

A Barrel for 50 Cents

The more I read about Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States, the more I am impressed with his wisdom and compassion.

A story is told about his early days in business – a mercantile venture with a man named Barry as his partner. It was a difficult time, and the store was not doing well; in fact, Lincoln and Barry were gradually going broke. At one point, Barry said to Lincoln, “Abe, how long do you think we can hold out?” Lincoln is reported to have answered, “I don’t know. If we have to sell out, I should hope we would have enough left for me to buy *Blackstone’s Commentary on English Law*.”

A few days later, a rickety, dust-covered wagon stopped in front of their store. A weather-beaten, gaunt man stuck his head out. By his side was the pinched face of his wife and two small children. The travelers declared they were headed west and had run out of money. They wanted to know if the merchants would be interested in buying a barrel.

There were many empty barrels in the store, as well as barrels filled with merchandise they could not sell. But as Lincoln looked into the faces of anxiety and need, he said, “Well, I guess a fellow could always use a good barrel. What do you want for it?”



“Fifty cents,” said the wagon driver. Lincoln reached into his pocket and gave the man 50 cents, reputed to have been practically his last dime.

Sensitivity was a remarkable characteristic of Lincoln. That quality, along with discernment – the ability to determine if someone is seeking to take advantage of an individual or a situation for some selfish reason – will serve anyone well.

Is it any coincidence that Lincoln’s heart for people led him to the presidency at a time when citizens – of both the North and the South – needed him most?

– Beecher Hunter