

## Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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As we read from the Scriptures each Sunday, it's usually the gospel reading that grabs my attention. Today, however, it was Isaiah's vision. If you don't know much about Isaiah, here's what you need to know for today: First, he was rooted in the Zion tradition, which celebrated God as the great king, and second, Isaiah saw Jerusalem (a.k.a. Zion) as the place that God founded and decided to live.

So, it's no wonder that in Isaiah's vision God was sitting on a throne, like a king. It's also not surprising that his divine vision was in the temple, which was only found in Jerusalem. Now, what *was* surprising is that the hem of God's robe *filled* the temple. After all, that is a MASSIVE hem! Just think about it. The bottom of the robe, the place where the fabric was folded over ever so slightly, it was that edge that took up the temple. I imagine it filled the room from edge to edge and still, the robe ballooned out of the temple, covered the city, and likely expanded far beyond that.

Another part that grabs me were seraphs—which are winged cobras that you might see in Egyptian art. The seraphs had two wings to fly, two wings to cover their feet (which is a euphemism for their private parts), and two wings to cover their face. The wings covering their face were important because they're protecting themselves from the overwhelming glory of God. After all, Jewish beliefs hold that no one sees the fullness of God and lives. That is why when Isaiah saw God he said,

“Woe is me!” because he thought he was dead. // But today’s reading is not about Isaiah, rather it is about God. It’s about a giant hem and overwhelming glory.

I think that’s why Isaiah’s reading was chosen for Trinity Sunday. Because the doctrine of the Trinity is one of the ways that the church has tried to pack God’s robe into the temple. It’s theologian’s way to try and contain God to better study the divine. It’s a way that we’ve tried to take our understanding of God found in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Gospels, and the early church and make it all fit together.

Over the years, the church developed the Trinitarian doctrine which names that God exists as three “persons” but as one being. All the persons have a single divine nature—so we say that all persons are co-equal, co-eternal, they have a single essence, nature, power, action, and will. None of these three persons were not created, but they are eternal without a beginning. The three persons are all one God. So, Karl Barth argues that it’s not “the Father,” “the Son,” and “the Holy Spirit,” where each is a different name for God, but rather, “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” *is* God’s name. Confused yet? Well, you’re in good company. Here’s a Schitt’s Creek version one of my colleagues made to explain what’s going on.

Sure, it’s a branded, immersive, experience, and the Trinity is indeed a mystery. But it’s a mystery because it is our human attempt to explain God, whose hem itself is too gigantic to grasp. So, you and I—we get little glimpses of God. Small parts of the whole, and that makes God seemingly so mysterious.

But the thing about humans is that we don't do so well with the grey zone, the unknown, and the unknowable. So, we take that part and make it the whole. We try to make God easier to comprehend. We strain to make it simple. We work to make God's fullness into a soundbite, or a tag line, or an 8-minute sermon. But if we're only grabbing a little bit here and a little bit there and from that we're making it an absolute, then we've only taken one small thread of God's hem and made it the whole. We've taken a piece and made it the puzzle. And, then, our faith is built around a part. And when we become so zealous about that one part, then we no longer are open up to experiencing the whole.

That's where this community of faith comes in. It's where we need to be challenged and confronted by things that we cannot hold in our mind. That is why I'm going to ask you to do like we did at the beginning of the service, and get out your phone to help me finish this sermon. Again, take the link on the screen and then click the button "share (worship polls)" and type in one word that describes God. You can submit as many times as you'd like but give us words that describe God.

You see, there are so many ways to understand God's fullness. And imagine, all of these things are just the beginning, just the hem of the robe. So, that's why I'm a little skeptical of theological gymnastics that try to sum it all up. Sure, the doctrine of the Trinity is helpful in so far as it gets us asking questions as we seek to better understand God's overwhelming glory. At the same time, these doctrines are only helpful if we acknowledge that it's just the hem.

And, it all makes me wonder, what if we acknowledged, owned, and embodied that we *only* have the hem? What if we realized that the hem might be at the church, but the rest of God is in every other day, in every other place, and is never going to be smashed into our molds?

I dare to think that if we came here each week to find the hem, then we could be on our way to exploring the rest of God's robe out in the world. For, we'd know what God's garment looks like. Maybe then, we could touch the hem of God's robe during worship. Maybe we could be like that unnamed woman who touched Jesus' hem and was healed. Perhaps that's how we are healed. Maybe healing for our nation, our church, and our world is the realization that we only have the hem. To realize that the hem is not the whole. To hold loosely to our convictions and instead seek to know and understand our God who is all loving, all glorious, and all too big to ever comprehend. To remember: it's only the hem; so, hold it lightly. And to respond by seeking to understand and growing in love. For, maybe, just maybe, that is the gift of the Trinity. Amen.