

The Apple  
United Church of Broomfield  
April 24, 2021

Genesis 3:1-13 NRSV

<sup>1</sup> Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" <sup>2</sup> The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; <sup>3</sup> but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" <sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; <sup>5</sup> for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, <sup>6</sup> knowing good and evil." <sup>6</sup> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. <sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. <sup>8</sup> They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup> But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" <sup>10</sup> He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." <sup>11</sup> He said, "who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" <sup>12</sup> The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." <sup>13</sup> Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate."

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So, as most of you know, we began our spring study this week, Trekking through the Bible, with an episode from the original series called The Apple, which aired in 1967. It was a lot of fun to watch the episode together and afterward many questions were raised about the Biblical aspects and implications of the episode, the series and the actors. To catch everyone up, let me begin with...

Captains Log 3715.3

The USS *Enterprise* arrives at Gamma Trianguli VI, a planet that appears to be a tropical paradise with very rich natural resources. The landing party quickly discovery that the paradise is extremely hostile; they lose three of the security team to a plant that shoots poisonous thorns, a bizarre lightning strike, and an explosive rock. Transporting back to the ship becomes impossible as an energy field is drawing power from the *Enterprise*, rendering the transporters inoperable.

Captain Kirk orders the team towards a primitive village, carefully avoiding the planet's hazards. Along the way, they capture a native of the planet who has been tracking them. The frightened native, Akuta, says he is the chief of the "Feeders of Vaal." Small antennae on Akuta's head allow him to communicate with "Vaal", acting as the Vaal's eyes and ears. During this conversation, Chief Engineer Scott, still aboard the *Enterprise*, reports that the ship is slowly being pulled towards the planet by a tractor beam and eventually the ship will collide with the planet and all aboard the ship will die. Kirk, suspecting a connection with the Vaal entity, asks Akuta to take them to it. Akuta leads them to a rock formation with a snake-like head and an open mouth, large enough for a human to enter. Science Officer Spock's analysis shows that the entrance is protected by a force field but appears to lead to an underground complex. Akuta says that Vaal may wish to speak with them later, but in the meantime, offers the hospitality of his village.

The landing party find the villagers to be young and healthy, like Akuta, but somewhat unsophisticated. The villagers say that Vaal prohibits "touching", as "replacements" (children) are not needed. After a while the villagers are observed "feeding" Vaal with the explosive rock mineral, apparently its fuel, and the landing party conclude that Vaal must be a machine, some form of artificial intelligence that maintains the Eden-like conditions of the planet, making the inhabitants virtually immortal and rendering most work unnecessary for them. It appears that all they have to do is feed Vaal.

In the evening, Officer Chekov and Petty Officer Martha Landon go to a secluded area to kiss, and a young native couple observe and copy their behavior. Vaal is instantly aware, and through Akuta, orders the natives to kill the strangers, by using large branches to crush their heads. During their attack, a member of the landing party is killed, but the rest of the crew subdue the villagers and place them in a hut.

Back on the ship, Scott reports that attempts to use all available power to free the ship have failed. Kirk orders his crew to prevent the villagers from feeding Vaal and instructs Scott to fire the ship's phasers on the rock formation, hoping to drain Vaal's remaining power. Vaal is overloaded from the lack of "feeding" and the phaser attack and appears to die. The *Enterprise* is freed from the tractor beam, saving all onboard. Kirk tells a distraught Akuta that his people will now be FREE – free to experience a normal life.

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This episode doesn't relate the exact Biblical story, but it is full of interesting inferences and juxtapositions of some of the elements of the Garden of Eden story from Genesis. Of the many ideas and possible discussion topics available in this episode, the theological ideas of "free will" and "blind faith" are clearly put forth.

In the episode, Spock and Medical Officer McCoy argue over the desirability of the relationship and social system that exists on Gamma Trianguli VI. Spock points out that the natives appear to be happy with their relationship with Vaal, so why disrupt it? Even though they may not be living up to their full potential, they're not being hurt. Why judge them by human standards?

Besides being exactly what a logical Vulcan would say, this falls in line with Starfleet's guiding principal through all of the franchises called, "The Prime Directive." It prohibits its members from interfering with the natural development of alien civilizations. The Prime Directive protects unprepared civilizations from the dangerous tendency of well-intentioned starship crews to introduce advanced technology, knowledge, and values before they are ready.

McCoy clearly struggles with this directive regarding the natives and Vaal. His personal assessment is that the natives lack free will and Vaal uses fear and provision to control and manipulate the natives.

**Spock:** In my view, [it is] a splendid example of reciprocity.

**McCoy:** It would take a computerized Vulcan mind such as yours to make that kind of a statement.

**Spock:** Doctor, you insist on applying human standards to non-human cultures. I remind you that humans are only a tiny minority in this galaxy.

**McCoy:** There are certain absolutes, Mister Spock, and one of them is the right of humanoids to a free and unchained environment, the right to have conditions which permit growth.

**Spock:** Another is their right to choose a system which seems to work for them.

Also, after returning to the ship, Spock suggests that their actions, destroying Vaal and giving the natives their "freedom," were the equivalent to the Garden of Eden story. Spock says that by giving the natives "the apple"

of freedom, the villagers were, in essence, driven out of their Garden of Eden. Kirk questions Spock, "Are you saying that I'm Satan," to which Spock says, "no."

