

**GRASPING FOR MUCH-NEEDED GRACE:
20 Days of Nonpartisan Prayer in a Polarized Political Season
Vermont Conference (UCC) prayer initiative
Fall 2020**

Day 9 (Friday, October 23)

“Bind Up the Nation’s Wounds”

The Rev. Dr. Scott Couper

Scripture focus: *“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”*
(Psalm 147:3 NIV)

Reflection: Though not necessarily a confessing or practicing Christian, Abraham Lincoln’s writings are saturated with biblical imagery. Because he was poor and received little formal education, Lincoln was dependent on the Bible as a pedagogical primer text. As a child Lincoln essentially memorized the Bible and he used what he remembered to great effect because his audiences, both north and south, were largely Christian.

In his 1865 second inaugural address toward the conclusion of the Civil War, Lincoln, while still definitively on a political side held out an olive branch. In his address, Lincoln preached reconciliation and unity to the nation with the immortal phrase ‘with malice toward none’. At the end of the address Lincoln pleaded, “...let us strive to finish the work we are in, *to bind up the nation’s wounds*, to care for him who shall have borne the battle for his widow and his orphan, to do that which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations”.

“...to bind up the nations wounds” is extracted and morphed from Psalm 147:3 which reads, “[God] heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds”. The rest of Lincoln’s quoted sentence is inspired by James 1:27 that reads, “Religion that God our [Parent] accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after the

orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world”.

In offering an olive branch and encouraging reconciliation and unity, Lincoln expressed the paradox of certainty and doubt, self-assured conviction and humility. The address demonstrated that one can, and often must, choose sides, but one must not dehumanize the other.

As people of faith, we are to be living, breathing, walking oxymorons. We must proclaim the gospel with boldness to our enemies while in the same breath say to them “I love you, let us be together in peace despite our differences”.

After Lincoln’s death, secretaries found some written musings by Lincoln. One, undated and untitled read, “The will of God prevails- in great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both *may* be, and one *must* be wrong. God cannot be *for*, and *against* the same thing at the same time. In the present civil war it is quite possible that God’s purpose is somewhat different from the purpose of either party – and yet the human instrumentalities, working as they do, are of the best adaptation to effect this”.

Prayer: Gracious God, fill us with conviction, yet may our conviction be humble. May we not lash out, but rather criticize the bad by practicing the better”. Amen.

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