



God Revealed

John 14:6-14

TRINITY PULPIT

His name is Homer Sewell, but total strangers tend to call him “Abe.” One look at the man, and you know exactly why: Homer Sewell bears a spooky resemblance to Abraham Lincoln.

This all started about 30 years ago in Orlando, Florida, when Sewell grew a beard and schoolchildren suddenly began to call him “Abe.” He completed the effect by adding a black suit and stovepipe hat, and developed a show called “Abe Lincoln’s America”. Sewell has now made over 2,400 appearances as the 16th president, performing for more than two million people. “As soon as I get my suit on and my hat,” he explains, “I become Abraham Lincoln.”

Sewell is a dead ringer for Honest Abe, even without makeup, and you’ve got to admire his attention to detail.

The car he drives is a Lincoln, of course.

Sewell is part of a group called the Association of Lincoln Presenters, a union of men and women dedicated to bringing Abraham and Mary Lincoln to life. There are currently 117 Abes and 32 Marys across the country, and together they form a group of passionate Lincoln-lovers committed to presenting the president and his wife to the world in costume and in words.

It must be a strange sight to go to a convention of the Association of Lincoln Presenters and see dozens of Abes and Marys walking around. The group naturally includes Sewell, who was given the “Lincoln of the Year” award in April 1999.

Whether it is Abraham Lincoln or the Flying Elvises we know that people can make a living appearing to be or pretending to be someone famous. However, here in John 14 Jesus makes a claim that is beyond appearing to be or pretending to

be someone famous. Jesus says to his disciples, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. The words I say to you are not my own but the Father’s. The Father who is living in me is the one doing the work.” Jesus goes beyond saying that he is a representative of the Father or a resemblance of the Father. Jesus says that he and the Father are one. Jesus is the full revelation of God.

We are turning our attention in our series on “Starting With Why” to the topic of revelation. This is the third part of our focus on God in this series. Let us remember where we have been so far in our thinking. Our focus verse is John 3:16. Let’s say it again together:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever would believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life.
John 3:16

Today we continue our focus on those first two words. For God. As we have looked at the doctrine of God we have focused so far on two ideas. First, we have looked at God as creator. What we discovered is that God is the creator of all things and that this means God and creation are not the same. However, God is revealed by creation. Because of creation, God is bound to us and us to God. Finally, because of creation God is always creating and recreating in our lives. The second focus of the doctrine of God was on the Trinity. We discovered that the Trinity is a mystery that we affirm. We affirm the doctrine that God is three distinct persons and yet same in essence because it is Biblical witness, the teaching of Jesus, and it identifies the God of the Bible of which we speak. The Trinity reminds us that we have been invited into a Holy community that exists beyond time itself. A community where there is delight in the other, selflessness, and sacrifice. A community where

there is eternal joy.

Today we turn our attention to another thought and that is the thought of revelation. When we speak of God we speak of a God who reveals. The idea of revelation means that we believe that the God of the Bible self-discloses to humanity. That is, we do not know God because we have somehow made some assent to God. We know of God and we know God because God chooses to reveal to us. Whatever we know of God and understand of God is because God seeks a relationship with us. God is a revealing God.

In theological terms there are two types of revelation. The first we speak of is General Revelation. General Revelation is exactly like it sounds. General Revelation simply means that God reveals God's existence in this world in a general way. I like to think that General Revelation is essentially the revelation of the knowledge of God.

In Romans 1, Paul reminds us of this truth. Listen to what Paul writes:

since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. (Romans 1:19-20)

Eugene Peterson translates it this way:

But the basic reality of God is plain enough. Open your eyes and there it is! By taking a long and thoughtful look at what God has created, people have always been able to see what their eyes as such can't see: eternal power, for instance, and the mystery of his divine being. So nobody has a good excuse. (Romans 1: 19-20)

General Revelation states that through creation the "basic reality of God" is plain for all to see. Paul names two qualities about God that is plain in creation or General Revelation. The first is eternal power. The phrase for eternal power means that in the creation of the universe we can plainly see the power of a God. Some would say a divine spark or a divine cause. The idea that the more you know of

creation, observe it, you stand back in awe. There is in creation a revelation of an eternal power.

The second phrase is divine nature. The term is found only here. It means not the God head but godhood. That is, if there is this eternal power, then whoever or whatever is behind it must be God. Whoever is responsible for creation and this kind of display of creation must be God. As humans we know we could never create such beauty and such incredible preciseness in the balance of life.

There are many examples of the delicate balance that is necessary and precise for our universe to exist and for us to be alive. One from Physics as stated by Physicist-philosopher Robin Collins:

Gravity is fine-tuned to one part in a hundred million billion billion billion billion. The cosmological constant, which represents the energy density of space, is as precise as throwing a dart from space and hitting a bull's-eye just a trillionth of a trillionth of an inch in diameter on Earth. One expert said there are more than 30 physical or cosmological parameters that require precise calibration in order to produce a universe that can sustain life.

Paul does not have this knowledge; but Paul, in a General way, says creation reveals God so that it is plain that there is a god. This is not only the truth for those of us who know the God of the Bible but it explains humanity's creation of gods. There is something in the human spirit and consciousness that asks those bigger questions. So Paul says God has made self-known. We call that General Revelation. Thus, all people for all time have known of God's existence simply by being on this earth.

