

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Jan 27th 2014

“A house divided against itself . . . will not be able to stand.”

Many Americans recognize this not as a quote from the Bible, but from a famous speech given by Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln made this speech in his famous debates against Stephen A. Douglas.

Lincoln was running in 1858 for the U.S. Senate against the incumbent Douglas. It was two years before Lincoln was elected President and three years before the beginning of the United States' bloody civil war.

Douglas and Lincoln disagreed about slavery. Though Lincoln was not yet an outright abolitionist (he eventually became one), he desired no further expansion of the wretched and unholy institution.

Douglas was playing to both sides advocating “popular sovereignty,” by which he meant that new states should be able to decide for themselves whether to be slave or free. The focus was on Nebraska (my home state) and Kansas (its immediate neighbor to the south).

Lincoln said: “A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently, half slave and half free. . . . It will become all one thing or all the other.”

Douglas won the Senate election. Lincoln won history.

So anyway, what does all of this have to do with us ordinary folks living 150 years later?

In a sense, we are all houses divided. We cannot be Christians by compartmentalizing our lives and deciding to give ourselves to God for an hour on Sunday and devoting our minds and spirits entirely to material things the rest of the week.

Please don't misunderstand me. There is nothing wrong with working hard and providing for your family. I try to do this. There's nothing wrong with taking a vacation. But we have to see those things in the context of living the Gospel, not as something that gives a “rest” from the Gospel.

Believe me, I don't come close to a 100% score in living out what I've written above. But Jesus is

calling on us to do our best. Eventually, as penned by Lincoln, we'll become all one thing or all the other. Let's choose wisely.

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