



Admiral James M. Loy
“Spirituality in Leadership”
Remarks for Spring Prayer Breakfast
April 11, 2002

Thank you, Chaplain Waite , for that very kind introduction, and thanks to all who have had a hand in preparing this wonderful opportunity to take a moment together to worship the God of our faith and give thanks and praise for all the blessings we enjoy.

First and foremost, I am not a preacher. I love to listen to good preachers...those with simple, clear messages that I can put to work in my life. I am qualified to preach the good news of the Coast Guard. As most of you know, I won't pass up an opportunity to do that!

But, this morning, I'd like to focus on just a simple lesson.

For me, our theme is clear...leadership does have spirituality as a foundational dimension.

In my recent State of the Coast Guard address, I offered that faith is an important element in our temporal and secular lives.

I suggested that our faith sustains us as we work long and hard hours to meet the new challenges we have as an organization since September 11th.

I suggested that those hundreds and thousands of volunteer Americans, who responded to the nightmares of the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the crash site in Pennsylvania, were operating on seven cylinders of adrenalin and at least one cylinder of faith and spirituality.

That foundation is always there when we need it most...in combat...in the center of a hurricane...in a number 8 sea-state...in the emotional crisis of a lost family member...in the hours of sitting with a feverish child.

Faith and spirituality offer an advantage to leaders in such moments, whose actions are buoyed by the energy of their faith.

They are enabled.

Each of us is blessed with the opportunity to know that advantage by simply accepting the grace that God offers.

That is the simple message for this morning. Just say YES to the GRACE God offers.

I don't know about each of you, but I like to read and hear stories that help me understand.

I'd like to tell you three stories and draw a common lesson from them that will amplify our simple message.

Each is about a well-known character, and my guess is that you have heard them all.

As I tell the second and third stories, try to hear the common thread that will become our simple message.

My first story is about Joseph.

The story of Joseph from the Old Testament book of Genesis captures the imagination of anyone who comes from humble beginnings to a prominent place of authority, responsibility and leadership.

Joseph was the favorite son of a man named Jacob. Not surprisingly, his brothers envied him. When he was seventeen, his brothers sold him into slavery to a caravan of merchants. They then conspired to lie to their father, telling him that Joseph had been killed by wild animals, and they produced his bloodied coat as evidence to prove it.

The merchants took Joseph far from his home in Canaan and sold him to a wealthy man in Egypt, named Potiphar. In the house of Potiphar, Joseph proved himself to be a very honest, capable and reliable servant, despite whatever resentments he might have had about the bad things that had happened to him. Potiphar rewarded Joseph by placing him in charge of his entire household.

Joseph had a strong sense of integrity. But it's strange sometimes how your strength can be your Achilles' Heel.

Potiphar had a wife, who tried to seduce Joseph, but failed. When Joseph ran from her, she grabbed his coat, and he left it behind as he fled.

She was a very unhappy woman. When her husband came home, she showed him the coat, and accused Joseph of trying to seduce her. Joseph went to prison.

So far, among other things, Joseph had lost two perfectly good coats and now his reputation. Life was not going quite the way he planned it!

While in prison, Joseph came to the attention of the great ruler of Egypt, because he had shown an uncanny knack for accurately interpreting dreams. Pharaoh had been

having troubling dreams that neither he nor his wisest advisors could figure out. So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, who was able to interpret the dreams to his satisfaction.

The dreams warned of a severe famine that was to come after seven years of plenty. Joseph advised Pharaoh to establish a long-term plan to prepare for the seven lean years by storing grain during the years of plenty. So, he did.

Pharaoh recognized in Joseph the same integrity, honesty, and diligence that had won him so much approval in Potiphar's house.

So, Pharaoh decided to place Joseph in charge of the master plan to prepare for the coming famine.

In fact, he was so impressed with Joseph that he decided to promote him to something like a Chief of Staff. Nobody in Egypt had more power than Joseph, other than Pharaoh himself.

So Joseph developed a strategic plan and directed a huge economic program to take a portion of each year's harvest for seven years, and store it away. It got to the point that the granaries overflowed from the abundance of crops—so much so, that there was more than enough for the population of Egypt.

As I've said many times...strategy matters!

Consequently, when the lean years came, which they surely did, there was enough surplus that people from surrounding countries came to buy grain. When things got really hard, even the people from far-away Canaan heard about the food surplus in Egypt. And they came to buy. So the land of Egypt profited tremendously.

Meanwhile, Jacob—now a very old man—sent his sons from Canaan to Egypt to buy enough grain to keep his family from starving.

Of course, Joseph was there to greet his brothers when they arrived in Egypt.

Now Joseph had been away for almost twenty years. His brothers didn't expect to find him in Egypt. So they didn't recognize him when they approached this mighty ruler to buy food. And, of course, Joseph made them sweat and fret a bit before he told them who he was. The remaining story is one of redemption and forgiveness.

When his brothers finally recognized him and asked his forgiveness for what they had done to him—afraid all the while that he would kill them in revenge—Joseph's response was that he believed in God's plan for his life, and that it was a good plan, in spite of all that had happened.

