

2 Peter 2:9-10 A Beautiful World
May 7, 2023

Back in the 1950's, there was an emphasis on science that became associated with the race to space, among other things, and involved futuristic possibilities and ideas. It was called the International Geophysical Year, or IGY.

The International Geophysical Year was, "a worldwide program of geological research that was conducted from July 1957 until December 1958, and was directed towards a systematic study of the Earth and its planetary environment." It marked the beginning of a new era of scientific discovery at a time when many innovative technologies were appearing.

The United States, in conjunction with the emphasis, announced the launch of, "small Earth encircling satellites." There were over 70 participating countries. It was accompanied by an educational program in the schools designed to encourage and attract children to pursue science careers.

In the 1980's, Donald Fagen, a featured member of the band called, Steeley Dan, wrote a song about his memories of it called, "IGY, What a Beautiful World This Could Be?" The lyrics include the following:

Standing tough under stars and stripes, We can tell
This dream's in sight, you've got to admit it . . .
The future looks bright
Well by seventy-six we'll be A.O.K. . . .

Here at home we'll play in the city
Powered by the sun
Perfect weather for a streamlined world
There'll be spandex jackets one for everyone

On that train all graphite and glitter
Undersea by rail
Ninety minutes from New York to Paris
A just machine to make big decisions
Programmed by fellows with compassion and vision
We'll be clean when their work is done
We'll be eternally free yes and eternally young

It was a vision of a scientifically produced salvation.
What a beautiful world this could be? What a wonderful time to be free? Some of it came true. Spandex happened anyway, the moon landing, the internet, there are satellites all around. But any thoughtful analysis would be forced to conclude that it has not lead to salvation.

This is not meant to be an anti-science message. Science has made life better in many ways, and promises to solve problems yet. It has given us many good things and increased our knowledge.

One is forced to admit that whatever science has contributed to the betterment of life, it has not solved the great human problem. We are not clean. There is no *just* machine. There is no-one, no group of somebodies, that could program such a machine with compassion and vision. We are not, as a result of scientific research, eternally free and eternally young.

Additionally, it has not solved timeless problems like poverty and war and disease, nor answered the questions of our common mortality, our moral foundation, or the meaning of our lives.

At least for a time, there was positivity and hope. We should not belittle the significance of even a qualified hope. Presently, however, one might have to admit that the future does not look so bright. The younger generations see problems that seem insurmountable.

Last week we looked at the part of 1 Peter that comes immediately on the heels of what has been read today. We became aware that the recipients of Peter's letter were outsiders in their own context and somewhat powerless, comparatively speaking, when set next to their more well-integrated neighbors. Before all that, Peter offers them something more encouraging, he tells them;

“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into this wonderful light. Once you were not a people, now you are God's people; once, you had not received mercy, now you have received mercy.”

What does a priesthood do? Does it not bear witness? Does it not act of behalf of the larger community? Does it not point the way to a better understanding of the meaning our lives?

Some say the decline of religious affiliation is the beginning of a process that will bring the human enterprise in religion to an end, and some see this process as a good thing. I am not so sure. I can see that bad religion is a really bad thing, maybe among the worst of all things.

That is why the prophets, and Jesus, and Paul, all saved their harshest rhetoric for the illegitimate, toxic , and harmful religious practices that they found, and yet what they left in its place was, by all measures still a religious life, filled with religious things; meetings, prayers, studies of sacred writings, songs, sermons offerings, service, spiritual development.

What Peter says to his churches in Asia Minor 1900 years ago, is God's Word to us in the 21st century.

We are witnesses to another way of understanding our lives. It is worth reading the whole letter to see the words Peter uses to describe this other understanding; “live as free people, only do not use your freedom as a cover for evil (2:16), stand firm in faith (5:9), you have a new birth into a living hope (1:30), love each other deeply (4:8).” We also use words like freedom, faith, hope, and love to refer a different experience of life than what science can address. And even these words we use cautiously lest they become, stripped down to their minimum, as the theologian Paul Tillich cautioned, “freedom would be distorted into willfulness, faith into belief in the absurd, hope into unreal expectations, and love . . . (the most important of all) . . . into sentimental feeling.

There are many, too many to mention; “Be clear-minded, self-controlled, humble; turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it; rid yourselves of all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind . . .”

We are called to participate in and bear witness to a relationship with the one who created us, and redeems, and sustains us, who taught us to love our neighbors and offer ourselves as living sacrifices.

Somewhere in each of us we know that life is more than what physical experience tempts us to believe it is. We know that it is in relationships that the most important and meaningful experiences happen.

We know that life is holy, characterized not by spandex graphite and glitter, or unrealistic expectations in the realms of train rides or machines that somehow make all the big decisions, but by a mercy and grace that rise above human ability, yet reside deep within each of us, by words like freedom and faith, hope and love in their best and fullest sense.

Participate in that life, bear witness to that life. It is our sacred calling. It is what we mean when we say that we are “in Christ,” that we have accepted Christ. It is the meaning of one of our most cherished doctrines, the Priesthood of all Believers. It is the source of the conviction that we do indeed live, in a beautiful world.

1 The elder,

To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth.

2 Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. 3 It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it. 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

5 Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters,^[a] even though they are strangers to you. 6 They have told the church about your love. Please send them on their way in a manner that honors God. 7 It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. 8 We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth. 9 I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will not welcome us. 10 So when I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, spreading malicious nonsense about us. Not satisfied with that, he even refuses to welcome other believers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.

11 Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God. 12 Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone—and

even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true.

13 I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. 14 I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.

15 Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name.

[Back](#)

[Home](#)