However, general revelation is just an elementary understanding of God. It is general because it is known by all, but there is another type of revelation, and that is Special Revelation. Sometimes we call it particular revelation. This is more than God revealing knowledge of God; this is a personal self-disclosure of God's character and personhood. This type of revelation is more revealing and personal.

In our culture today it is easy for us to think we know someone when we really know *about* someone. How many Facebook friends do you have that are really not your friends. In fact, you have never

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met them in person and the only thing you really know about them is that you assume they are real and that they have some connection to you through someone else. This is even more true when we follow celebrities or politicians on twitter or instagram. We get entry into their lives. We see pictures of their everyday lives. We might even interact with them on social media. We know where they went to dinner last night or that their grandchild had a birthday. We know whom they support politically and we might know where they went on vacation. Soon, we begin to think we really know these people. There has been some revelation of that person through social media. However, we know the truth. We know we do not know this person – we simply know about them. In fact, if we were finally to meet them, we might discover they don't look as put together as they do on instagram. We might discover that their perfect children are really quite rebellious. We might discover that their perfect marriage has its challenges like others. We might discover that their perfect job is just one long day of stress. In other words, when we know them we discover that we did not know them.

Now contrast those with whom you really share life — your parents, your child, your spouse, your sibling, your best friend — the person or persons who know your secrets, disappointments, frustrations and dreams. Think of how deeply you know some people in your life. Now the truth is what we discover is that there are actually very few people on the face of the earth that we can say we truly know.

Here is the good news for us: God wants to be known the way we know our deepest relationship. In fact, the great outcome of going to heaven is that we shall know as we are known. You see God already knows our deepest dreams, frustrations, fears, doubts and thoughts. This is the part that is mind-blowing. God desires for us to know him as deeply as we are known by God.

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There is a difference between General Revelation, the knowledge of someone and Special Revelation, knowing someone as the result of their self-disclosure. God did not simply make self-known through creation in a general way but he also makes self-known in a personal or special way.

Let's think about the special revelation of God. Jesus places these special revelations in three categories

in John 14. First, there is the experience of the Father. Jesus says if you don't believe in anything else at least believe on the miracles themselves. In other words, God has revealed self in the moments in history when God has broken through in a special way. We can recount instance after instance in the Old and New Testaments when God breaks in. In the Old Testament it begins right after man and woman sin against God. God comes walking in the cool of the day, in the Garden of Eden, calling out their names. Such an intimate picture of God and God's creation. The first act of God after sin against God is God comes to us. Think of all the other stories of the Old Testament when God calls and intercedes.

There is Noah building an ark, Abraham offering Isaac, Moses at the burning bush, the people of God at the Red Sea, or marching around Jericho. There is the giving of the law. There is Samuel hearing his name called in the night. There is Isaiah hearing his calling. The prophets all have a calling as the result of God speaking. We get to the New Testament and we find God's full special revelation in the person of Jesus. One of those ways that Jesus declares the coming of the Kingdom is the miracles he performs so that everyone might believe as the result of the miracles. So, Jesus says there is special revelation through the moments God breaks into this world in special ways.

Jesus says we know the Father by the words of Jesus. We can say that the Bible is a special revelation of God. The scriptures, we believe, are God breathed; thus, they are inspired. The Bible is a special revelation of God. Thus when we read the Bible, we can learn of God, God's nature, God's character, and God's ways, and gain more and more knowledge of God.

In this way the Bible is a special revelation of God. So much, that many times we refer to the Bible as the word of God. However, we have to be careful at this point. Because the Bible refers not to itself as the word of God but to Jesus as the Word of God. Thus, the Bible is a special revelation but even the Bible is not the full revelation. In fact, to elevate the Bible to the place of full revelation is to make an idol out of the Bible. We treasure the Bible but we do not worship it.

In John 5, Jesus is being questioned by what authority he has healed an invalid that had been in that condition for 38 years. Jesus' response is very

interesting. Jesus says he has authority from the Father, and then he says:

And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

Jesus is saying that the scriptures do not give life, but what gives us life is to know the One of whom the scriptures speak. We can know the Bible from cover to cover and be able to quote it verse to verse, but if we do not personally know Jesus, the one whom the Bible reveals, then we have missed the point and worst of all, we have missed the life that God has for us.

So this brings me to my last thought on revelation: God has self-disclosed in General Revelation through creation and in Special Revelation, but God has self-disclosed fully in Jesus.

Phillip makes a request that must have broken the heart of Jesus. Jesus has spent life with Phillip and been teaching, preaching, and working. Jesus says to his disciples, "If you have really known me you will know my Father as well." Then Phillip

says, "Show us the Father and that will be enough." Show us the Father and that will be enough. Phillip is right yet he is still missing it. Phillip is right. If we can see God, know God, that is enough. That is all we need. However, Phillip does not quite yet understand that standing right before him, in this moment, is God. Jesus says, "Don't you know me?"

Phillip, don't you know me?

My friends, this is the question for us today. The doctrine of revelation is not just a stale doctrine, but it has as its root this question from Jesus, "Do you know me?"

You can hear in this question a sense of pleading. Phillip, don't you know me? Can you hear this question to you and to me God is asking us? Look at this world and the very fact you are here and breathing. I exist, I am, and I am real, God screams to us through time. But more than that, think of the moments when I broke into time and space. I have given you my word to read that reveals who I am. I have given you understanding. But more than all of this, out of love, I gave you my one and only son. Yes, there is General Revelation, and yes, there is Special Revelation, but Jesus reminds us of this: it all points to him.

Can you hear his question to you today — "Do you know me?" ▲



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