

Lincoln Lecture Series at the University of Saint Mary

“Leadership in a Time of Crisis”

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If most of you are like me, you'd like the concert choir to come back out and sing a few more songs. That was wonderful. First, let me say that I'm flattered at your invitation to address this distinguished crowd tonight. What an honor to be the Lincoln Lecture Series guest speaker on this significant day, the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth.

I do want to say a special thanks to the University President, Sister Diane Steele, for this invitation. I want to share with you all that my team and I collectively have already benefited from this event, far more than you'll probably benefit from my words tonight. In the course of reading about Lincoln to prepare for this lecture, our team learned a great deal. I'm not sure I would have taken time to really reflect and think about the impact of Lincoln's life on our country or the timeless leadership lessons he taught us if it were not for your invitation. Many of us have studied Lincoln from a military perspective and know how he led the Union Army as the Commander in Chief, but tonight we look at him in a broader light.

I would also like to thank the Academic Dean, Dr. Bryan Le Beau, Ms. Laura Davis and Dr. Steger for coordinating the event; Mr. Pete Payne and the MidAmerican Bank and Trust Company for sponsoring the event; and other distinguished guests for the privilege of being here tonight. To the Sisters of Charity – thank you; your dedication to academic excellence and preparing leaders for the future continues to reflect the commitment and vision of the sisters who came before you to Leavenworth in 1858, and who later founded St. Mary's Female Academy in 1923. Your university remains relevant today and ready to face the challenges of tomorrow.

Thanks to the members of The University of Saint Mary ROTC program for your service to our country. The color guard did an absolutely wonderful job tonight. Your ROTC program has commissioned 11 officers since 9/11. Four have served or are serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, and two more are on orders to deploy. My thanks to LTC John Basso, your Director of Military Science, and to CPT William Chuber, his assistant, who was commissioned from here in 2004 as an artillery officer and served with distinction in Iraq. Six out of eleven officers commissioned from your program will have seen combat since 9/11 - amazing.

In our preparation for this Lincoln Lecture Series, there were several different directions we considered. Then we came across a quote by Lincoln which solidified what I would...and what I would not... talk about tonight. Lincoln stated, “Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt.”

I must confess, I'm not an expert Lincoln historian by any means. What I do know is that at the most difficult time in our history he saved our Nation, and through his quiet, subtle leadership he achieved extraordinary results, but it was not easy.

In our research, we also discovered that the press labeled Lincoln a disgrace to the Nation, suggesting that his short speeches (so I'm going to go long) only emphasized his lack of the needed qualities, intelligence, and education to hold such high office.

If we have time for questions and answers and I get a tough question on Lincoln, I brought our Fort Leavenworth historian with me. Where is Kelvin? Mr. Crow will take any tough historical questions. We're part of a team.

Lincoln struggled with many of the same issues we face today, and yet history clearly shows us he got it right. Issues like:

| 1860s | Today |
|---|--|
| Country at War in multiple states | Country at War in multiple countries around the world |
| Reconstruction efforts prove very difficult | Reconstruction efforts in Iraq/Afghan prove very difficult |
| Presidential elections in the midst of war | Presidential elections in the midst of war |
| Precarious wartime economy | Precarious wartime economy |
| Divisive partisan politics that made doing anything difficult | Fortunately, we don't have that today! |

As you can see, there are many parallels, and I think it deserves a closer look by leaders today. As the Army's senior leader responsible for educating and training our officers and noncommissioned officers, the parallels certainly have made a strong impression on me. Therefore, we should probably ask ourselves:

- What were the qualities and traits Lincoln was looking for in leaders of his time?
- Are they the same we look for today?
- Where do we get men and women like that?
- How do we develop them today?

These are the same questions that have been asked by presidents, generals, corporate executives, and leaders in academia for generations. They are timeless questions that today we ask again as:

- America's role in the world is questioned.
- Our economy suffers.
- We look for resolution in difficult wars.
- News surfaces of declining academic prominence among America's students compared to the rest of the world.

Times are tough. Some of you may have lost jobs; your companies may be experiencing cutbacks; or, you may be nearing retirement and you're worried if you will have enough in the stock market to retire comfortably. Yet the election results certainly demonstrate that in this country anything is possible. With hope, vision, and a lot of hard work dreams can still be realized.

It also reminds us of the important role of Presidential leadership in restoring hope and a vision for our country during tough times. On the 200th anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, it is only appropriate that we look back at some of his timeless leadership lessons for "Leadership in a Time of Crisis."

