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Radio and television speech

'LINCOLN REVISITED'

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Every year in this season I like to visit with Abraham Lincoln. How often we lament the fact that he is not here and sometimes in sheer agony people will say, even as John Milton once said of somebody, "Thou shouldst be living at this hour." Well, he is here. He still speaks to the American people like he always did. Perhaps you remember in the letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Hebrews he was commending on the righteousness to be gained by Abel the brother of Cain and the sacrifice he made and then he said of Abel being dead, he had speaketh. Well, perhaps he is dead but he still speaks and he still speaks particularly to his fellow countrymen. We see him in the Memorial, we think of him in the Tomb in Springfield, but there are a thousand and one places where you can jump on the transport of fancy and just conjure up that Lincoln is there and that he is speaking to us. There are so many reminders of him, of course. At the moment we are dealing with a resolution for a constitutional amendment in the Congress to take care of the succession of the President and the Vice President in case something untoward like death, assassination, resignation or retirement should happen. The matter has been considered before. It was considered when William Henry Harrison died and John Tyler became President. It was considered when he was assassinated by an evil bullet and Andrew Johnson succeeded. It was considered when Garfield was shot and Arthur succeeded. It was considered when McKinley was shot and Theodore Roosevelt succeeded. And then in our own time, it was considered when the late John Kennedy was shot and President Johnson
succeeded. The problem is still here as a reminder of him. They are making plans now to reproduce the Second Inaugural all over again when he made that deathless Second Inaugural speech and that will be a reminder of him. If only those evildoers and particularly he who pulled that trigger could have thought of the last sentence in the Second Inaugural "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right". See everywhere there are reminders of him and being dead yet speaketh it is so well that we revisit with him every so often and we need so desperately to do it today. We need his spirit as never before. His devotion, for instance, to fundamental things. You remember when Horace Greeley, the great editor, wrote that Prayer of the Twenty Millions and his appeal to the people of the country to somehow dissuade you from the course that you were pursuing. And then the letter that you wrote to Greeley and oh how you put him right. This powerful editor who influenced so many decisions and opinions in this country and when he got all through you wrote that short simple letter and you just said, "Dear Mr. Greeley: My paramount object is to save the Union." How many people tried to get you off that track? How many people tried to invest that civil strife with other reasons and other purposes? But there in a sentence, "My paramount object is to save the Union". That was it and that is the kind of devotion we need to fundamental things in what may be regarded as a kind of a superficial aid. So maybe there is a hope that we can retrieve some of those fundamentals in our national life before they become irretrievably lost. That is why we so desperately need your spirit. I think of your reliance upon the people, if only they have the facts. When was it
that they tried to urge you to make some action against Maximilian, the Archduke who set himself up as the Emperor of Mexico? Knowing the fears that were here, there and everywhere and what did you say? You just said that you were going to put on some pressure to get those European powers to get Maximilian's troops out of Mexico and General Juarez and his people would take care of Maximilian. How truly you spoke, Mr. Lincoln. For when those troops came out they did take care of Maximilian and so our sister Republic to the South could go forward and somehow exemplify and achieve its own destiny as a Republic in the Northern Hemisphere. You had a capacity for striking through all the superficial and going to the heart of the problem to see just where the answer lay. And there again your trust was in the people, once they were given the facts that they would understand. We need something else, something that is so easily overlooked in this day and age. I think we need a little more of your courtesy. We need a little more of your good manners. In your day they associated you with uncouthness and with the backwoods as if you had no manners and as if you had no courtesy. What a delight it must have been to you when you walked out of the White House and took a stroll and came up along Riggs Bank in Washington and there every morning, as I understand, you used to see this colored man with one leg and I can just imagine the broad grin on his face as he took off his hat and doffed it to you and he said, good morning, Mr. President, and then you would take off your hat and doff it and say, good morning. A lot of people wondered why you did that to so humble a person and what did you say? You said you just couldn't be outdone in manners by a humble person. We need some manners in our
life today. It has gotten out of hand a little. We need a little more courtesy, one toward another and we need a little more restraint of spirit that you have always manifested because it will add sweetness and it will add grace and it will add light to our society. We need a little of that and I hope we can retrieve it. There is another thing, your consummate patience. Sometimes I think this is the impatient age. Everything has to be done overnight, nothing can wait. Nothing can wait until the spirit and the mind and the heart reflect upon some of the crises and the challenges that confront us today. I think back to your last speech, the last speech you made before that evil bullet sent you down to the ages. That was the night you talked to that serenading crowd at the White House. I think it was on the eleventh of April, 1865. A move that was afoot in Louisiana, twelve thousand people had already signed a petition to come back into the Union and you were encouraging the idea to be sure there were some things to be desired but you did not want this opportunity to go by without giving encouragement to the people of Louisiana to adopt the right kind of a constitution, to make the right kind of concessions, and then to come back into the sisterhood of States. And while you were belaboring that point and doing it so very constructively it was on that occasion that you said this, "we shall sooner have the fool by hatching the egg than by smashing it" and the crowd laughed. But how pointed and how appropriate that was. We shall sooner have the chicken, I might say, by hatching the egg rather than smashing it. But that is the kind of impatience that somehow is upon your country today. And may we sit at your feet and gather a little of that patience because there are crises, there are challenges,
there are so many things that require the utmost of patience, prayerful patience if you please, if they are to be surably sound and so desperately we need that patience that you exemplified all during your existence. And then we need some restraint when we are under pressure. I think of your second election but particularly your second nomination. Do you remember that group that went to Cincinnati and set up a rump convention. They wanted you to withdraw and you had some premonition that you could not win. You remember when you took that piece of paper and laid it upside down on the table and had the Cabinet members sign it. They didn't know what they had signed. It was put in the War Department files under lock and key but you had written that there was a possibility that you might not be re-elected if renominated and then there would have to be a caretaker and you would have to give some instructions to whoever was to follow you in the Presidency. Why, some of your best friends were in that group. Senator Sumner, Millard Fillmore a President of the United States, Horace Greeley, Cameron of Pennsylvania, people you knew and they wanted you to withdraw. Oh, you could have been so intolerant about it. You could have been intolerant about the effort to get the soldiers vote on your side. You might have gotten up your hackles in the language of the day when they insisted on that peace conference on that vessel at Hampton Roads. You didn't want to do it and fortunately nothing came of it at the time and so you went on to fold up the destiny of this country and put the great golden mark of Peace upon it once more and when we could go forward and retrieve our real destiny. We need you and you are here, being dead yet speaketh. I wonder why don't we communicate with you oftener. We could get so many answers out of this period. I salute you.