

We have just experienced another Presidential election. I did my duty, but I got so tired of campaign commercials that I began to mute the TV whenever one of them came on. I wish I could have voted for Abraham Lincoln. He was a man who could stick to the essentials, to the things that were important. He loved this country and was totally committed to the preservation of the Union. After the battle of Gettysburg, which was a turning point in the invasion of the North and thus a signal of the nearing end of the Civil War, he was asked to deliver a dedication address for the cemetery where so many who had lost their lives were buried.

Unlike most politicians (especially those of today) he did not concern himself with his own political glory; he was touched by the sacrifice of the lives of so many men for what they believed in. The other speaker spoke for two hours and was much lauded by the press. Lincoln spoke only a few minutes and was pretty much ignored. But the only thing that he said in his speech that wasn't true was that it would not be remembered. To me it is one of the greatest speeches of all time.

What makes it so memorable? Because it flowed from the heart of a true patriot. Lincoln had seen so many die for the cause. The last sentence of the speech reads, "It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth." The phrase "the last full measure of devotion" is my favorite. They gave their all; there was no more to give. And Lincoln knew that he must not allow their deaths to have been in vain.

Mr. Lincoln was a Bible reader, and perhaps he drew this phrase from the words of Christ in John 13:1, "he now showed them the full extent of his love." This was on the occasion when he washed his disciples' feet; more importantly, it was just hours before he was crucified. Christ indeed showed the full extent of his love, for he gave until the last drop of blood was shed. Why did he do this? His words are recorded in John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." You and I are the reason that Jesus was so filled with devotion! How can we measure such a thing? We ask our children how much they love us and they hold their hands far apart. Someone has written: "I asked Christ how much he loved me... and he opened his hands out wide... and died!" Christ on the cross truly showed the full extent of his love.

Lincoln in his great speech commemorated a cemetery; we worship a risen Savior. But we both honor the "last full measure of devotion." Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift!

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