If Lincoln could speak to us tonight, I believe he would encourage us with some simple.... yet penetrating....words that would serve as both an inspiration....and a call to action. Three simple things came to mind that we must do:

- **We must DEMONSTRATE DISCIPLINE.**
- **We must DENOUNCE DIVISION.**
- **We must DEEPEN OUR DEVOTION.**

Demonstrate Discipline:

Abraham Lincoln's entire life demonstrated discipline. During Lincoln's funeral oration, it was said of the President "They saw in him, a man who they believed would do what was right regardless of all the consequences." The consequences were often grave, yet Lincoln had a clear vision and remained resolute.

Lincoln demonstrated discipline in many ways. First, in how he dealt with criticism from the press and from his subordinates.

Lincoln was not swayed by public opinion despite cruel, disparaging remarks from the press. Shortly after being elected President for the first time, the Baltimore Sun published an editorial that read, "Had we any respect for Mr. Lincoln, official or personal, as a man, or as President-elect of the United States, his career and speeches on his way to the seat of government would have cruelly impaired it... We do not believe the Presidency can ever be more degraded by any of his successors, than it has been by him, even before his inauguration." All this, and he hadn't even taken office yet!

Even his own subordinates questioned his leadership and personally attacked him. General George McClellan, his senior Army commander, famously abused Lincoln saying, "The President is an idiot,"... "nothing more than a well meaning baboon,"... "my inferior socially, intellectually, and morally,"...and his personal favorite, "the original gorilla." As a military officer, this is shocking to me, and even more so that he was not relieved. Can you imagine what would happen today?

Despite these attacks, Lincoln remained above the fray. He once quipped, "If I were to try to read, much less answer all the attacks made on me, this shop might as well be closed for any other business." Clearly, this demonstrates again that even in the face of harsh criticism he remained resolute.

Lincoln went on to say, "I do the very best I know how – the very best I can; and I mean to keep doing so until the end. If the end brings me out all right, what is said against me won't amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten thousand angels swearing I was right would make no difference." Lincoln had a clear vision, and nothing would sway him from achieving his goals.

What can we learn from Lincoln's example of how to deal with criticism that we can apply in our own lives? We, too, face many of the same challenges. Are we capable of humbly dismissing personal attacks or using self-effacing humor to remain positive? I dare say there's nobody in this room who has not had someone, at some point, say something derogatory about them. Remarkably, Lincoln refused to stoop to the level of those who ridiculed him.

Lincoln also demonstrated discipline when dealing with adversity and uncertainty. Can anyone in this room imagine losing a child...while serving as the President...while our country was ripped apart by a Civil War?

His son Willie died while he was the President. Those closest to him saw him respond as any human would – with grief-stricken pain. Elizabeth Keckley, former slave and dressmaker to Mrs. Lincoln at the White House, described the President’s response, "Mr. Lincoln came in. I never saw a man so bowed down with grief...he buried his head in his hands, and his tall frame convulsed with emotion. His grief unnerved him, and made him a weak, passive child. I did not dream that his rugged nature could be so moved.”

Yet, Lincoln’s anguish only made him a stronger leader. His tragic loss gave him a perspective on empathy....a strength born through adversity.

Lincoln would later use his personal tragedy to comfort others and help them through similar situations. In a letter to Fanny McCullough, daughter of an Illinois officer killed in battle in 1862, he wrote, “In this sad world of ours, sorrow comes to all.”....“You are sure to be happy again. To know this....will make you some less miserable now. I have had experience enough to know what I say....”

Lincoln also demonstrated discipline when dealing with inaction. Lincoln spent more time out of the White House than he did in it. He regularly visited troops in the field. When Lincoln was on one of his periodic trips to the front in 1862 to prod GEN McClellan to action, he took his friend O.M. Hatch for a morning walk. They stood overlooking the landscape of tents, and Lincoln asked, "Hatch, what is all this?" "Well, Mr Lincoln," replied Hatch, “this is the Army of the Potomac." Then Lincoln replied, "No, Hatch. No, this is McClellan's bodyguard."

Another instance of dealing with inaction reported by O.M. Hatch was a dispatch from Lincoln to McClellan that reads: "If you don't intend to use the army, won't you lend it to me?" McClellan replied that his horses were too fatigued to conduct offensive operations. Lincoln wrote back, "What has your cavalry been doing since the battle of Antietam that would fatigue anything?"

Despite these inactions and blatant disregard for Lincoln’s ability as Commander in Chief, he did not initially fire McClellan. He put aside these personal affronts for the sake of the Union and its Army.

