

**March 29, 2017 at Advent Lutheran Church in Cedarburg, Wisconsin.
Wednesday Evening Lenten Service. 7:00PM. Luke 11:14-23.**

On **June 16, 1858** more than 1,000 delegates met in the Springfield, Illinois, statehouse for the **Republican State Convention**. At 5:00 p.m. they chose **Abraham Lincoln** as their candidate for the U.S. Senate, running against Democrat **Stephen A. Douglas**.

At 8:00 p.m. Lincoln delivered an address to his Republican colleagues in the Hall **of Representatives**. The title of his speech was taken from our Gospel lesson for this evening from the **Gospel of Luke**.

"A house divided against itself cannot stand," a phrase uttered by **Jesus** and recorded in all three synoptic gospels (**Matthew, Mark, Luke**).

Most Americans know about that speech, and many people have quoted that storied title. But many Americans do not know the details of the aftermath, other than the fact that **Lincoln lost** that election to **Democrat Stephen A. Douglas**.

That's because the speech created many repercussions, giving **Lincoln's** political opponent fresh ammunition. **Lincoln's** friend and law partner **William H. Herndon** encouraged him not to deliver that speech because it was morally courageous but politically incorrect, afterwards said this:

"When I saw Senator, Douglas making such headway against Mr. Lincoln's house divided speech I was nettled & irritable, and said to Mr. Lincoln one day this -- 'Mr. Lincoln -- why in the world do you not say to Mr. Douglas, when he is making capitol out of your speech, -- 'Douglas why whine and complain to me because of that speech. I am not the author of it. God is. Go and whine and complain to Him for its revelation, and utterance.' Mr. Lincoln looked at me one short quizzical moment, and replied 'I can't.'"

As with all decisive and important moments in life we seldom appreciate their full meaning and impact until much later. That is the way of all scripture I believe. That is why I refer to this painting and Jesus in the garden agonizing over a decision whose full impact he could not have known until after he made it. It turns out that it was the same with **Lincoln's** house divided speech as recorded in **American history**, and I quote:

“Reflecting on it several years later, Herndon said the speech did awaken the people, and despite Lincoln's defeat, he thought the speech made him President. ‘Through logic inductively seen,’ he said, ‘Lincoln as a statesman, and political philosopher, announced an eternal truth -- not only as broad as America, but covers the world’”

Another colleague, Leonard Swett, said the speech defeated Lincoln in the Senate campaign. In 1866 he wrote to Herndon complaining, "Nothing could have been more unfortunate or inappropriate; it was saying first the wrong thing, yet he saw it was an abstract truth, but standing by the speech would ultimately find him in the right place."

All of this fits the pattern of the teachings of Jesus **beautifully**. When we follow our **conscience** with **courage, truth** and **integrity, and do not waver** from what we believe in, the eventual outcome may surprise both **supporters** and **antagonists**. The word for that, as we know, is **integrity**, something that seems to be woefully missing from our **culture** and **political** structure these days.

The point **Jesus** makes is rather obvious. If **God is good**, and if the **devil is evil**, then **God** is part of **anything** and **everything** that results in **good**. **Love, hope, healing, encouragement, compassion, kindness, honesty, truthfulness, courage, faith, humility.**

If you are not **for these things**, then you are for **something else**. If you are not **for me**, says **Jesus**, then you are **against me**. You cannot have it **both ways**. If you are not for **life** in all its manifestations, then you are for **death**.

These things are **not always**, I would even say **ever easy** to sort out, because, as we know from the story of the life of **Jesus**, and the **agony** depicted in this **beautiful** yet **troubling** painting, **events**, as they are happening, are seldom if ever what they seem to be.

And so, we live with that uncertainty, but we **also live by faith**, the faith that ultimately, we are all members of the human family created in God's image, and graced by God's unconditional love. A house, we can say, that will not long endure being divided. **The nail we drive this evening is the nail of all the things that would separate us in to them, and us, a separation that cannot stand!**
AMEN.

