

Message by Pastor John  
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It all started about 30 years ago in Orlando, Florida, when Homer 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 is a dead ringer for Honest Abe, even without makeup, and you’ve got to admire his attention to detail. He even drives a Lincoln! 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. A group of passionate Lincoln-lovers committed to presenting the president and his wife to the world in costume and in words. In today’s lesson from the gospel of John, it certainly seems that Jesus is laying the foundation for an “Association of Jesus Presenters.” Jesus knows that his death is coming, and he is preparing his disciples for the period that lies ahead, when he is not going to be physically with them.

“They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

The disciples are invited to be Jesus Presenters — people who carry forward the words and works of Jesus Christ, and offer his grace and truth to the world. Like members of the Lincoln Presenters, their mission is to educate and inspire, and to present the powerful insights and actions of their leader to the world. Disciples are to be dead ringers for Jesus, so that when people see them at work, everyone will know that they are Christians.

For Homer Sewell to make this work, he's got to put on the stovepipe hat and have the beard thing working. He'll dress in period costuming every time he appears as Lincoln.

Christians don't need to do that sort of thing. We are to wear the mantle of love to be sure, but what identifies us as Christians is not, or should not be, some external object of jewelry or dress, or a bumper sticker that says "Honk if you love Jesus."

We are challenged to mimic our master in our daily walk through life. When people observe us, they should do a double take. They should sense that they have seen the Christ.

Does this sound unlikely, or even impossible? It shouldn't. Last week we read about Jesus's promise that "the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do" (v. 12).

Then he prays that the disciples may be one, just as Jesus and God the Father are one.

"On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you."

There is to be a strong and seamless connection between Jesus and God and all of the followers of Christ, an unbroken thread of unity and love and shared mission that ties all three very tightly together. Homer Sewell can only pull this off cosmetically; Christians make it work by who we are, as new creations in Christ. Jesus Presenters should never display anger or judgment, they should strive-despite all our human failings- to offer compassion and curiosity and concern.

Instead of trying to fix others and help themselves, Jesus Presenters concentrate on helping others and fixing themselves. Understanding

who God is, is a theologically and philosophically daunting task. Jesus makes it simple, a sort of Theology For Idiots. “If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen God. I am in God and God is in me.” If we’re not sure how to describe God, we look to Jesus. Then, as those who model their lives on that of Jesus, we are able to show God to the world.

When we contribute time, money or a bag of canned goods to a food pantry, we’re making the statement that God wants no child to go hungry. When we reach out to someone who is troubled, we’re showing the world that the Lord cares for every one of his lost sheep. When we organize a small group in church, we’re reflecting a divine desire for spiritual nourishment. When we care about a social issue, we’re showing the community that our Lord is concerned about justice.

In all of these ways, we’re revealing the power and character of God. We’re doing the works of Christ, and continuing his ministry in the world. We are Jesus Presenters. We do our work knowing that the power of God is working through us. Jesus continues to be active in our lives, promising that he will do whatever we ask in his name, meaning that he will answer us when we ask for help in revealing the power and character of God. In addition, the Lord God gives us the Holy Spirit, the one who teaches us, and reminds us of all that Jesus has said to us (v. 26). Jesus has selected each of us to join his association.

Homer Sewel says: “As soon as I get my suit on and my hat, I become Abraham Lincoln.”

We don’t need to grow beards or acquire the clothes of a first-century Palestinian. We aren’t even required to travel the country and spread our message to millions of people. Instead, we are invited to become one with God and Jesus, and to let the Holy Spirit work through us. We are asked to perform the works of Jesus, and through these works to reveal the power and character of God to the world.

ID Please! Please prove who you are!

You can hardly do anything these days without those questions being asked. We show who we are by what we do in Jesus's name.

Amen.