

Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Amen.

Jesus speaks in our gospel text with the well-known and well-understood words that a house divided against it self cannot stand. In His words, there is no mixed meaning or ambiguity; this is not a parable to hide the truth, or a message that can be interpreted in more than one way. Jesus speaks the simple and full truth that division will give way to unity.

President Abraham Lincoln, then candidate for US Senate, used these very words from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke in his now famous “House Divided Speech”. Lincoln’s friends said the speech was too radical for the occasion and his best friend and law partner (William Herndon) considered it morally courageous but politically incorrect. Regardless of the opposition from within his own camp, Lincoln said, of the speech,

“The proposition is indisputably true... and I will deliver it as written. I want to use some universally known figure, expressed in simple language as universally known that is may strike home to the minds of men in order to rouse them to the peril of the times.”¹

Now many of us may begin to suggest a separation of church and state issue here, but the words of Jesus in the gospel text today is a universal truth that transcends far more than the time of the Pharisees and even more than God’s Covenant with Israel. The message of a ‘divided house’ is a reality that we experience in almost every walk of life. For that matter, division is a way of life since our human history began under our Creator.

God created man and in the first division created woman. Man’s partner was not to be the same, but different yet similar. The divisions continued with each choice and decision we made; decisions that were right to one person and wrong to the other. Divisions in the bible reached a biblical proportion when God confused the speech of all people at the Tower of Babel.

As time continued and the world populations and cultures formed, each area produced its own unique personality and identity; a visual means of division in the form of language, food, clothing, and traditions. In the very time of Jesus’s words there was division between the Jew and the Gentile; but fast forward to today and the division continues in new ways we are still discovering through modern technology, social media, and even political movements. Let’s face it, we live in a world divided.

Division is everywhere and Jesus tells us a universal truth that a “house divided against itself will not be able to stand”, meaning for us to stand together there must be an element, a bond, or a relationship that either ends the separation or unites that which is divided. My friends, Christ is that element, that bond, and that relationship that unites us all, regardless of our differences and divisions, because our Lord restores us to a holy relationship before our Almighty God and Father!

The divisions we observe and endure today are not entirely bad; you see the differences we encounter can be either opposed or welcomed to our advantage or to our disadvantage. When we open our self to what another person, culture, or even creature can teach us; then the division becomes a mutual benefit and a new means of hope. Just as we might see division or difference that may be harmful, another person might see that same difference as the means of their future; a means of personal growth; the means of their survival. This is not merely a matter of perspective my friends...this is a universal matter of faith.

¹ www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/house.htm

On Thursday, a member came into my office and we discussed several issues, one topic included haircuts. You see the stylist cutting the person's hair had shared that earlier in life they had been addicted to heroine. The individual teaching them the skills and craft of styling hair promised to continue to teach them if they would get help for their addiction. So after a year of healing, recovery, and support, the stylist finished her training and today she styles hair AND shares her story...not to alarm others, but to provide the hope and to reveal the *universal truth that the Spirit of God is working within all people for the sake of 'life-together'*.

This, my friends is at the heart of Jesus's words to the Pharisees in that God sent Jesus to the world and gave Him the Holy Spirit to save the world. The Pharisees accuse Jesus of having the spirit of Satan within Him to which Jesus replies, "how can Satan cast out Satan?" The Pharisees saw no good coming from Jesus and plotted to kill him; Jesus saw no love of compassion in the hearts of the Pharisees and Sadducees towards Him or towards the people God had entrusted them to care for. When the temple was destroyed in 70AD, the Great Sanhedrin ceased to exist; as did the two groups that comprised its membership: the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

A great division in the house of Israel has been eliminated as Jesus offers hope and unity too all through the saving grace of His death and resurrection. A great separation between God and His people has been reunited through the universal truth of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit the actions of God that prove the compassion, care, and complete and divine love Almighty God has for each of us.

Abraham Lincoln encountered and managed a division so great that our country lost 2% of its population or 620,000 lives. That same percentage today would equate to 6 million souls.² President Lincoln knew the outcome of the division would end in unity; one way or another and he shared, "I do not expect the house to fall, but I do expect it will cease to be divided."³ The division over slavery did cease.

My dear friends in Christ and in community, divisions will continue to exist, differences will remain, and disparity will persist among us until this world passes away. However, inasmuch as this is a reality we live with, the universal truth that our Lord reveals to us is that the House we live in will not fall! When we act and seek the universal qualities that our Lord revealed in His person and nature, we act, speak, and function in the universal language of love, compassion, care, and respect for one another and for life; life-together.

When we act out of the love that God expresses and reveals to us through His son Jesus Christ, the divisions become diversity, fractures become facets, and differences becomes new dimensions to how we share and celebrate the gift of life and the miracle of life-together. We cannot solve the problems in the world that tear people, lives, societies, and nations apart; GOD CAN AND DOES and He asks each of us to trust Him and allow His Spirit to lead us in a direction that will lift up life and glorify God. You see, this is the work of the Spirit; to make something from nothing and to reconcile all things to God.

The most severe separation suffered by both God and humanity began when we sinned, when we disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. The Holy Spirit immediately engaged and begin fulfilling a plan that God has already designed to restore the relationship with humankind. Through the death of Christ, the division between God and us has ceased and our House remains not only strong, but a true and universal fortress that will remain forever. A house that we will remain in forever and live with the peace that passes all understand to keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

² <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/civil-war-casualties>

³ *ibid*