Kirk has Vaal destroyed in order to save the Enterprise, which we can understand, doing so saved hundreds of Starfleet lives. But he also does so in order to "free" the natives, believing, along with McCoy, that the social system the natives live in isn't truly "living." McCoy preaches the superiority of human culture over the natives' culture. After destroying Vaal, Kirk's gives a speech to the natives, assuring them they will enjoy Federation culture more than their old one. Ironically, Kirk takes over for Vaal as God and ignores the Prime Directive by taking the decision out of the natives' hands without ever discussing it with them. He believes that the Federation's more advanced technology, knowledge and values are better, period. He decides for them, literally taking away their free will. Spock is the only one to call Kirk and McCoy out on this and instead of understanding their culpability, Kirk and McCoy make fun of Spock, inferring that he looks like Satan.

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The argument that we can have begins with asking, "Did the natives have a blind faith in Vaal - did they have the freedom to choose the life they were living?" Did they have a personal choice, the "free will to say yes or no to Vaal at any time in any way? ... Because that's how we would define faith, right?

I believe we can clearly see that the natives' choice, whether it was to have faith in Vaal or to choose how they lived, wasn't free. While the system in which they lived under Vaal, was "like paradise" and they appeared to be happy and content with it, they did NOT have free will. They were entirely and wholly dependent upon Vaal for everything. We can infer that if the natives did not feed Vaal, Vaal created frightening storms and used lightning to kill. We are presented with nothing indicating that any part of their lives is a free choice.

McCoy states that he believes free will involves a free and unchained environment with conditions that permit growth. According to his definition— there was no free will. Their faith in Vaal was indeed blind. A dictionary definition of *blind faith* is "belief without true understanding, perception, or discrimination." That's what was happening on Gamma Trianguli VI. Vaal wasn't a god, but rather a supernatural dictator.

We understand free will as a gift from God. Unlike Vaal or Captain Kirk, our benevolent and selfless God allows us the choice to make decisions, whether they be good or bad, free of any pressure or coercion. God desires that we use our free will for good, for love and sacrificially for others. But we can, and often do, choose otherwise. The deity Vaal, shows us that McCoy's understanding of free will, living with conditions that permit growth, is how our God behaves.

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Even if we agree with McCoy and Kirk, we should think about whether we are okay with them violating the Prime Directive? Perhaps thinking of the Prime Directive can help us better understand our actions and our relationship with God. Who has the right to determine what's best for a species, a civilization, or a culture? The prime directive is meant for protection. But who is being protected and from whom or what? Too much technology or knowledge, can be harmful. The natives of Gamma Trianguli VI will likely live better lives for the most part, but they'll also incur struggles, pain, and uncertainty. Is that so bad? Is it worth it that Kirk **forced** that upon them? Perhaps, but THEY had no say in it.

What did our God do with Adam and Eve? Adam and Eve were given the freedom to have a say in things. God empowered Adam and Eve. In Genesis we read that God created Adam in God's likeness. While God has

sovereign power of all of creation, God gave Adam and Eve dominion over the earth, over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle, the wild animals, and every creeping thing. God said be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. To you I give every plant and tree. God put them in paradise and allowed them access to everything – everything except one tree. That’s it! It’s all yours except for one tree. They had the knowledge, the information about the tree – eating from it means death – they chose.

Unlike Vaal or Captain Kirk, in this episode, God **requests** our worship - and we have the free will to decline it. God **wants** to give us love and mercy – and we have the free will to decline it. God **desires** relationship with us, one that is beneficially reciprocal and not out of fear, guilt, or intimidation – and we have the free will to reject it. That sounds a lot more like paradise than Gamma Trianguli VI.

For many of us, we see God in mysterious ways and so much of our faith, blind or otherwise, is based on a choice of what we believe and what we’re able to handle and comprehend. If God truly is omnipotent, then it makes sense that God would approve of the Prime Directive. With the Prime Directive, knowledge and understanding is achieved in due time, when recipients are physically, mentally, and spiritually **ready** for such knowledge. Perhaps that is God’s approach – humanity will know and understand the mysteries of God in due time, when the time is right for us. We ate from the tree of knowledge too soon. We played God and we weren’t ready for God’s advanced technology, knowledge, and values.

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As it says in Hebrews, “Now faith is being confident of what we hope for, convinced about things we do not see.” (11:1) By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible” (11:3).

Soren Kierkegaard, the famous 19th century existentialist philosopher and theologian, once wrote, ‘Faith is a matter of choice, our personal decision in finding God.’ Free will moves us closer to or further from God. As Kierkegaard wrote, it is our decision; faith is our choice.”<sup>1</sup>

Our faith is not blind. Faith is founded on fact, and it is tried by truth. Faith is not a step into the dark, it is a leap into the light. We have faith in God because we know through experience the love demonstrated through Jesus Christ. We choose to live that love. We choose to leap into the that light.

May we live long and prosper.

AMEN

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<sup>1</sup> <https://sermons.com/sermon/holy-week/60284>