

## A Personal Word for You

Mack McCarter

The year was 1858 and this nation had been embroiled in a deep struggle for a decade. The controversy over slavery had become an ideological debate about the rights of individual states versus a federal system of authority, dominating the political landscape. Arguments had raged at every level of political life. Men feeding squirrels on county courthouse greens argued the question. It invaded and dominated the conversations at tea parties. It was *the issue* on the state and national scene for ten long years.

When people debate for a long time, they become so entangled in the minutiae of the arguments that an emotional and mental overload occurs, bringing in its wake the condition which we politely call “confusion.” The danger of confusion for people as well as for society is that decisive behavior becomes suspended. **No one does anything to solve the problem confronting the group.**

On the evening of June 16, 1858, Abraham Lincoln stood before the state convention of his party in Springfield, Illinois, and accepted their nomination for United States Senator. His speech electrified the crowd. He cut through the confusion of ten years of mental meandering by defining the conflict at its most basic and compelling level. No more gray: now the people had clear black and white choices. His speech mobilized a nation to deal with the ethical choice before them. A war resulted, but that war enabled a mighty spiritual victory to be won for all mankind.

Lincoln’s speech was later chronicled as his famous, “House Divided Speech.” His theme was taken from Jesus’ words found in Matthew 12:25, “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” Lincoln’s opening sentence strikes the first ax blow at the base confusion’s multiple vines. Here is what he said: “If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do, and how to do it.” Now that may seem simple! But remember, simplicity brings clarity and clarity is the midwife of human action.

We, too, live in an age of terrible confusion. The disaster siren is stuck, wailing and wailing. Some people react in panic. They are running in every direction to try to find the cause and the cure of what is surely impending societal doom. Others react in resignation. They simply live on emotional overload. Their response circuits are blown by the massiveness of “the problem.” Still others react in anger. Unable to find the source of their life’s disruption, they begin to personalize their anxiety by projecting hatred on individuals and groups. They look for a scapegoat.

Now I believe that this present darkness is the result of a deep and terrible struggle for the very heart of our culture. It is a battle of immense proportion. The conflict is real and it is so pervasive that we face it daily, ceaselessly. It is omnipresent. We are in a real war. And we are losing. It is goodness versus selfishness. It is truth against the lie. It is symmetry opposing chaos. It is love versus apathy. It is vision against blindness. And it is hope against the void.

We are in a real war. And in order for us to win, we must meet and fulfill the conditions and principles necessary to win any war:

- We must have a *clear understanding* of what “victory” really means.

- We must have a *simple strategy* to achieve that victory.
- We must have *definable steps* to take in order to follow the strategy.
- We must have *trained and equipped “soldiers”* who can effectively take those steps.
- These *soldiers must be committed to sacrifice* everything, even their lives, in order to win.
- We must be armed with *adequate weaponry* with which to “fight.”
- We must have the unqualified and sacrificial *support of the “home front.”*

Our struggle is not against any group of people. It is not against any one person! Our struggle is against the forces that make us less than what God intends! It is against conditions which destroy people. It is against the unseen powers that in some inexplicable way pit us against each other and then discard us after we are empty.

What the great pragmatist William James said at the turn of this century still rings true: “What we need is the moral equivalent of war!” War mobilizes. And we must mobilize the population of our community, not in the horrid ritual of killing, but rather in the *higher calling of commitment to care for one another!*

In next month’s *NEWS* I will show how we are seeking to define, measure, and fulfill each principle to win this war for the heart and soul of our cities and our society. *And please remember that we are not seeking to preserve the present state of things.* That would mean true defeat. No! *Victory can only mean the radical transformation of our lives and our communities from pervasive self-centeredness to caring, other-centered living.* We need each of you to join in this mighty effort as we unite across radical, denominational, and social lines to fight the good fight and to win victory!