

# LINCOLN LORE

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## THE MOST SOLEMN EASTER

While there may be no spiritual depression in America the economic need everywhere is bound to temper the season of exaltation which is usually experienced at Easter time. One is led to recall other years when the normal approach to this significant religious celebration was influenced by current events.

The most solemn Easter in the history of America was April 16, 1865, when from every pulpit in the North and many in the South there emanated words of lamentation rather than praise. The assassination of Abraham Lincoln which occurred on Good Friday, April 14, 1865, was the cause of national mourning.

Inasmuch as the dates of April, 1865, coincide with the dates of April, this year, it seems timely to refer to some of the reactions of the clergy who felt moved to lay aside their prepared messages of joy and speak of the great calamity which had fallen on the nation by the death of Abraham Lincoln.

The excerpts which follow, selected from messages delivered by the preachers of Boston, Massachusetts, are typical of those heard throughout the nation.

*Rev. Warren H. Cudworth*

"We would have celebrated the joyous festival of Easter today, . . . But, yesterday morning like a clap of thunder from clear skies, came the appalling announcement, 'The President has been assassinated.' . . . And is it not strange that Good Friday was the day, of all days in the year, chosen by the murderer for his infamous deed? It is one of those remarkable historical coincidences, which, whether we will or not, challenge observation and cause remark; and, no doubt, could our President have spoken after he was shot, he would have forgiven the cowardly perpetrator of this inhuman act, and rounded the parallel with a final and complete imitation of our Lord's example."

*Rev. Cyrus A. Bartol*

"What a contrast the last tragedy to our late jubilee! God seems to have chosen sacred days for his messages—on two successive Sundays appointing celebrations of victory—and now giving to Good Friday and Easter a new association indeed in Christian minds!"

*Rev. James Freeman Clark*

"Perhaps the crime committed last Friday night, in Washington, is the worst ever committed on any Good Friday since the crucifixion of Christ. It was not only assassination—for despots and tyrants have been assassinated—but it was patricide; for Abraham Lincoln was as a father to the whole nation."

*Rev. Chandler Robbins*

"And now, on this blessed Easter Sunday, which we were expecting to celebrate with double gladness, through the association of our joy for our country's triumph with our rejoicings for our Redeemer's victory, He has permitted our land to be shrouded with such a tragic gloom as even the radiance of the resurrection cannot wholly dispel."

*Rev. W. S. Studley*

"This bright Easter morning is one of the saddest, and, at the same time, one of the most hopeful mornings that ever dawned upon the American people. . . . Abraham Lincoln, our President, whose mental and moral vision was as clear and true as a sunbeam, and whose great heart was as tender and loving as a woman's, a man who possessed such a genial and generous nature that he had scarcely a personal enemy in the world. . . . this wise and just and merciful ruler lies murdered in the capital!"

*Rev. E. N. Kirk*

"On Sunday, the 16th, the voice of song has died in our streets. The triumphant banner of the Republic wears the weeds of widowhood. A word can start the tear in every eye. Arrangements for rejoicing are suspended. A nation is making preparations for a funeral; the greatest funeral but one it ever attended; yes, the greatest: for, the people never buried such a President at such a time—a murdered President."

*Rev. W. R. Nicholson*

"Easter is the synonym of joy and triumph, and Easter-day has come. How sweetly its blessed light has dawned upon us this morning. And yet it has brought with it the saddest tidings—yes, in an important sense, the saddest tidings—which have ever concerned us since we were a people. Today, our whole land is filled with sorrow and mourning; not only so, but with the keenest sense of national shame and mortification."

*Rev. William Hague*

"Never, we believe, since the death of Washington did the countenance of every man, every woman, and every child, over the broad area of the republic, express a sentiment of grief so profound and keen as that which greets us now, whithersoever we may turn."

*Rev. Rufus Ellis*

"Our Easter flowers shall remain in the house of prayer, not because we are glad—we cannot be glad today—but because we are full of the great hope which is the Christian's anchor, and which holds in the stormiest sea. They are providentially here to grace the burial of our Chief Magistrate. . . ."

*Rev. Edward E. Hale*

"'And on earth peace, good will toward men.' The martyrdom of Good Friday does not make us veil the motto, though we read it through our

tears. Of such martyrs, it is as true as ever, that their blood is the seed of the church."

*Rev. George L. Chaney*

"All speech is so feeble in the presence of the national grief and indignation, that I would choose to be a silent worshipper with you, while each should listen to the solemn preaching of the event, as his own heart might only interpret it. But since the occasion, and your general expectation, not unfairly demand speech, I will try so to speak as not to disturb your hearts' conference with its own bitter grief."

*Rev. E. B. Webb*

"Men hold their breath, and turn pale at the appalling words. Citizens meet, and shake hands, and part in silence. Words express nothing when uttered. All attempt to express the nation's grief is utterly commonplace and insignificant. An eclipse seems to have come upon the brilliancy of the flag—a smile seems irrelevant and sacrilegious. Even the fresh, green grass, just coming forth to meet the return of spring and the singing of birds, seems to wear the shadows of twilight at noonday. The sun is less bright than before, and the very atmosphere seems to hold in it for the tearful eyes a strange ethereal element of gloom. Surely 'the night cometh.'"

*Rev. Henry W. Foote*

"Our hearts, so recently, alas! throbbing with an exultant sense of security in the blessed assurance of approaching peace, have been quickly clothed again in the habit of anguish so familiar, but now in a sackcloth blacker than the loss of many battles could have brought, whose hues of mourning must hereafter darken all our lives. . . . Nor even can God's whitest angel of peace return, save with tear-dimmed eyes, and the disquiet of a mighty sorrow."

*Rev. John E. Todd*

"Such was the dreadful story. It was ticked off at first, at midnight, to a few blanched faces, and was rejected. It came again with stronger authority. It stared out in grim and terrible lines from the morning papers, making the brain of the reader to reel, and the heart to grow sick. It was told in husky and frightened tones by one to another, and with voices choked with tears. It leaped from face to face, pale and livid, as we never saw the faces of the people before. It began to fringe the flags, and darken the streets which were but recently so gay. It began to create gloom, and a hush and loneliness in business haunts, which, but a few days since were filled with crowds and processions and cheers and music. It began to wail from steeple to steeple. It broke at last from the cannon's mouth in solemn thunder. And, at length, we begin to realize today, that our beloved President is no more."