

March ASO Magazine Column **Lessons from Lincoln**

With February just passing us by and it being the month we celebrate Abraham Lincoln's birthday, I want to honor him by taking a closer look at him. I have found three great short stories about Lincoln's life and through them I hope to look closer at his values of leadership, ethics and morals. I want to start with the story I used in my introduction of Fritz Klein as Abraham Lincoln to the Jr. High Students of Tremont and Deer Creek / Mackinaw Schools.

Once while visiting the army's telegraph office in Washington D.C., the President came across three lost kittens. He picked up one of the mewling kittens and said, "Where's your mother?"

An officer overhearing Lincoln said, "Sir, the mother is dead."

"Well," said Lincoln, stroking the kitten, "she can't grieve as many a poor mother is morning for a son lost in battle."

Gathering the other kittens in his lap, he petted them and said gently, "Kittens, thank God you are cats and can't understand the terrible strife going on."

Then he turned to the officer in charge, "See that these poor little motherless waifs are given plenty of milk and treated kindly." The hand that had recently signed the Emancipation Proclamation turned to caressing three stray kittens.

I liked this story because it shows the deep moral strength that Lincoln possessed. He could sign the Emancipation Proclamation turning millions free and also make sure to take care of three little lost kittens. Far too often we find individuals that can take care of big issues and individuals that can handle small issues, but true strength is caring for the little issues in the same manor that you care for the large issues.

The first positive proof that the Civil War had ended was a wire from Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy, saying that the Confederate officials and army had abandoned the city.

While Stanton, Lincoln's Secretary of War, was away visiting troops, Lincoln ignored Stanton's recommendations and decided to visit Richmond. When his steamship landed at the Richmond harbor, he made his way to the town, only to find he was mobbed by former slaves who recognized him; then fell on their knees before him, exclaiming thanks over their deliverance.

Besides "Mr. President," some of the other phrases of address were "Savior" and "Redeemer".

Lincoln answered their cries with an order: "Don't kneel to me - it isn't right!"

"You must kneel to God only," he continued, "and thank Him for the liberty you now enjoy. I am but God's humbled instrument but you may rest assured, that as long as I live, you shall have all the rights which God has given to every other free citizen of the Republic."

Later that day, while visiting Richmond, Colonel William Crook, the President's bodyguard, observed "Mr. Lincoln never looked sadder in his life than when he walked through the streets of Richmond and knew it saved to the union and himself victorious."

At least two lessons here in this short story. First, in victory, Lincoln recognized that individuals that had lost the war would soon be his brethren again and in such will need our assistance. Rather than being ready to celebrate a hard earned victory, he saw that the destruction of the south that had led to this victory now needed his immediate assistance to rebuild. Secondly, while millions now looked at him as a "Savior" and "Redeemer", Lincoln was humble enough to not only explain their freedom to those that had yet to realize what they had received but also of such a strong religious character to realize that thanks needed to be given God who through his instrument of Lincoln had freed these individuals.

One last short story; this one involves Lincoln's time in the State Legislature.

In 1836, the Democratic-controlled Illinois legislature would not raise the revenue to enable the state to redeem its bonds. The Democrats wanted to embarrass the banks and their Whig friends in the business community. Under state law, default would be incurred if the legislature adjourned without action.

The minority-party Whigs led by Lincoln tried to prevent adjournment by denying the quorum necessary to vote for adjournment. On one fateful afternoon, the Democrat Speaker, who was presiding while Lincoln was addressing the House, realized that the presence of Lincoln and a few of his fellow Whigs constituted a quorum. He quickly had a vote for adjournment called.

Lincoln quickly sensed the situation and leaped out the State House window.

The lesson here, always have an exit plan ready.

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