Not all of Lincoln's challenges were from the military. Lincoln was not immune from this challenge even from his closest Cabinet members. Next is a true record of an exchange between President Lincoln and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton from the Official Record of the War of the Rebellion.

Dear Mr. Stanton: "Appoint this man chaplain in the army." A. Lincoln.

Dear Mr. Lincoln: "He is not a preacher." E. M. Stanton

Dear Mr. Stanton: "He is now." A Lincoln

Dear Mr. Lincoln: "But there is no vacancy." E.M. Stanton

Dear Mr. Stanton: "Appoint him chaplain-at-large." A. Lincoln

Dear Mr. Lincoln: "There is no warrant in law for that." E.M. Stanton

Dear Mr. Stanton: "Appoint him anyhow." A Lincoln

Dear Mr. Lincoln: "I will not." E.M. Stanton

Despite this clear insubordination, Lincoln didn't fire Stanton. For the good of the country, Lincoln demonstrated discipline and restraint in order to sustain the fragile alliances within his own Cabinet.

So how did Lincoln handle this exchange which undoubtedly infuriated him? One of the most effective means President Lincoln had of dealing with inaction was to write letters to the offending party and refute their claims. However, most of these letters were never sent. The President would sit at his desk, compose the letter, and then walk away without ever sending it. He felt vindicated in writing his response, but he did not want his remarks made in frustration to be made public. How many of us have sent an email out of anger or frustration and later wished we had not sent it?

Lincoln's response tells us much about the man. In each of these situations, Lincoln's actions and words were consistent. He demonstrated discipline. He never let emotions dictate his actions.

Lincoln realized that the world would watch his every action and word. His calm, consistent, collected disposition personified his stoic public demeanor which steadied the Nation. I marvel at Lincoln's ability to remain calm during times of crisis. How many times have we run out of patience with others when things aren't going our way? Yet when you look at Lincoln you see incredible discipline.

Our actions must match our words. Demonstrating discipline gives others insight into our true character.

One reason Lincoln was able to deflect personal criticism was because he would not allow it to be about him. He viewed himself as a humble servant leader. If it's not about YOU, then you don't have to take the attacks personally. You are able to keep your pride out of the equation. If your definition of success is not defined by your position, or rank, or wealth, rather by how well you serve those entrusted to your care, this will shape how you respond in every crisis.

If you are devoted to your cause, and you know how you define success, then you are less likely to get caught up in the day-to-day criticism and minutia. If you have a clear endstate and know where you're going, and you focus on that, it is easier to demonstrate discipline. I'm not sure I do all the time, which increases my admiration for Lincoln even more.

For Abraham Lincoln, his passion was preserving the Union – he did not waiver in his commitment to his goal. What do you focus on in times of crisis? Do you stay focused on your endstate and demonstrate discipline?

The second item Lincoln would encourage us to embrace would be to denounce division.

Denounce Division:

Not only did President Lincoln demonstrate discipline, he also denounced division. His first absolute principle was devotion to the Union. Above all, President Lincoln wanted to preserve the Union, and to do this he had to denounce division.

Lincoln denounced division in his famous speech “A House Divided Against Itself” which was delivered at the Republican State Convention in 1858. Lincoln stated, “A house divided cannot stand.” He believed the government could not endure permanently, half slave and half free.

He reminded everyone at his Second Inaugural Address, thought by many to be the noblest political document known to history, and which some call his “Sermon on the Mount,” that reconciliation was essential. “With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds....to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace.....”

Due in no small part to Lincoln's leadership, the majority of the North never seriously wavered in its commitment to the preservation of our Union, although there were many who questioned whether war and the destruction of slavery were the most effective means to that end.

President Lincoln denounced division when he picked his Cabinet. He overlooked personal differences in order to get just the right team – a story highlighted in the book “Team of Rivals” by Doris Kearns Goodwin. Some of his staunchest opponents in the primaries became his closest confidants during his Presidency. During his campaign, President Obama read this book and later reflected on Lincoln's timeless wisdom as he selected his Cabinet. This doesn't mean Lincoln didn't promote a “clash of ideas” – in fact this was part of the genius behind his “Team of Rivals.”

For example, Secretary of State William H. Seward was the favorite for the 1860 Republican nomination before the convention; Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury, second favorite; and Edwin Stanton, Secretary of War, a Democrat.

Lincoln's ability to denounce division and reconcile differences for the betterment of the Nation proved to be equally timeless today. In fact, one of the least told stories from Iraq is how we denounced division in Iraq when we met with insurgents who fought our Soldiers.

