

Voices: Audacious effort led to cosmic leap

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A man steps out of an awkward looking box, climbs down a short ladder, bounces down to a powdery surface and makes history. July 20 marks the 50th anniversary of one of the most amazing events in world history. On July 20, 1969, fuzzy gray images let the world watch as Neil Armstrong stepped onto the surface of the moon with that famous “one small step,” which marked “one giant leap.”

In writing about the U.S. effort to put a man on the moon, [George Will](#) hearkens back to President Kennedy’s 1961 challenge: “Kennedy’s goal was reckless, and exhilarating leadership. Given existing knowledge and technologies, it was impossible. But Kennedy said the space program would ‘serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills.’ It did.”

What an adventure! As a schoolboy, I watched on TV as the Mercury, Gemini and Apollo rockets launched in the eight-year lead-up to Apollo 11. Watching such things makes anything seem possible.

But it took a nation of people to do it. George Will added this from Robert Stone and Alan Andres: “The American effort to get to the moon was the largest peacetime government initiative in the nation’s history. At its peak in the mid-1960s, nearly 2 percent of the American workforce was engaged in the effort to some degree. It employed more than 400,000 individuals, most of them working for 20,000 different private companies and 200 universities.”

Count my dad among that 2 percent. He worked for Collins Radio/Rockwell at the time and helped make the radio equipment that carried the astronauts’ voices over the many missions leading to Apollo 11 and

afterward. It was one of his proudest achievements in life—right up there with catching 13 passes against Dallas Jesuit High School.

Amazed at God's creation

In August 1969, it was as if we lived George Bailey's imaginings from "It's a Wonderful Life" and lassoed the moon. The moon is about wander and romance, but it is much, much more. It is part of God's great creation. The lights of the night sky have moved humanity for millennia to worship and to see themselves in a cosmic context.

*When I observe your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you set in place,
what is a human being that you remember him,
a son of man that you look after him? (Psalm 8:3-4, CSB)*

Our mothers and fathers going back to Eden have stared into the sky with wonder, and then one day through the gifts of science and engineering, God enabled a human to step onto this object of our fascination. May our ability to make that small step, yes even that giant leap, never prevent us from being amazed at God's creation and our role in taking care of it.

God brought together people from around the world to a place called the United States in order to do what humanity had dreamed of doing before there was a United States of America. So, on this anniversary, it seems quite appropriate to worship the God of creation and to celebrate what this nation of ours accomplished through its space program.

Giant leap, humble walk

The United States is a special place because of its founding principles and the people who have come from all over the world to throw in their lot with this grand experiment in democracy and freedom. The nation is indeed strong and powerful, but the things that hold us together seem so fragile right now.

It's not popular any longer, but I still like the "melting pot" imagery of America as a place where different people come together to be something new and different—even better. My ancestors were mostly English, and I love to visit England, but I'm not English. I'm an American, connected to other Americans who come together to do amazing things, like defeating fascism and landing people on the moon and bringing them home safely.

As long as humans write history, they will be writing about this thing called the United States and all that we accomplished. Let's not tear ourselves apart.

It took rocket science to get us to the moon. Living well in community, in a nation, doesn't take such sophisticated understanding. It just takes a willingness to justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God; this is what God expects (Micah 6:8). Some truths never change, even if you do something audacious like walking on the moon.

Ferrell Foster is the director of ethics and justice for the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission.