended and started rerunning in syndication. So from the time I was a small child, the voyages of the Starship Enterprise, whose mission in the twenty third century was to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, and to boldly go where no man has gone before, has always just been there, often playing in the background in the evening or on a weekend afternoon.

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There were only 79 episodes in total, so it wasn't difficult to catch them all over time.

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Star Trek's basic message. That we should boldly go exploring the universe simply because it's there, because we are curious, really sparked my imagination as a child. It wasn't until I was older that I realized how revolutionary Star Trek was. It didn't seem all that unusual that there was a racially diverse cast or that the series depicts a future in which humans have put aside their differences and become a unified earth, where crew members of different nationalities and cultures sit side by side on the Bridge of the Enterprise. And of course, the diversity of Star Trek doesn't end with humans. There are a litany of beings from other planets represented, some of which are members of the United Federation of Planets, of which Earth is a part. Others are in competition or conflict with the federation. And some beings either haven't yet realized they're not alone in the universe or have and just want to be left alone, the interactions among the federation, its allies, its enemies and sentient life forms the federation has not yet encountered what drives the plot of most Star Trek episodes. And through these interactions, Star Trek was able to hold up a mirror that reflected the pressing societal issues of the late 1960s. And it wasn't until I was even older that I realized that Star Trek's depiction of diversity was not without its flaws. There's that where no man has gone before line in the introduction to every single episode, there was only one person of color in the crew. And the few female crew members somewhat implausibly wear form hugging mini dresses as uniforms. I always thought these shortcomings were a failure of imagination of the writers and producers of the show, but as it turns out, the truth is more complicated.

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The original pilot for Star Trek was more progressive, with everyone wearing the same uniform and even a female first officer as creator and producer, Gene Roddenberry explained it. You might have thought the ladies in the test audience would have appreciated the character. Instead, their comments were. Who does she think she is? The test audience men and women alike couldn't stand her. The show is limited by what its audience would accept, and the team made a new pilot with substantial changes, including a male first officer and those mini dresses to make it more palatable to the late 1960s audience. On the one hand, the fact that the show was changed from its original vision makes me angry. On the other, I recognize that without compromise, the show would never have aired like in so many things, the perfect could easily have been the enemy of the good. The fact that the show was changed from its original vision makes me angry because the ripple effects of the general cultural hostility toward capable, assertive women. That's not an academic issue for me at all. That's impacted me directly. You see, like the women in the cast of the original Star Trek, when I started my professional career as a public accountant in nineteen ninety six, there was still a raging debate about whether it was ever appropriate for women to wear pants in the

workplace. And in 2007, when I was admitted to the partnership as the first female partner in my geography and practice area ever, it was several years before I was successful in convincing my male colleagues to stop introducing me as and this is Chris, our first female partner.

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They didn't understand that leading with an emphasis on my difference diminished rather than enhanced my credibility. In 1987, when I was 13, Star Trek The Next Generation first aired and I watched it for all seven of its seasons. The events of next generation are set a century after the events of the original series, and there were some improvements here from a diversity perspective. Where no man has gone before is replaced with where no one has gone before. The women did get to wear pants, although the primary female characters were still in traditionally helping roles as the ship's doctor and the ship's counselor. There were several actors of color with long term roles in the series, and there were other forms of diversity to one character was born blind and wears a visor that not only allows them to see, but provide superior vision. And next generation also introduced synthetic life in the form of crew member Commander Data, a self-aware humanoid lifeform created by humans who in some ways has superior abilities but struggles and strives to understand human emotions and behavior. And really just wants to be more human. There have been several other Star Trek series over the years, but having literally grown up with the crew of next generation, it's always been my favorite. So, yeah, I'm clearly in the target demographic for Picard, which picks up 20 years after the end of the next generation story and focuses on Jean-Luc Picard, who was captain of the Enterprise throughout the series.

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Picard is portrayed by Patrick Stewart, was a thoughtful and reflective captain with a collaborative leadership style and a clear commitment to accountability and responsibility in pursuing the enterprise's mission. He often found a way to creatively solve complicated issues through diplomacy rather than violence. We learn as the new series begins that Picard's time with Starfleet did not end well after rising to Admiral, he resigned in protest after Starfleet abandoned plans to rescue Romulan citizens from a supernova when rogue synthetics attacked the rescue fleet.

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In addition to aborting the rescue, the attack on the fleet resulted in a ban on all synthetic life. Picard resigned because he disagreed with the decisions of Starfleet leadership. Feeling they were not living up to their commitment of honoring the value and worth of all beings. Picard has retired to his family vineyard and has been ruminating for 14 long years on both the failed Romulan rescue and the death of his good friend and synthetic life form commander Data who sacrificed his life to save Picard's. Picard has never married, he has grown old, he is tired, and he is clearly unhappy. The show primarily focuses on Picard's journey as he nears the end of his life. To tie up loose ends, make amends where he can, and, of course, save the universe from total annihilation while he's at it.

