

From the Rector; Wednesday, December 31, 2008
Reflection

In January and February, by way of observing the 200th anniversary of his birth, our Sunday morning Adult Forum will study Lincoln's religion. My Thursday (this week, Wednesday) reflections during this time will focus on the readings we'll be considering the following Sunday.

Lincoln was ambitious, and his ambition focused on intergenerational rivalry. He both admired the generation of the Founders, and hungered for an opportunity to outshine them. In his 1838 Address to the Young Men's Lyceum in Springfield, he counseled those of his generation to make a religion of respecting the rule of law. This, he said, would ground the Founders' achievement in civic virtue. Reading between the lines, though, we sense Lincoln chafing at his self-imposed restraints. He wants something more than what he recommends, i.e., an opportunity for glory and honor equal to that of Washington, Jefferson and the rest.

He sensed the danger of his own powerful desires, though. He warns that if the "sons" can't eclipse the "fathers" by positive achievement, they'll turn their passions to some violent and destructive enterprise. We don't have to look far to find examples of this phenomenon in the 21st-century world. In the Biblical narrative, we see not only examples but a consistent witness to the capacity for evil resident in even the noblest aspirations. As the New Year and new beginnings approach, we remember, as Lincoln did with great insight and eloquence, that the story of human ambition, with its promise and threat, is not a new one.