



A SERMON by Rev. Joann H. Lee: August 30, 2026



How Great Thou Art

Psalm 8

*O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
 You have set your glory above the heavens.
 Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark
 because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger.
 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
 the moon and the stars that you have established;
 what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you
 care for them?
 Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
 and crowned them with glory and honor.
 You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
 you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen,
 and also the beasts of the field,
 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
 whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
 O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

Trivia question: What do Elvis Presley, Billy Graham, Dolly Parton, Carrie Underwood, and all of us have in common?

We've all sung the hymn "How Great Thou Art." Not all of us have recorded it, but still - We are in good company! So the Swedish poet Carl Boberg first wrote the words to "How Great Thou Art." He had just gotten caught in a windy, summer thunderstorm, and just as he reached shelter, thunder and lightning flashed across the sky. But soon afterwards, as he looked out from the safety of his home, a clear sky appeared with a beautiful rainbow.

In his own words, he says:

"After reaching my home, I opened my window toward the sea. The church bells were playing the tune of a hymn. That same evening I wrote a poem which I titled, 'O Store Gud,' (How Great Thou Art)."

Later in 1949, the missionary Stuart K. Hine translated the hymn into English. And when Billy Graham started using it in his crusades, it became globally renown.

Missionaries to post-war Korea brought the hymn with them, had it translated in Korean, and that's how my grandparents and parents learned it.

Now, Joanne Whitt and Victor have been preaching that the hymns we sing in church all have a story, and with that story comes a theological and biblical basis.

But my bias for "How Great Thou Art" has less to do with theology or authorship, and more to do with my own family history with it. Both sides of my family became Christian through my grandmothers. These tiny, yet indomitable women schlepped their families to church, partly because of the education and medical care that those first Presbyterian missionaries offered. But also because they found comfort in the community, and the spirituality, and this person named Jesus.

My parents, when they immigrated to the states, looked first for a church home. And I grew up in Korean immigrant congregations that had two worship services. One of the services was "big church" where our parents went, and everything was in Korean - the sermon, the liturgy, the hymns. But I mostly went to "youth church" where we had English-speaking leaders who would teach us praise songs instead of hymns.

On some special Sundays, however, all the kids would join our parents in *their* service, and we would sing together these old hymns brought to Korea by American missionaries. I vividly remember singing along to "How Great Thou Art" in Korean as I stood with my parents in the pews.

~ 주 하나님 지으신 모든 세계 내 마음속에 그리어 볼 때 ~

Now, as the child of immigrants whose ancestors survived war and migration just one generation ago, there's not a whole lot that my family has passed down to me. There's not a whole lot that they had in the first place! But what they did pass down to me, was their faith.

And to me, singing "How Great Thou Art" reminds me of the faith of my parents and my grandparents whose prayers never ceased for me. And it even reminds me of my ancestors who never heard about Jesus, but whose resilience and love continue to reverberate into this world through me and all their descendants today.

Part of the reason I became a pastor was so that we, the church, could continue to pass on this faith for generations to come. And that's why I've always stayed connected to youth and young adult ministries, no matter where I've served.

Today, it is my privilege to share the pulpit with our youth who went on their first mission trip since the pandemic. *This* is how we pass down our faith: by providing opportunities for our youth to serve God in the world, and by hearing from and equipping our youth to lead in worship. And it is one way we affirm to God, "How great thou art."

So please join me in welcoming Jeff, Susan, and our youth mission trip team.

Susan (Parent)

Good morning, everyone. This past June, I had the opportunity to join our Youth Director, Jeff, and six of our teens—including my daughter, Isa—on a mission trip with Be The Neighbor in Austin, Texas.

For me, this was much more than simply going on a mission trip. Be The Neighbor is a justice-based service-learning ministry that encourages youth and adults to put their faith into action through love, service, and a commitment to justice. I really appreciated that the program wasn't just about going somewhere and helping for a few days. It was about listening, learning, building relationships, and trying to understand the challenges our neighbors are facing.

Our focus in Austin was food justice and food insecurity. During the week, we had the opportunity to serve with local organizations, including urban gardens and food pantries. We also spent time learning about why food insecurity exists and the larger systems that make it difficult for so many people to have consistent access to healthy food. One of the most meaningful parts of this trip for me was watching our teens. They truly impressed me with their willingness to get up early each morning and face long days of heat, humidity, and hard physical work. They gardened, farmed, packed boxes, washed dishes, and helped serve food to nearly 200 people experiencing food insecurity. What stood out most was the compassion, love, and empathy they brought to everything they did. I never heard them complain. Instead, I watched them work together, encourage one another, and find plenty of reasons to laugh. Even after those long days, our van was always filled with the laughter and energy of six teenagers.

We also received wonderful feedback from the managers and staff at the sites where we served. They were genuinely impressed by our teens' work ethic, positive attitudes, kindness, and willingness to help. As a parent, I couldn't have been prouder of them.

Isa (12th Grade)

Hello, my name is Isa. During our trip we had the opportunity to volunteer at Farmshare Austin. We spent the day doing hands-on farm work, including cleaning and picking onions and picking beets. It was extremely hot outside, and since there was very limited air conditioning, the physical work felt even more challenging.

This experience made me realize how much time, effort, and physical work goes into producing the food that we often take for granted. Even something as simple as an onion or a beet requires a lot of care before it ever reaches our table. Farmshare Austin is focused on making fresh and healthy food more accessible to communities that may not otherwise have easy access to it. They grow and share fresh produce with the community, while also helping local farmers and making fresh food easier for underserved communities in Austin to access.

Even though the heat and work were difficult, I really appreciated being able to contribute and see the impact of the work firsthand. It gave me a new appreciation for the people who grow our food and for the importance of making fresh food available to everyone. Thank you.

Sohalia (9th Grade)

Good morning everyone, my name is Sohalia King, and I am going to talk about Caritas, which was one of the places that we volunteered at while on the mission trip to Texas. It was a soup kitchen that relied on volunteers to feed the unhoused or people otherwise unable to get food. Since they do rely on volunteers, if they don't get enough volunteers each day, they unfortunately cannot open to serve people.

When we went, I found it to be an enjoyable experience. The staff were all very kind and it was a very nice working environment. I started out chopping celery and other vegetables with Jeff and Henry to help prepare the meals. We were then each assigned different jobs, and I along with Isa, had jobs as bussers, which meant we got to help those who were physically or otherwise unable to serve themselves. So, we would carry plates and handle food and drinks for them! I really enjoyed this job as I got to serve and help these people, as well as have the opportunity to talk to some of them, it was so interesting to hear their stories and I had some really nice

conversations, some of these conversations were very eye opening and helped me expand my viewpoints of the issue of people experiencing homelessness or experiencing problems with food access. I also had the opportunity to work a bit as a dish cleaner with Henry and Isa, which was also very nice. Overall, I found Caritas to be such a valuable and inspiring experience, and I'm so grateful that I got the opportunity to volunteer there, and I definitely would recommend it!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Wesley (10th Grade)

Hi my name is Wesley King, and I will be talking about the community first village today. Visiting the community first village which is a part of Mobile Loaves and Fishes provides affordable, permanent housing and a supportive community for men and women coming out of chronic homelessness. This was a truly unforgettable experience for me. It was almost like a town, and it looked exactly how I would picture a community to look. Houses all arranged around a common park area where people would gather and spend their free time, and you could tell that everyone was happy. They had a movie theater, a garden, and even an art house. Seeing hundreds of houses being provided to people in need and where everyone lived in community together made me feel inspired and hopeful. All the people there were so nice and talking to them was amazing. Everyone there was grateful for me being there even if I was just picking weeds and moving rocks.

Interacting with people who had experienced homelessness completely changed how I think about community. I realized that community comes in many shapes and forms and that a community is built through care and compassion for the people around you.

Hearing real stories changed my view a lot. I learned that anyone can become homeless and some people are only one emergency or accident away. And I learned presence matters as much as food. Food is very important but sometimes people just want someone to talk to. Building connections with these people taught me lessons and shaped how I look at life. Thank you.

Henry (12th Grade)

Good morning! I'm Henry and my experience on this mission trip was very eye-opening. While there, I met another youth group from Fort Worth. I learned about the challenges of food insecurity in Austin and served at two farms: Farmshare and New Leaf. The latter was especially interesting because, unlike farms in America, New Leaf Farm hired refugees from many different countries. These included Bhutan, Congo, Burma, Nepal, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh.

My time on the farm was full of hard work and fun memories, from harvesting and trimming beets to spotting yellow grasshoppers and painfully aggressive fire ants. I spent time with the Fort Worth group at Farmshare, though not at New Leaf. While I enjoyed having small conversations with the Fort Worth group, they didn't socialize much, so I appreciated how communicative our group was. Over the course of the trip, I built a genuine bond with the Calvary youth group. Though I've known them for a while, this trip gave me a chance to connect truly.

Before this experience, I paid little attention to food insecurity and rarely helped those in my community. After researching food insecurity, I discovered that it has a severe impact on the world. For instance, food insecurity is significantly high in US states such as Arkansas, Kentucky, and Louisiana, as well as in countries like Sudan and Nigeria. I may not be able to solve food insecurity myself, but I will give meals to support my community, participate in food banks, and avoid wasting food.

Arianna (10th Grade)

Hi, my name is Arianna, and this summer I attended the mission trip in Austin, Texas, where we focused on food justice in Austin. One experience that really stayed with me was when we visited the Texas Capitol and did a Mock Committee Hearing. We split into groups and came up with ideas for how to reduce food insecurity. My group focused on making SNAP requirements more inclusive for larger families living on a low income. This experience really opened my eyes to how much laws and government policies can affect people's access to something as basic as food.

Before this trip, I hadn't really thought about how policies could make it harder for families to receive the support they need. I realized that food insecurity isn't always just about someone's personal situation. There are also larger systems that can make it more difficult for people to get access to food and resources and that's why I'm grateful I went on this trip because now I understand the reasons why people struggle with food access and advocating for changes can make a difference. Thank you.