

**Charles Bolden, NASA Administrator**  
**The 44<sup>th</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative Service**  
**Ebenezer Baptist Church**  
**Atlanta, GA**  
January 16, 2012

Rev. Warnock, Dr. Christine Farris, Dr. Bernice King, members of the King family and distinguished guests...Thank you for the honor of being in this hallowed space on this special day. As a former pilot and astronaut, I have had a few out-of-this world experiences. But I have to tell you that standing in the pulpit where Dr. King, Daddy King and now Rev. Warnock have inspired so many is an out-of-body experience for me. The spirit is truly in command this morning.

I bring greetings from the First Family: President Obama, First Lady Michelle Obama, and their daughters, Malia and Sasha.

Like me, they are all proud children of Dr. King's sacrifice and they have brought his ideals, his faith and his steadfast commitment to building the "beloved community" into the White House.

I also want to honor the fact that while Dr. King's influence and teachings reached every corner of this globe; it all began here, in this community...in this church... where he and Coretta raised their four children. The King children are testament to their parents' love and commitment to family.

As some of you may know, I was born and raised about 200 miles from here in Columbia, South Carolina. With my uncle by marriage, the late Judge R. Edwin Thomas and his wife, Mamie, life-long residents of Atlanta; my mother, Ethel, a Masters degree recipient from Atlanta University, my wife, Jackie, a graduate of Spelman, and our daughter, Kelly, a dual degree recipient of Spelman and Georgia Tech and a graduate of general surgery residency at Emory – I feel quite at home here in Atlanta.

And no, our son, Che` didn't go to Morehouse; he followed me in a career as a United States Marine after graduating from the Naval Academy.

Many of the values I have brought to my professional life, I also got from my parents...being bold and being fearless, and not allowing what other people think or say deter me from doing what is right. They taught me not to just sit on the sideline of life, but to strive to turn my passion and dreams into reality. My parents were greatly inspired by the tenets of Dr. King.

I wasn't called upon to be as brave as the freedom riders or the Little Rock Nine, but in my personal life, I took strength from Dr. King's work. I also learned the value of public service through my parents. That commitment to service led me to join the military – I attended the U.S. Naval Academy and enjoyed a 34-year career in the U.S. Marine Corps. When Dr. King was preaching and engaging in non-violent protest, I was diligently working to get into the Naval Academy.

Though some may think so, that's not really such a paradox. I wanted to serve my country as my father and my uncles had done in World War II when Blacks had to fight for the right to serve in our Armed Forces. I have also been fortunate to take part in government and civic life.

I honestly thought after the bumpy rides I had experienced as an attack pilot and an astronaut that the job of NASA Administrator would be smooth sailing. But, as we have all seen lately, the turbulence of Washington is like nothing in this world. That is why we are so blessed to have the steady hand of Barack Obama at the helm and the timeless teachings of Dr. King as a guide.

Many people think of NASA as purely about science and technology. But for me, the most important and satisfying part of my job is the opportunity to engage people from all walks of life... all parts of the world in reaching deeper into the cosmos and improving life right here on earth.

Dr. King understood that connection too. In his 1964 Nobel Peace Prize lecture, he spoke about the role of science in the evolution of human consciousness. He said, *“Modern man has brought this whole world to an awe-inspiring threshold of the future. He has reached new and astonishing peaks of scientific success. He has produced machines that think and instruments that peer into the unfathomable ranges of interstellar space. He has built gigantic bridges to span the seas and gargantuan buildings to kiss the skies. His airplanes and spaceships have dwarfed distance, placed time in chains and carved highways through the stratosphere... Yet in spite of these spectacular strides in science and technology and still unlimited ones to come, something basic is missing... We have learned to fly the air like birds and swim the sea like fish, but we have not learned the simple art of living together as brothers.”*

I've had the privilege of viewing our planet from orbit, where its serenity and lack of political borders belies the truth of what sometimes happens on the ground. I hope more people will have that chance in the future and under President Obama's ambitious plans for space, many more will. It can only increase understanding and bring about a realization of how much we are all in this together.

Until that day happens, those of us earthbound have Dr. King to look to as a guidepost on our way. Long before I took flight in aircraft and spacecraft, his principles were freely given to me. I carried them with me to Vietnam, to space, and now in my daily life in the decisions I make as a leader, a father, grandfather, husband, and citizen.

I am proud to serve a President and a country that have given NASA the mandate and the resources to honor Dr. King's dream by reaching new heights and revealing the unknown so that what we do and learn will benefit all humankind. That is our sacred mission and this is our sacred moment.

Thank you. God bless you. And God bless America.