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It also, in the best Star Trek tradition, holds up a mirror to our current times, particularly the rise of isolationism and the othering of groups based on aspects of their identity.

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Picard struck me as much more trauma informed than prior to Star Trek installments, all of the members of the crew he assembles to help him on his quest, including Picard himself, have experienced trauma that is reflected in the ways they interact with the world and with each other. And not all of their coping mechanisms are healthy ones. Now, without getting too deeply into the intricate plot. Picard and crew find themselves racing to find the home world of a group of synthetics who have been created in spite of the ban. Also in pursuit of the synthetics are a group who want to destroy all synthetic life because of their religious belief that the existence of such beings will bring about the apocalypse. At a pivotal moment in the series, when things looked particularly hopeless, Picard offers these words.

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The past is written. But the future is left for us to write. And we have powerful tools.

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Openness, optimism and the spirit of curiosity.

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Sitting here in the midst of everything going on in the world right now, this struck me as a bit naive initially, really our curiosity is going to get us out of this mess. But when I thought about it, I certainly believe the corollary that our ignorance may destroy us. Octavia Butler broke new ground as a woman and African-American science fiction writer in her nineteen ninety eight book Parable of the Talents, the second in a series that depicts the struggle to survive the hopefully not too prescient socio economic and political collapse of twenty first century America. She includes these words. Beware. Ignorance protects itself. Ignorance promotes suspicion.

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Suspicion, engineers, fear, fear, quail's irrational and blind or fear looms defiant and closed, blind, closed, suspicious, afraid, ignorance protects itself and protected ignorance grows. Dr. Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. in a

speech at Cornell College in October 1962, also talked about the relationship between ignorance and fear.

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He said, I am convinced that people hate each other because they fear each other, they fear each other because they don't know each other and they don't know each other because they don't communicate with each other and they don't communicate with each other because they are separated from each other.

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As I am learning more about ship. And like many others, I am very much at the beginning of this journey.

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I understand that genuine curiosity can indeed be a powerful tool to help bridge that separation. Not as an end to itself.

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But as a start, a beginning.

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And we don't have to go it alone, the spirit of curiosity is integral to Wellspring's beliefs and commitments to who we are as a community. We believe in the burning bush that blazes everywhere, that the divine is present to us and the holiness of our everyday experiences and the possibility of revelation is always open to us through our mindful attention. It is our mindful attention, our curiosity that opens the door to the holy. Curiosity also weaves throughout our commitments, including those to honor our relationships, work for justice and listen deeply, they call us to openness, honest discernment, humility and vulnerability.

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These are powerful tools, indeed. Sometimes it's not our answers, but our questions that best serve. I'd like to close with the story of Daryl Davis, who was the only black man in a country band playing an all white venue in Maryland in nineteen eighty three. After they're set, a member of the audience approached Davis to compliment his piano skills. They hit it off, shared a drink. And the audience member admitted. That he had never had a drink or even a conversation with a black man before. He said that was because he was, in fact, a card carrying member of the Ku Klux Klan. But the two hit it off, exchanged numbers and became friends. That was the start of what Darrell calls his obsession to find an answer to the question, how can you hate me when you don't even know me?

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How can you hate me when you don't even know me?

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His curiosity around this question led him to numerous face to face conversations with white supremacists. He listened to their point of view and got to know them as people and respectfully, respectfully spoke from his own experience. In many cases, over time, these dialogues led to the white supremacists changing their views.

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One clan leader shut down his entire chapter and gave his robe and hood to Davis.

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And that was not a unique occurrence, Davis now has a closet full of robes from former members.

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Daryl Davies explains why his approach is so powerful. He says people must stop focusing on the symptoms of hate, that's like putting a Band-Aid on cancer. We've got to treat it down to the bone, which is ignorance, the cure for ignorance is education. You fix the ignorance, there's nothing to fear. If there's nothing to fear, there's nothing to hate. There's nothing to hate, there's nothing or no one to destroy.

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I don't think it's much of a spoiler to reveal here that at the end of Pacard, the synthetics are not in fact destroyed. The federation establishes diplomatic relations with them. And the ban on their existence is lifted.

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There are many other things the series explores love, aging, death, loss, family, friendship, religion, even resurrection. It's worth a watch if you haven't yet had the opportunity.

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My husband, Owen, who is far from a Trekkie, assures me after coming along for the ride that you don't have to have prior to Star Trek experience to enjoy this series. But the best reason to watch McCard friends is this. It serves as an invitation in these uncertain times.

[00:41:18]

To be brave. To be curious. To be open and to be kind. Amen. So may it be. Will you join me in the spirit of prayer?

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God of life and love in the midst of uncertainty, in the midst of fear, may we remember that we always have a choice each and every moment to close down or to open up. May we choose to open, maybe let our curiosity be our guide and courageously go wherever it leads us?

END OF TRANSCRIPT



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