

Religions of Star Trek

Lesson 3: What Does It Mean to Be Human? “The Logic of Spock”

Star Date 2.21.21

Objectives: Explore the second of Five Core Questions—“What does it mean to be human and alive?”—and how it relates to the way Star Trek explores that same question.

Materials: Teachers should download lesson plan onto their desktop, login to Unity’s YouTube account.

Time allotment: Suggested for 60 minute online class.

1. Zoom Welcome (as youth arrive into the breakout classroom)

- Teachers and youth are expected to log on to zoom at 11:15am (15 min before class begins at 11:30am) so that everyone can be organized into correct breakout classrooms. We want to make sure there is an attentive adult in each breakout classroom with youth.
- Greet youth and ask everyone to correct their display name as needed. Ask everyone to select “gallery view” to see everyone else.
- Staff will take attendance.

2. Zoom Icebreaker: Tree Pose (5 minutes, begin while waiting for everyone to arrive)

We say that Unity is a place where people lead lives of integrity, service, and joy. We say that at church we find and keep our balance. So in the spirit of yoga.... who can stand on one leg the longest, in a tree pose, with their eyes closed?!?!



3. Chalice Lighting

Light a chalice at your home, invite youth to light their own chalices and say together: “We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith, the light of truth and the warmth of love.”

Teacher reads: (from creator of Star Trek, Gene Roddenberry)

“If man is to survive, he will have learned to take a delight in the essential differences between men and between cultures. He will learn that differences in ideas and attitudes are a delight, part of life’s exciting variety, not something to fear.”

4. Brief Check-in (5 minutes)

Continue weekly ritual/check-in (e.g. sharing a joy or sorrow so that everyone feels present in class).

5. Introduction: Star Trek explores what it is to be human (10 minutes)

Teacher introduces: We are going to explore the question of “What it means to be human and alive?” which is one of the five core topics we explore in RE at Unity Church. But as we have seen, the five questions (just like the seven UU principles) are so often interconnected. Many of the things we will discuss in answering this one question could and will relate to the other questions and principles. Feel free to point this out during the class discussions.

Questions for Discussion:

- Can you name some aliens from the Star Trek series and describe what they are like?
- Are those aliens like humans, and if so, how?
- What makes them NOT like humans?
- Do those differences matter?
- Why do you think having alien characters and alien races/cultures/civilizations are important in sci-fi stories?
- Why do you think so many of those aliens seem to have human characteristics?

6. Explore video clips of Spock (30 minutes)

[Note: This longer section introduces various clips and aspects of Spock’s humanity. Teachers facilitate viewing as well as discussion along the way.]

Teacher introduces: We are going to begin to “...explore strange new worlds, seek out new life and new civilizations...” and discover what they tell us about being human. Today we are going to look at the character of Mr. Spock.

Question for Discussion: What do you already know about Spock?

(a) Teacher summarizes: We know that in the very first pilot episode, Spock was not the unemotional, logical character that became the trademark of the stoic Vulcan race. By the time the series made it to broadcast, the writers had settled that Spock was to be the logical, almost computer-like counter to the emotional humans of the Enterprise crew.

- A very early clip of Spock from the Original Series “Where No Man Has Gone Before”:

Screen share (with audio)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aIFWiSw4Mol&list=PLBS34APvqtnEbj-qa3nZQLMOIPq4OzuhX&index=160> (1:05 min)

- A later clip where Spock's parents come aboard the Enterprise during the OS episode "Journey to Babel": <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eA12wOtr-ok> (1:47 min)

(Note that even though Spock's father should be ruled by logic, he seems to have a passive aggressive reaction to Spock's presence. Vulcan family life can be as difficult as it is for human families!)

- (b) Teacher summarizes:** Spock is a character with his feet in two worlds. He is half Vulcan and half human, giving writers a great opportunity to explore what it is to be human. When they developed the back-story for Spock, they described the Vulcan race as having evolved from a state very much like the human race, only more extreme. Vulcans were ruled by their emotions. They were passionate, violent, and bound by traditions that encouraged conflict and war. Faced with their civilization's destruction by unending warfare, they were saved by the Vulcan philosopher Surak, who developed a new way of thinking. Surak maintained that the root cause of all problems on Vulcan lay in the uncontrolled outpouring of emotions. He devised a strict adherence to an ethics based purely on the principle of logic. Emotions were to be controlled through will power and meditation, with a strict set of traditional rules and practices to help control and suppress their primitive nature.

Spock, being only half Vulcan, was subjected not only to repressing his primitive Vulcan tendencies but also his human emotions. He had to work extra hard to prove himself. And it should be noted, that although Vulcans value logic above all else, they were not beyond emotions that gave rise to prejudice, pride, and political conflict. (For instance, they seem to have prejudice against humans and other emotional races, and view them as weaker or less evolved. Spock himself was subject to this prejudice because he was half human.)

In episodes where Spock is confronted with his repressed emotions, opportunity exists to explore his human nature.

- In this OS episode "Plato's Stepchildren," Spock and Kirk have been forced to perform physically and emotionally for the entertainment of an alien race. The forced expressions of emotion are particularly hard for Spock to recover from:
Screen share (with audio) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wntUM6K75Uw> (2:26 min)
- In another OS episode "This Side of Paradise," Spock is exposed to spores that create a state of mind that allows the expression of love:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfdRVtlyFQc> (2:17 min)
- Kirk has to make Spock angry to kill off the spores, giving us a chance to see what emotions Spock may be suppressing in his normal state:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wY9NkYGUEyE> (2:19 min)
- Then we see Spock back to normal, having to deal with his emotions and the ramifications of his choices: how they affect his feelings and the girl he loves:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gMVRQ4Zq3M> (3:15 min)

(c) Teacher summarizes: If you watch almost any Vulcan character on Star Trek, you often notice an undercurrent of emotion that they do not want to acknowledge, even to themselves. For writers and viewers, this makes Vulcans more relatable or “human,” providing a great way to explore what it means to be human. This human, emotional undercurrent shows up often in Spock, even when he uses logic as an excuse for explaining his personal sacrifice for his Captain and friend.

