

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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This week was a struggle. Many of you know that I'm not a fan of Holy Trinity Sunday, which happens to be today. The texts for this Sunday each year don't often speak to me. I also get frustrated when I cannot fully grasp the one theological topic that we devote an entire Sunday to each year. On top of that, our Vicar and Seminarian have completed their time with us so I couldn't pass these texts off to someone else. So, I studied today's texts, prayed about them, read countless commentaries from intelligent theologians, and thought about it all week but still this sermon wasn't coming easily.

In these situations, sometimes what I do is read through the text slowly and see what words, phrases, or images grab me and then, I try to understand why they're holding me and how it connects to our Christian tradition using a Lutheran lens. So, in frustration, I tried just that this week, and the images that stuck with me were all from three verses in Isaiah. Which is why I asked Tammi to read a few verses from it this morning.

The first image that struck me was how "the hem of [the Lord's] robe filled the temple." After all if only the hem of the robe fit inside the whole temple, then that is a HUGE robe that could not be contained by the largest of buildings.

The other image was that of the Seraphs, which are the highest order of angelic being. Now create a mental picture of these seraphs. Start with a cobra snake. Then, add wings onto the snake, like you may have seen in Egyptian art. These seraphs had six wings. Two of their wings kept the cobra airborne, two were covering their feet (which is a euphemism for their private areas), and the final two wings were covering their face. After all, Jewish beliefs hold that no one sees the fullness of God and lives. And one Seraph said to another “holy, holy, holy.” It’s a memorable image.

These two images paired with my frustration with both the texts and the theological topic of the day got me thinking. You see, the Trinitarian theology that we celebrate today focuses on the three persons of the Trinity – namely the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Theologian Diana Butler Bass notes that “Trinitarian theology was largely developed after the New Testament was written in response to genuine confusion in early Christian communities about the relationship between Jesus and God, Jesus and the Spirit, and the Spirit and God. We often read backward into the text, and we imagine there is clarity where there was not. Arriving at the doctrine of the Trinity was a genuine struggle for our theological forebears (and often remains problematic even now).”<sup>1</sup>

And, holding all of that together, got me thinking that perhaps the point of Holy Trinity Sunday is not to explain the Trinity or to find trinitarian themes in the scriptures, but maybe it’s to hold on to the words of the Seraph who said “holy, holy, holy.” After all, the word “holy” names something as sacred or awe-inspiring. And so, perhaps what these odd images and the only Sunday

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<sup>1</sup> [https://dianabutlerbass.substack.com/p/sunday-musings-614?utm\\_source=substack&publication\\_id=47400&post\\_id=144943008&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=share&utm\\_campaign=email-share&triggerShare=true&isFreemail=true&ri=3gfV3&triedRedirect=true](https://dianabutlerbass.substack.com/p/sunday-musings-614?utm_source=substack&publication_id=47400&post_id=144943008&utm_medium=email&utm_content=share&utm_campaign=email-share&triggerShare=true&isFreemail=true&ri=3gfV3&triedRedirect=true)

we have focused on a theological doctrine are meant to do is not to help us explain something that is unexplainable or to be a religious exercise in finding the Trinity in the Scriptures, like some religious “where’s Waldo” game. Instead, perhaps what this whole day is about is reminding us to embrace the awe. To notice the places and ways that we experience awe in both the peaks and the mundane places of life.

Recently The New York Times featured an article on awe. The most quoted individual in the article was a psychologist named Dr. Keltner from the University of California in Berkeley. He talks about how many of us associate awe with dramatic, life-changing events, but the truth is that awe can be a part of everyday life. He says that awe comes from “perceived vastness” as well as something that challenges us to rethink our previously held ideas. Awe, he says, is critical to our well-being—just like joy, contentment, and love. Awe can improve our health, quiet negative self-talk, and make us more generous. Yet, awe is not only found in images of 6-winged seraphs and giant robes. It is discovered all around us. Awe is in science, in nature, and in the baptism of Rosemary. Awe is in noticing the goodness in another whether it’s the bus driver, the grocery clerk, or a kind neighbor. Awe often comes from unfamiliar new experiences like meeting someone new, learning something new, or trying a new food. Awe is something we can experience every day.<sup>2, 3</sup>

As we enter this summer season, many of us will travel, see family and friends, and experience God’s gift of life. In the weeks ahead, I invite you to join me in the practice of noticing moments of awe—whether that is a

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/03/well/live/awe-wonder-dacher-keltner.html>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/24/opinion/sunday/why-do-we-experience-awe.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/24/opinion/sunday/why-do-we-experience-awe.html?_r=0)

blooming flower, a baby sleeping, cicadas crawling up a tree, or the best darn pizza you've ever had. After you notice it, take a picture of it, and share it with us. You can post it on social media and tag us with #wplcawe or send it to [photos@wickerparklutheran.org](mailto:photos@wickerparklutheran.org) so we can post it and share it. In this act of sharing places of awe all around us, we'll be reminded of the gift of Holy Trinity Sunday. A gift given to sit in awe. A gift given to improve our health, cultivate generosity, and to better appreciate all that God has given us.

So, friends, be on the lookout for moments of awe. Notice how the familiar is vaster than we might have imagined. Recognize the beauty all around us. Seek the awe in the mundane *and* the novel. In the end, come to recognize that even if you cannot fully understand everything about the world around us, God has given us the gift of awe so that we might have an abundance of life. Let us share that gift with one another in holy awe. Amen.