

A Divided America Cannot Stand

On June 16, 1858, senatorial candidate Abraham Lincoln delivered his famous “house divided” speech, including these memorable lines:

A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently, half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward, till it shall become lawful in all the States, old as well as new—North as well as South.

Lincoln was quoting from the words of Jesus, who had been accused of exorcising demons by the power of Satan. This could not be, the Lord explained, since it would mean that Satan was driving out Satan.

As Jesus said, “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation. And every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. Then how will his kingdom stand?” (Matt. 12:25-26).

One hundred years after Lincoln’s speech, in a 1957 sermon, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. drew on this same concept, stating, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.”

This is a message America needs to hear again. We are

literally tearing ourselves apart.

And so, rather than the Vegas massacre drawing us together, it is being politicized and propagandized, often in the most vulgar ways. Is there no respect for the dead and grieving?

Normally, I'm careful to hyperlink any relevant links, wanting to document every point I make. But to do so here would be to inflame more anger, so I will not name names or link quotes. (Those wanting to find the sources can readily do so.)

I will just say this:

Now is not the time to blame Democrats or Republicans.

Now is not the time to attack whites or blacks.

Now is not the time to malign people of prayer and faith.

Now is not the time to blame the victims. (Yes, a now-fired TV executive went as far as tweeting her lack of sympathy for the murdered and wounded, "because country music fans are often Republican gun-toters.")

Now is not the time to make statements like this: "No way not to politicize this tragedy. It's about gender & race as well as access to guns. Considering it random is comforting & dangerous."

Unfortunately, when we hear such ridiculous, ugly sentiments, our tendency is to bash back.

The left makes an outrageous comment and the right responds with indignation and mockery, and both sides are further provoked. Are we completely unable to step higher? Must all of us sling mud?

Although I'm a conservative, I'm not a gun person myself, and if gun control laws can save lives, let's have the discussion. If that's not what we need at all, then let logic and common

sense prevail. I have no personal dog in the fight.

And whatever we can do politically and legally to protect the innocent, let's do it. This is not about politics, it's about saving lives. I trust we can all agree on that.

But whatever we do, let us have common decency, and let us recognize that during the hurricanes and during the shooting, strangers were helping strangers, regardless of their ethnicity or skin color or sex. Do you think anyone stopped to ask, "Did you vote for Trump or Hillary?" as they risked their lives to help others?

I'm not pretending that our divisions are not deep. To the contrary, they are very deep (and wide). The distance between Planned Parenthood and the pro-life movement is massive. The differences between socialism and capitalism are countless. The chasm between LGBT activism and biblically-based, family values is huge.

This is just a sampling of what divides us today and, to be candid, I'm not prepared to compromise my deeply held convictions one inch.

But if we continue to speak and act irresponsibly, if we don't learn to sit down together at the table of reason (to quote my friend James Robison's constant appeal), if we despise and disparage each other, we will quickly destroy each other. Can we not differ without vitriol and viciousness? Can we not differ without demonizing one another?

For those who say to me, "Brown, you're dreaming," I would say in reply: 1) I'm not ignoring the depth of our differences. I'm simply calling for responsible behavior in the midst of our differences. And 2) Can we at least give this a try within the family of God, among fellow believers? Perhaps we could start with some civility and respect here? Is that too much to ask?

It was Lincoln who also spoke these prescient words: "America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves."

For the sake of our children and grandchildren, let us chart a path of restoration by speaking the truth in love, with words that heal rather than destroy. It can start with you and with me.