Our leaders sat down with insurgents who weeks before targeted our troops. We denounced division when we sat warring parties from Sunni and Shia tribes down at negotiations and began to work through an Iraq-wide reconciliation movement so each could move on and live in peace with one another. This reconciliation movement, timed with the troop surge, proved pivotal to reducing violence in Iraq in 2007.

My wife Stephanie and I denounce division about every 20 minutes in my house...not between us...but when my two young sons, both under 10 years of age, can't figure out who gets to play on the Sony Play Station next.

When we denounce division we are building unity.

So, our first point was to demonstrate discipline, and our second point was to denounce division, which brings us to our last point.

Deepen our Devotion:

If President Lincoln was here tonight, he'd remind us that we need to deepen our devotion. First, Lincoln was deeply devoted to our Nation – both North and South. When Abraham Lincoln took the oath of office, he swore to support and defend the Constitution of the United States, an oath similar to the one taken by the men and women of our Armed Forces today. President Lincoln, like all of our veterans today, was someone who, at one point in his life, wrote a blank check made payable to "The United States of America," for an amount of "up to and including his very life." Many of you in this room have done just that. In fact, to all of the veterans in the crowd, I want to tell you thanks.

Second, Lincoln would also tell us to be deeply devoted to equality, or equal protection of freedom for all. Even though several Cabinet members argued that such a move was politically damaging...might undermine his slim support in Congress, and could put the opposition in the majority at the upcoming midterm elections... Lincoln was not deterred. After the Union victory at the Battle of Antietam in September 1862, Lincoln made the announcement to free all slaves. It was followed by the actual Proclamation on January 1, 1863.

With the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln made a one-man decision that did not satisfy either side in the slavery controversy. Without asking their advice, he announced his decision to his Cabinet, revealing that this act was to carry out "a solemn vow before God."

Although the Emancipation Proclamation did not actually free a single slave at that point, it forever changed the whole course of American history by establishing a change in moral direction. The dramatic act of this one man's courage and conviction paved the way for our Constitution's Thirteenth Amendment to be passed by the Congress shortly before Lincoln's death, thereafter freeing all slaves within the jurisdiction of the United States.

Interestingly, one of the original copies of the 13th Amendment is on display here in the university library's special collection.

Lastly, Lincoln was deeply devoted to those entrusted to his care (Soldiers/families/students, etc). While nearly consumed by the political debates of his day, President Lincoln never forgot the price paid by individual families for the difficult executive decisions he asked them to execute.

Upon learning of a widow who lost several of her sons in the war, President Lincoln sat down and wrote a personal letter to their mother, Mrs. Lydia Bixby. In an excerpt from his letter, he offered the following comfort, "I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom."

In another example of his great devotion to the American Soldier, President Lincoln was asked to donate the original draft of the Emancipation Proclamation for an auction to raise money for a Chicago-based organization that helped veterans. Mr. Lincoln sent the document with a note accompanying it which said, "I had intended to keep this paper, but if it will help the Soldiers, I give it to you." The paper was put up at auction and brought \$3,000.

Lincoln was deeply devoted to a cause greater than himself. Lincoln said on many occasions, "The man does not live who is more devoted to peace than I am.....None who would do more to preserve it."

Each of us can make a difference in the lives of others. Each of us can devote our self to something bigger than our self. What is it that you can do? How do you contribute to our community, to something bigger than yourself? Can you lead a Boy or Girl Scout troop, volunteer at our VA Hospital, tutor or mentor a young adult, or serve in your church?

Just this past week, I had the opportunity to talk with a local Boy Scout Chapter here in town, and what I saw was exciting. There was a tremendous opportunity to mentor and give back to our youth, many of whom came from very challenging backgrounds.

The qualities and traits Lincoln exhibited, and those he looked for in his own leaders, are the same ones needed to lead America today and tomorrow; leaders who demonstrate discipline, denounce division, and deepening their devotion.

Where can we find these leaders? Many are sitting right here in this room tonight, and countless others walk through the halls of our elementary schools, our universities, and even our Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth every day. Just as Lincoln did two centuries ago, it is up to each and every one of us to educate, train, mentor, and inspire them to greatness. Perhaps one of them will become our next great leader. Perhaps one of them will become a leader like President Abraham Lincoln, a man whose legacy has stood the test of time and forged the foundation of our Nation. Lincoln's leadership ensured liberty and equality for all.

Thanks again for the opportunity to be with you all tonight. May God bless you, and may God bless America.