

“Man on the Moon”

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When I was a little boy we lived, often times, as I have said before, on Air Force bases in the military. When I was growing up in the late ‘60s early ‘70s, the military was proud of NASA and what the space program was doing. This month is the 50th anniversary of Apollo 11. I remember that my little brother and I and our friends would all get models of the rockets. We would put them together and we knew the difference between each one. We had our little NASA stickers we would put on our book covers and everything for school. It was the center of so much of what we did, and we watched every launch with such excitement and anticipation.

We believed, because of what was happening with NASA, in American ingenuity and power. We were so proud every time that rocket went up because it defined who we were; and, if we could put a man on the moon – like that old phrase “we could do anything.” When I was growing up, America felt like it was the country where you *could* do anything.

The whole space race, rockets and the opportunity to go to the moon, really got its start at the end of the Second World War. Right as we knew we were winning, there were plans in both the United States and in Soviet Russia to try to grab the German scientists – the engineers – because they had done an amazing job of moving forward with the rocket industry. They were smarter, in many regards, than we were and we are lucky that the Second World War did not continue much longer because we, for better or worse, dropped those bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But the Germans were right there as well. God only knows what would have happened, and how our world would be different, if they had had that power just a few months later.

There were plans in place to try and get to those German scientists; so we dove in trying to find them. We grabbed as many as we could. The Soviets grabbed as many they could. We were fortunate we were able to get Wernher von Braun, and a number of other scientists. We probably won that little part of the space race against the Soviets, although their scientists were almost as good. Right from the top the Soviets knew, especially after we dropped the bombs in Japan, that we were going to be in a space race and they wanted to win, and they funded it much faster than we did. So, even though we seemed to have gotten the better scientists, they got ahead of us.

Now I’m too young to remember, but I know that there are a lot of people in this room who remember when Sputnik flew and Sputnik II flew. Nothing that we were trying to shoot off that launch pad lifted and it was a very frightening time. So the United States and Wernher von Braun, who was every bit as good with the PR machine – with a microphone – as he was in the lab, started to press the Eisenhower administration to start making changes.

There was a young senator from Massachusetts who also saw a need. Kennedy and von Braun met, respected each other and saw the value in each other, and these two gentlemen

in cooperation with each other continued to push the Eisenhower administration forward in trying to develop the space program.

It was interesting that it happened the way it did, because Wernher von Braun has been celebrated in different movies. He was someone who was not only a German who happened to be in Germany during World War II, during the Nazi revolution, he was a Nazi stooge. Wernher von Braun was part of the Nazi party. In many ways he sold his soul for the funding and the opportunity to build rockets. So how frustratingly sad, and yet he was needed in the United States after the war. They continued to push the Eisenhower administration: Kennedy and von Braun. Together they forced the national hearts and minds to see that a space program was important. Many people wanted to beat the Russians. They were scared to death that they were watching everything we were doing and that they were capable of destroying us. While few believed the march into space would have any real benefit, considering the massive dollars spent, we continued to do it anyway, based a lot on our fear of the Soviets, and they wanted to look up to the sky with American pride and the celebration.

Between the political acumen, and now President Kennedy and the marketing and brilliance of von Braun, they were able to get that space program running. When Kennedy made those famous words that there will be a man on the moon by the end of the decade, just about everyone rolled their eyes, including the Soviet Union. No one believed that that was possible and yet, it was that kind of vision that allowed a difference to be made. It took more than a nice vision; it took massive amounts of money. Between Kennedy and von Braun they raised billions of dollars that were funneled into the space program. In an amount of time that no one believed possible, scientists and engineers and politicians did their part to put Apollo 11 on the moon within that decade, and now we are celebrating it 50 years later this month.

There were so many changes that came about because of that person being placed on the moon in that space race. In the areas of health and medicine, the benefits were huge. We have infrared ear thermometers, ventricular assist devices, Lasik surgery, artificial limbs, and scratch resistant lenses, all because of the scientific learning that took place over the moon launches. In transportation, we have improved radial tires that brought you here today, chemical detection that warns against corrosive conditions in factories, that have saved untold lives. In public safety, video enhancing and analysis systems, landmine removal, firefighting equipment that has been used in California over the weekend, shock absorbers in buildings that were used in California over the weekend, all because of the space race. Industrial productivity like powered lubricants, improved mine safety and food safety and many, many other things, all because of what we learned trying to put that man on the moon 50 years ago. And yet the costs were staggering. NASA, in 1973, submitted congressional testimony that reportedly totaled just the project Apollo missions alone of \$25.4 billion dollars. In 2018 money, that would be \$153 billion dollars used on the space program.

