

For the Journey

April 2/26 - Rev. Dave Crawford



The Artemis II spacecraft. Apparently it's taller than the Statue of Liberty. What a glorious liftoff yesterday. We welcome this "good news" story, I think it's fair to say. We need it. We pray for success and a safe return. It's the first time a Canadian (Jeremy Hansen) has been on a lunar mission. Also the first time a woman (Christina Koch) has done so, and a first for a person of colour (Victor Glover). American Reid Wiseman rounds out the crew and serves as commander. He has completed 165 days aboard the International Space Station (2014), including 12 hours of spacewalking.

We are awed by the technological know-how, the intellect and vision of the scientists and engineers, and by sheer power of the spacecraft. We admire the courage of the crew and marvel at their apparent composure.

We may not be aware that at least one of the crew members is a brother in Christ. Victor Glover is a longtime member of the Church of Christ denomination, and is described as a “committed Christian”. When assigned to the ISS (International Space Station) in 2021 Glover brought his Bible and Communion elements so that he could celebrate the sacrament with his church virtually, from space. He always prays before flying and afterwards, and asserts that his faith and scientific career are not at odds, telling “The Christian Chronicle” during an interview that his calling to be an astronaut is “fed by his faith”. He refers to the universe as “the beauty of God’s creation.”

It has been popular in academia, western media, and Hollywood for at least 30 years to belittle religious faith when confronted by science and the scientific method. Neo-atheists like Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins have found their life’s most important vocation in what they hope will be the destruction of religion, Christianity in particular. Dawkins, for one, would be horrified by the revelation that an astronaut in 2026 is also a Christian.

Yet more thoughtful scientists have taken a different course. Sir John Houghton comes to mind, as does John Lennox. John Houghton was a Welsh atmospheric physicist and co-chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007. He served as professor of atmospheric physics at the University of Oxford. Houghton was also Presbyterian elder with strong roots in evangelical Christianity, who believed in science and Christianity actually strengthening each other rather than representing polar opposites. He was a founding member of the International Society for Science and Religion, and was knighted by Queen Elizabeth in 1991. Houghton died in 2020 at age 88 but prior to his passing was granted honorary doctorates from the University of Wales, Stirling, East Anglia, Leeds, Glamorgan, Birmingham, Dalhousie, and many others.

The issue here is how spirituality and science might intersect or at least view one another with respect although from a distance. Some atheists or anti-religionists assume believers to be intellectually inferior, lacking education, narrow-minded people in need of a divine crutch to make it through life. Sir John Houghton and Victor Glover surely put that criticism to rest.

One of my own personal sayings through the years has been: “When Christians gather for worship they’re not supposed to park their brains at the door.” Likewise, perhaps for some scientists, a similar saying might be useful: “When we meet for our conferences, matters of the spirit shouldn't be automatically barred from entering the arena.”

Scientists of high regard. Astronauts racing across the far reaches of our earth’s and moon’s orbits. Representatives of both fields actually believing Easter’s proclamation of a risen Christ, considering themselves to be disciples, engaging in prayer and service to their neighbours as a key element of their cherished spirituality. Who’d a thunk it?

Thanks be to God.

Grace and Peace.
Rev. Crawford