

“To Boldly Go”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts
November 15, 2020 – 24th Sunday after Pentecost
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30

Stardate 5784.2: This is the time in which the 67th episode of the original series of Star Trek was set. This episode, entitled “Plato’s Stepchildren,” was first broadcast in November of the 1968th Year of Our Lord, but it envisioned the future date in which the space ship Enterprise would be hurtling through space at warp speed, boldly going to places where no one had gone before.

Like the other episodes of Star Trek, “Plato’s Stepchildren” showed the crew of the Enterprise boldly going where no other television program had gone before. The series overall was forward-thinking, as you would expect a program about the future to be, and it envisioned many new technological innovations that have since become part of our world, such as the flip-phone-like “communicators” that the crew used to call for Scotty to “beam them up” or “phasers set to stun,” which produced a taser-like, immobilizing-yet-non-lethal jolts of energy.

Star Trek did not just envision new gadgets and gizmos, but was also forward thinking in its vision for society. The crew itself was a team of diverse individuals: The typically macho, but sensitive, white Captain James T. Kirk, flanked on deck by persons of color, Communications Officer Lieutenant Nyota Uhura, portrayed by an African-American woman, Nichelle Nichols, and Helmsman Lieutenant Hikaru Sulu, played by an Asian-American, openly gay man, George Takei. And, of course, ubiquitous on the deck was Second Officer Mr. Spock, born to a human mother and father from the planet Vulcan, portrayed by Jewish Leonard Nimoy. George Takei said later of the show that its creed was:

“Infinite diversity in infinite combinations.”¹ That forward-thinking mentality certainly played itself in the makeup of the cast and the characters they portrayed.

Throughout the series this diverse crew worked together as a united team, solving space problems, forging new inter-galactic friendships, and battling many an extra-terrestrial villain. And in the 67th episode, they boldly went where no show had gone before when White Captain Kirk and Black Lieutenant Uhura kissed when forced to do so by space villains. This was the first interracial kiss aired on television, and it was a bold move by the show’s producers to have the two smooch in an era when many Presbyterian mothers still looked down upon their sons and daughters marrying Methodists and a US Supreme Court decision to strike down laws that forbade interracial marriage occurred just one year prior its airing.

Throughout its three year run, time and again, the show boldly went where no one had gone before, providing glimpses of a better future, where a diverse team of people cooperated and where those who were less empowered in the late 1960s were more empowered.

I share all of this with you this morning because I see these bold messages of Star Trek providing for us very good examples of what our own “upward way” could look like, for we are called by God to boldly create a future that is better and more blessed for our children and all of God’s creation. We are called to think boldly and act boldly, to boldly go where we have not gone before.

In today’s gospel reading, we are offered a parable that tells us to do just that: Be bold. We find in the parable some of its characters acting quite boldly. The master is bold in entrusting such huge sums of money

¹ Katrina Ojaste, “Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations: Star Trek, the Sixties & the American Left,” *Borders* 5, no. 1 (2012), <https://journal.lib.uoguelph.ca/index.php/borders/article/view/2829/3063>.

to a team of servants, and the servants who invested that money were bold in doing so. But one character, the servant who received “only” one talent (just to remind you, this was worth about 15 years’ worth of wages) was not bold at all. This “wicked, lazy servant” was fearful of losing the master’s money, perhaps in some unprecedented, uncertain times such as our own, and so did what was common in the day for those wanting to preserve a stash of silver: He buried it so that it would stay safe and so that he would stay safe when the master returned and found that his money was not lost. But the master expected not safe action, but bold action. The master could have buried the silver herself, but instead entrusted the servant to boldly work the money and grow it while she was away. The master expected all of her servants, stewards of her money, to engage in some risky business with it. Those who acted boldly were rewarded, whereas the one who didn’t was cast out where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth. Jesus’ message in this parable is that we are to be bold in growing all with which we have been entrusted by God. We have received God’s blessings so that we can be bold in growing them for God and others.

And we have received God’s blessings in abundance. In fact, all that we have is a gift of God that has come to us through others. None of us have come here today having created our own lives out of nothing through our own efforts, pulling ourselves up from our own bootstraps. Well, some of us have boots, and some of us have bootstraps on those boots, but even those were given us to us by someone else. And our society gives some much better strapped booties at birth than others. Those of us who look like James Tiberius Kirk are given the best boots; those of us who look like Nyota Uhura are not. But all of us have been given the resources we have from others, even if we have worked hard to do something with those resources to become what we are today.

Think of this beautiful sanctuary. This building was raised up by others, who took bold action using the resources they had been given, and we are blessed today because of that bold building action by previous generations. And this space is a resource for us to use boldly to bless others today and tomorrow. Surely it would be safer for us in these uncertain times to stick our treasure in the ground, but we have treasure because others did not do that, and we ourselves are called not to do that. Rather, we are called to grow the treasures that have been given to us.

This takes courage and it takes boldness and a commitment to not rest comfortably where we are. As professor Brené Brown states, “We can choose courage or we can choose comfort, but we can’t have both.”² As a church, I hope we choose this day to continue to be courageous with our resources rather than doing what is comfortable with them, for this is our tradition and our calling.

We are courageous in using this facility, even in this scary pandemic time, to feed our community. The rooms beneath where we are worshipping this morning are filled with food that is gathered, organized, and distributed to the food-insecure in our midst. In the age of Covid-19, this activity is risky business; it would be a whole lot safer for us if we would just shut down the food pantry until the pandemic is over. But that is not what we are called to do! And we engage in risky business by having gaggles of preschoolers and their teachers gathering in our building each day. But our purpose is not to be comfortable or to take the safest path, but rather to serve the community, and so we maintain the Purpose School, which continues to greatly bless a great number children and their families.

² Brené Brown, *Rising Strong: How the Ability to Reset Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2015).

Friends, we are called to bold action, we have taken bold action, and we must still boldly go forth on the upward way. And so we must consider, even at this time, how we can give and work in ways that amplify even more the gifts that have been entrusted to us. We should consider how we can use our resources to grow a more just society, one in which we would expect to find *Admiral* Uhuras and *Commander* Sulus leading us just as much as we would Captain Kirks. By boldly using our time, talent, and treasure in ways that empower people and make the world more just, we will expand the realm of God on earth and reduce the weeping and gnashing of teeth that is all too common among people. And so let us boldly go forward together, bringing God's greater blessings of life and love to a weary world. Amen.