Think about the 135 missions that were shot up there with the total cost, just with the space shuttle. The space shuttle alone had 135 missions and they spent \$192 billion dollars on top of the \$100-plus billion dollars on Apollo; yet another \$192 billion for the space shuttle, and that is 2010 dollars. That meant that every space shuttle that went off cost approximately \$1.5 billion dollars, and I don't even have the dollar figure on Gemini and

the other rocket launches. While the costs were high and the sacrifices were painful, on this Independence Day, on the 50th Anniversary of Apollo 11 this month, we are called to reflect anew on what it means to have a passionate calling and a response.

I still struggle with whether the space travel to the moon and everything was worth it. Think about the hundreds of billions of dollars and what if they had been used for things like poverty care, civil rights in the 1960's, so many other things to help bring about educational improvements. Imagine throwing, into this country alone, over \$300 billion into education at that time; what it would have done for the poor, for those who had schools that were not up to code.

It is tough and, yet, I doubt the way we have our internet and our technology that we have today would be where it is without it. The struggles are there, and there needs to be ethical decisions in that process. But it got me to thinking about, ethics aside, what Kennedy and von Braun did. They took a plan, an idea – a bold idea – that no one thought possible and within 7-8 years made it a reality. To this day a few people still don't believe it ever happened, including a basketball player who last season played for the Boston Celtics. He still doesn't believe that there ever actually was a man on the moon. I'm glad he doesn't play for the Minnesota Timber Wolves. [Laughter.]

On this 50th anniversary, whether you think this was a good idea or not, you have to be impressed by what they did to make a vision – to name it and fulfill it.

I'm equally awed, and even more awed, by what Jesus did in that same time that we are reading about in Scripture today. Here he was from this backwater place in Nazareth. He had no real education; he didn't have the recognition or the support of his religious establishment, and yet he started proclaiming a Gospel, first to 12 and then when the 12 got strong enough, he shared it with another 70 disciples. Then they started proclaiming that Gospel and it expanded amazingly. Even after his death, when it all should have fallen apart, it started to grow. And that growth continued to expand and grow until we were at a point, historically, where Christian faith was the center of the world's focus.

Now we need a new vision because we are quickly becoming a minority religion in this world; we are becoming, as Christians, the joke – the politically incorrect.

Jill and I were watching this show and I'm not recommending it, because the language is really vulgar. It's a series called *Silicon Valley* and it's about Silicon Valley. It's a comedy, but one entire episode was about this gentleman who was just an awful human being. He was running this horrible site on the internet, and he did all of these things, but they were not going to put him down, because it's not right to do that, until they found out that he also went to church – a Christian church – on Sunday mornings. Then they threw him out.

They could put up with anything in the Silicon Valley, except someone being a Christian. It was funny. I laughed at it, and then I thought there is a little bit of truth there. I think it is our fault, because our vision has not been to share the positives. We have let other people define who we are, to rightfully convey our falsehoods – our problems as a Christian body, historically – without defending ourselves properly, and we are in a place where we are no longer relevant and, in many circles, even inappropriate.

We need a new vision, because that is not who we are – that is not who God is. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of both the Jew and the Gentile, the God of the universe,, deserves more than being a punch line on HBO. We have not shared the blessings of the faith well enough, shared a vision greater than just showing up on a Sunday morning, to leave the door open to being that punch line. We have not done enough missions as a denomination.

As a Christian body, we have left people believing that we don't care, or that we care about ourselves more than others. If that isn't true, then we need to create a vision that they see with hope and honesty. Too many churches are now seeing that we are cruel and exclusive, because we don't include the LGBTQ community, and perhaps we have not done even enough to say that there are other bodies like ourselves who are compassionate, who are open and affirming. The more we do that, and we create that vision, the more we will remain or become relevant again. That is what we are called to do; not because it is a good marketing strategy, but because people need to hear and accept the glorious message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; an accepting message, a loving message, a forgiving message and a healing message that they can't get anywhere else. It's our task – our job – to set a mission and a vision that is so expansive that it can change lives.

If a president and a former Nazi can put a man on the moon within a decade, how much more can we do with the promise of the help and the guidance of the Holy Spirit? We can reclaim Christianity from being lumped together as one evangelical hate group, into a group that makes a difference for God. We need to reclaim our vision. We need to acknowledge not all Christians are filled with hate and, we need to reaffirm that vision before everyone beyond *Silicon Valley* believes that we are that awful.

I pray that we will have that vision and make that difference, and it begins right here in our individual hearts and our individual Church, and it begins today. Amen