

LINCOLN'S BIRTHDAY
Memorial Day Weekend –May 29, 2016 –I Corinthians 6: 11
The Church of the Covenant

This sermon was originally in my preaching notes and schedule as “Lincoln’s Benedictory”, as in, Lincoln’s blessing on the nation. But somewhere along the line someone as a typo changed it to “Lincoln’s Birthday”. And as I was looking at it in the bulletin for last week I decided that however it had come about that I liked the new title better than the old. Because what Abraham Lincoln referred to in his Gettysburg Address was a “new birth of freedom” and a new birth of freedom born of self-sacrifice, and that self-sacrifice is the very essence of Memorial Day and what we celebrate today as a people and as a nation. Reminds me of other great bulletin typos over the years –the one that said “the active Christian Parenting Class is being taught by Pastor STUD Broberg” is a favorite—evidently auto correct on the computer translates “Stu” into “Stud” if you are not careful! Ridiculous! Lincoln’s BLESSING to us, his benedictory, is that we are to have a “new birth of freedom”. No typo in that --Happy Birthday!

We may remember one of my favorite more recent movies, Steven Spielberg’s “Lincoln” starring Daniel Day Lewis as the melancholy writer of the finest prose ever written. It has a segment in it where Lincoln is speaking excerpts from one of his greatest speeches, his Second Inaugural Address, March 4th, 1865. By June first of that same year, Abraham Lincoln was dead and being eulogized. So it, along with his more famous Gettysburg Address, are his benedictory remarks for the nation, his last words to a nation he loved and fought to keep together, the UNION, one and inseparable, now and forever.

Gary Wills, in his book on Lincoln and Lincoln’s writings, entitled, “Lincoln at Gettysburg” notes that almost everything the great President wrote had scripture or Biblical allusions underlying it. Some were actual quotes from scripture; some just scriptural principles. Highly educated people in Lincoln’s day were so conversant with the Bible that their thought processes, their writing, and how they chose their words were all infused with scripture. How far we have fallen from that high standard.

So for example, when Lincoln is writing in his Second Inaugural, “Yet if God wills that it (the Civil War) continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman’s 250 years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword...” Lincoln is alluding to the Old Testament scriptural principle that only blood can erase blood, only the shedding of blood can forgive sin, the blot and stain of sin on any land can only be wiped away by the shedding of the innocent blood of sacrifice. Slavery was sin. Slavery produced a deep stain of sin upon the land. There was a dark blot of sin permeating the nation. And only the blood shed by the Civil War could hope to erase the stain of the lash of slavery from the nation. The blessings of liberty and of wealth and of peace accumulated up until that point, could only be defended and maintained by the shedding of blood in the Civil War, the nation’s worst conflict with heaviest casualties ever suffered. His point? --A nation suffused with sin will only be restored by the shedding of blood. As Lincoln concludes that section he notes: *“The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”*

Couple this now with Lincoln’s other great address, The Gettysburg Address, November 19, 1863. He notes there: “But in a larger sense, we can not dedicate –we can not consecrate –we can not hallow – this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far from our poor power to add or detract...” He is saying yet again, that it is the blood of sacrifice that dedicates and consecrates and hallows –that dedicates it to God, that consecrates (literally sprinkles it with the blood of sacrifice), and that hallows and makes it holy—the land. What people sacrificed is what wipes the land clean of its sin. The blood shed at Gettysburg and the sacrifices there made are what restored the

nation. And then Lincoln concludes with his stirring, familiar conclusion –He trumpets from the graveyard of those who died and made sacrifice for their nation—He says: “We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain –that this nation, under God, (and by the way the very place where the phrase “one nation, under God” originated is here in the Gettysburg Address), shall have a new birth of freedom –and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” It is the hope of every Memorial Day. He is saying that it is his eternal hope that we would learn the lessons of the past, and that these brave dead will not have died in vain and that there would be again a “new birth of freedom” in the land. That is the new birth that Lincoln hopes for at the end of his Presidency and at the end of his life.

Our scripture from I Corinthians speaks of the shedding of blood and the remission of sin and the cleansing which only ultimately God can do. This is where the eloquent Apostle Paul declares: *“But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”* (I Corinthians 6: 11) The Apostle is declaring that we are WASHED in the blood of Jesus shed at Calvary and so are made clean. The shedding of Jesus’ blood at the cross is where a person and a people and a nation are washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. And then if we are first WASHED then we are SANCTIFIED; we are made HOLY. When Jesus’ blood prevails for us as a person or as a people or as a nation then it is that God sends the Holy Spirit to indwell the heart of people and the nation. The indwelling and living presence of Holy Spirit alive in the heart is what makes us holy, nothing and no human actions can make us what only God can make us. And then if we are WASHED by the BLOOD of JESUS and we are SANCTIFIED and MADE HOLY by His HOLY SPIRIT, then we are JUSTIFIED, we are made into a RIGHT RELATIONSHIP with GOD through what Jesus Christ has done for us, and not by what we have done for ourselves. Then and only then is there NEW BIRTH. New spiritual birth for a person and new spiritual birth for a people and new spiritual birth for a nation, comes from sacrifice, the self-sacrifice of Jesus on a cross. It is then we are WASHED and the stain and blot of sin washed away. It is then we are made HOLY by the Holy God. It is then we are saved from ourselves and every pathway of self-destruction on which we are poised to walk. The self-sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and HIS precious blood is powerful enough to erase the blot and stain of a nation.

So all of this then presents us with a choice, I think. Do we wish to be cleansed the OLD TESTAMENT WAY, through the shedding of the blood of the best and brightest of our nation? Through the kind of sacrifice that happened in our own Civil War? Or would we rather choose to be cleaned through the NEW TESTAMENT WAY, through turning our hearts to Jesus Christ, through being WASHED and SANCTIFIED and JUSTIFIED, through being washed clean by the BLOOD of the LAMB? Can the birth of new freedom only be purchased through the carnage of Gettysburg? Or can it be achieved through what Christ has already done for us on the cross? On this Memorial Day, I know what my hope and prayer would be. I believe I know what makes for a just and lasting peace. I think it would be Lincoln’s hope and prayer as well.

“You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” Are we? Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, Pennsylvania
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*