- In this OS episode “The Empath,” Spock, Kirk, and McCoy are trapped in a cell with an empath. Their captors are about to torture one of them and they must decide who is to be tortured. You can see that the empath is picking up on Spock’s suppressed emotions as well as the suppressed emotions of the humans:

Screen share (with audio) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_6xctI_Z8I (4:14 min)

(d) Teacher summarizes: In the movie “The Wrath of Khan,” Kirk speaks of his friend this way: “...of my friend, I can only say this... of all the souls I have encountered in my travels, his was the most... human.” The friendship and love between Kirk and Spock (and even McCoy) are key to exploring what it is to be “human.” Their connection, the deep relationship between their characters, is one reason the series was so successful in connecting to the audience.

Here are three scenes from the Star Trek Feature Films that show how deep that friendship has grown over the years:

- From the movie “Wrath of Khan,” Spock has saved the Enterprise and crew at the expense of his own life. It was the logical thing to do:

Screen share (with audio) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KqpcmQhnl48> (stop scene at 2:04 min)

- In return, Kirk saves Spock after he is rescued from death in “The Search for Spock.” That friendship has become part of who Spock is:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yc81Un8ltS4&list=PLtsWLSQ5oROim6paUWC6n16orFnROtOIB&index=4> (stop scene at 2:13 min)

- And of course, friends are always there for each other. Fun scene from “The Final Frontier” after Spock rescues Kirk: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qomgE1QY-g4> (0:45 min)

(e) Teacher summarizes: Spock’s life journey in Star Trek brings him to a place where he finds acceptance of that emotional or spiritual part of being. He finds friendship with Kirk and crew mates and comes to make peace with his own human half.

- In the new timeline film “Star Trek,” Spock meets himself and shares a bit of wisdom:

Screen share (with audio)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Ppo5YIYwTM&list=PLtsWLSQ5oROim6paUWC6n16orFnROtOIB&index=2> (stop scene at 1:48 min)

- Spock also meets another non-human—“Data”—whose character helps us explore being “human.” Data asks a question during the Next Generation episode “Reunification”: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQnwMXWgksQ> (0:29 min)

7. Questions for Discussion (10 minutes)

- Spock is clearly a character that offers an outsider’s perspective on the nature of humanity. What does Spock reveal about the nature of being human that speaks to you?
- What do you think is the most important quality or criteria that makes someone human?

8. Announcement: We have regular RE next Sunday!

9. Extinguish the chalice, saying together: *“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”*

10. Leave zoom breakout classroom: wait until all youth have left, click “Leave” then “Leave Meeting.”

Viewing clips, in order of sequence:

- A very early clip of Spock from the Original Series “Where No Man Has Gone Before”: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aIFWiSw4Mol&list=PLBS34APvqtnEbj-qa3nZQLMOIPq4OzuhX&index=160> (1:05 min)
- A later clip where Spock’s parents come aboard the Enterprise during the OS episode “Journey to Babel”: <http://www.youtuberepeat.com/watch?v=eA12wOtr-ok> (1:47 min)
- In this OS episode “Plato’s Stepchildren,” Spock and Kirk have been forced to perform physically and emotionally for the entertainment of an alien race. The forced expressions of emotion are particularly hard for Spock to recover from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wntUM6K75Uw> (2:26 min)
- In another OS episode “This Side of Paradise,” Spock is exposed to spores that create a state of mind that allows the expression of love: <http://www.youtuberepeat.com/watch?v=SfdRVtlyFQc> (2:17 min)

- Kirk has to make Spock angry to kill off the spores, giving us a chance to see what emotions Spock may be suppressing in his normal state:
<https://www.youtuberepeat.com/watch?v=wY9NkYGUEyE> (2:19 min)
- Then we see Spock back to normal, having to deal with his emotions and the ramifications of his choices: how they affect his feelings and the girl he loves:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gMvRQ4Zq3M> (3:15 min)
- In this OS episode “The Empath,” Spock, Kirk, and McCoy are trapped in a cell with an empath. Their captors are about to torture one of them and they must decide who is to be tortured. You can see that the empath is picking up on Spock’s suppressed emotions as well as the suppressed emotions of the humans:
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_6xctl_Z8I (4:14 min)
- From the movie “Wrath of Khan,” Spock has saved the Enterprise and crew at the expense of his own life. It was the logical thing to do:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KqpcmQhnl48> (stop scene at 2:04 min)
- In return, Kirk saves Spock after he is rescued from death in “The Search for Spock.” That friendship has become part of who Spock is:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yc81Un8ltS4&list=PLtsWLSQ5oROim6paUWC6n16orFnROtOIB&index=4> (stop scene at 2:13 min)
- And of course, friends are always there for each other. Fun scene from “The Final Frontier” after Spock rescues Kirk: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qom9E1QY-g4> (0:45 min)
- In the new timeline film “Star Trek,” Spock meets himself and shares a bit of wisdom:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Ppo5YIYwTM&list=PLtsWLSQ5oROim6paUWC6n16orFnROtOIB&index=2> (stop scene at 1:48 min)
- Spock also meets another non-human—“Data”—whose character helps us explore being “human.” Data asks a question during the Next Generation episode “Reunification”: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQnwMXWgksQ> (0:29 min)