

## Memo to the Concordia Community

January 7, 2021

As I sat in front of my television yesterday afternoon and evening, watching the events of the day unfold, I was reminded of how I spent the afternoon and evening of September 11, 2001. As I watched – and re-watched – both of these national tragedies play out in front of me, I kept wondering how this could happen in and to my country that I deeply love. Last night I also wondered what I would say to you, as our Concordia community, this morning. Throughout the time, three things have kept coming to me.

1. Sitting on the shelf behind my desk is a bust of **Abraham Lincoln**, a hero of mine since boyhood. He was often invoked yesterday including a drawing that had the image of him, as depicted by the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, weeping with his face in his hands. This morning I re-read his *Second Inaugural Address* in which he states quite clearly that the object of those who supported slavery was to strengthen, perpetuate, and extend their interest, “for which the insurgents would rend the Union, even by war.” That seemed to be the picture I watched unfold inside the Capitol during the afternoon.

Lincoln ends his address with words that seemed to ring more true of the scenes that took place in the Capitol through the evening and into the early morning hours when he states, “With malice toward 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 to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.” May God bless those who “strive on” in that work in the weeks, months and years ahead.

2. Sitting on the shelf behind my desk is a copy of Michael Roth’s book entitled *Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters*. Roth, in referencing Thomas Jefferson, notes that “the health of a republic depends on the education of its citizens...and that, as members of an educated citizenry, we are better able to recognize and overcome our distance from – our strangeness to – one another.” He writes later on, “education depends fundamentally on our ability to generate optimism and find reasonable (and defensible) ways to sustain it.” The actions of those who stormed the Capitol were neither reasonable nor defensible; the actions of those who stood up for the democratic process as outlined in the US Constitution were reasonable, defensible, and generated optimism. I am proud that Concordia University Texas, as outlined in its mission, continues to educate in a way that reflects **the traditions of a liberal arts university**.
3. Sitting on the shelf behind my desk is **a cross – a plain, wooden cross** that my predecessor, Tom Cedel, handed down to me. This morning as I looked at that cross, I was reminded of the servant nature of Jesus “*who, being in very nature God...made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant.*” Leadership begins from this position, not one of outrage, arrogance, or fear. Leadership exhibits the message of Jesus, so eloquently stated in the fifth chapter of Matthew: *Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are the meek; blessed are the merciful; blessed are the pure in heart; blessed are the peacemakers.* It is in that spirit, and that attitude, through which we as a nation can heal and move forward after yesterday’s events.

Finally, let me remind you of the purpose of our institution, namely to cultivate goodness, truth and beauty. While the events of yesterday happened thousands of miles away, we will have the opportunities today to cultivate those same ideals in our residences, our neighborhoods, our offices, our classrooms, our fields of competition, and in all of the places in which we encounter the other. May those encounters be ones that exhibit care, compassion, listening, speaking the truth in love, and knowing that Christ walks beside us, no matter the circumstance. I pray that we, as a nation, can move forward in the same manner we do here at Concordia University Texas: With One Heart and Joyful in Hope.