You see, he had come to believe that God had allowed all the things that had happened—the bad as well as the good—to put him in a position to benefit a great many people.

The tremendous power with which he had been entrusted was given to him so that he could help provide for the needs of others.

And he wielded his great power and influence to do just that. Quite a story for a young man from the middle of nowhere with a very inauspicious start in life.

Joseph had traits that are necessary and common to great leadership. Despite some indications in his story that he was a cocky young kid who invited and aggravated the envy of his brothers, he later developed a character built on values such as integrity, decency in his behavior toward others, and diligence in doing the right things.

These are the same spiritual values that I learned a long time ago as a youngster in church—and I must say they were best learned at that early age.

In the Coast Guard, we refer to these same values as our Core Values: Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty. They serve us well. We make every attempt to instill and reinforce these values in our new recruits and cadets, because they are so essential to good leadership. And we reinforce them at every opportunity.

Those who incorporate these values in their daily lives develop the traits of leadership. Those who just cling to them like an empty coat do not.

But most importantly, Joseph had been in the darkness, and he had found GRACE. Hold that thought...

My second story is about our sixteenth and greatest President...Abraham Lincoln.

Lincoln was born in 1809 in a primitive log cabin in what was then known as Hardin County, Kentucky. His father was an illiterate, wandering laborer. His mother a frail, sickly woman.

They were forced out of their home when he was only seven. His poor mother died when he was nine. He had virtually no formal schooling.

He first attempted a career in business in 1831 and failed miserably. A year later, he ran for state legislature unsuccessfully. That same year, he lost his job and applied to law school, but was laughed out of consideration because of his miserable qualifications.

Not long after that humiliating ordeal, he started another business, using money he borrowed from a close friend. Before the year closed, however, that business faded and failed. Lincoln claimed bankruptcy and spent the next seventeen years paying off debt.

In 1835, he fell deeply in love with Ann Rutledge, only to have his heart broken when she died soon after their engagement.

The following year, he had a complete nervous breakdown and spent the next six months in bed recovering.

In 1838, he sought to become speaker of the state legislature and was defeated.

In 1840, two years later, he sought to become the elector of the state, and was defeated.

Three years later, he ran for Congress and lost.

In 1846, he ran again for Congress and won. Only two years later, he ran for reelection and was soundly defeated.

In 1849, he sought the job of land officer in his home state, but was rejected.

In 1854, he ran for the Senate of the United States. Again, he lost.

In 1856, he sought the vice-presidential nomination at his party's national convention. He got less than one hundred votes, suffering yet another embarrassing defeat.

In 1858, he ran for the US Senate, and lost again. Finally, in 1860, Lincoln was elected to the presidency of the United States, and soon after endured the most devastating war our country has ever experienced.

His perseverance rewarded him with unprecedented political success, and he was reelected for a second term. Sadly, only five days after Lee surrendered, on the fourteenth day of April 1865, only about a mile from where we sit together, Lincoln was assassinated. He was dead before reaching sixty years of age.

How long had Lincoln been in the darkness!

From his birth in 1809 to the Presidency in 1860! And then through the terrible days of the War. A long time in the darkness...only to then find GRACE and the ability to articulate it like perhaps no other!

Listen to these words:

“The judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether...With malice towards none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all

which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”

This second inaugural address was a profession of faith. Lincoln, perhaps our greatest leader, indeed had been in the darkness and had found GRACE.

Story number three is one of my favorite characters in the New Testament...of course, with the exception of Christ: Saul of Tarsus, who later becomes Paul the Apostle.

Our first glimpse of Saul is both brutal and bloody. He is more terrorist than saint. There is blood spattered on his clothing. Certainly not like the beautiful colors in Joseph's coat.

He holds the robes of the Pharisees, as they stone to death a vibrant follower of Christ: Stephen...the first martyr.

The sixth chapter of Acts describes Stephen. He was a young Christian, living in Jerusalem, “full of grace and power.” He was one who spoke with Spirit...one anointed with wisdom...and whose countenance shone “like the face of an angel.”

Saul watched as they stoned him to death, and then congratulated his killers.

This is the same Saul who, when converted, became the Paul who gave us the letters of the New Testament...letters to the Corinthians, the Romans, the Galatians, the Thessalonians.

His letters to Timothy from prison are so full of wisdom and counsel. But he began in spiritual darkness.

He later became known as the “apostle of GRACE.”

From the depths of the darkness to the serenity of a life of devoted GRACE.

Three stories—what do we find as our simple message?

First...we may learn best when challenged from that darkness. Change doesn't happen without struggle. Joy doesn't happen without pain. We are each offered our darkness from which to learn.

Second...these three great leaders turned to their spirituality...to their faith in God, when they made their difference in the world. They each found GRACE when it mattered most.

Third...regardless of what you have done...no one is beyond hope.

That's the great hope of the Christian message, and I am certain it has its parallels in all the great religions of the modern world.

Don't ever be stuck on what you were ...GRACE found in faith will give you wings to soar.

We can each become a leader filled with GRACE...steeped in spirituality.

Listen to these beautiful words:

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, blind but now I see.

T'was grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares
I have already come.
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

Just say YES to the GRACE God offers.

