

September 20, 2026 + 10:30 A.M.

Eighteenth Sunday of Pentecost

We Join in Worship

Liturgist: Carol Callaway

If you need extra space for a wheelchair or walker, or if you have young children with you, please feel free to make use of our Playground, the extra space across the aisle from the sound booth.

PRELUDE

When You Pray

Audrey Mieir

WELCOME

CHORAL INTROIT

ANNOUNCEMENTS

***THE PEACE OF CHRIST**

*** CALL TO WORSHIP** (Adapted from *Psalms* 19)

Leader: The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.

ALL: The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple.

Leader: The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes. The ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

ALL: The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple.

Leader: More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.

ALL: The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple.

Leader: In keeping them there is great reward. Let the words of our mouths and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you, O LORD, our rock and our redeemer!

ALL: The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple. We worship you, O LORD, our rock and our redeemer!

***OPENING HYMN:** "The Mighty God with Power Speaks" (Glory to God, 13)

INVITATION TO CONFESSION:

Leader: In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul asks, "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" Together, let us confess our foolishness.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (unison)

O God, our rock and our redeemer, we confess that we have been foolish in choosing the wisdom of the world over the Wisdom of the Way of Jesus Christ. We have chosen love of idols over love of you. We give our hearts, souls, and minds to ideologies and idealogues that despise the life led by Jesus of Nazareth. We have chosen hatred of neighbors over love and welcome. We have chosen selfishness over healthy self-love. Forgive us for our foolishness. Let your Wisdom burn bright within us once more. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

KYRIE: (572)

**Lord, have mercy upon us.
Christ, have mercy upon us.
Lord, have mercy upon us.**

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Leader: Friends, hear the good news! The message of the cross is the power of God, and God decided to save those who believe!

ALL: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven! Hallelujah! Thanks be to God!

GLORIA PATRI (577)

**Glory be to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now, ever shall be, world without end. Amen.
As it was in the beginning, is now, ever shall be, world without end. Amen.**

STATEMENT OF FAITH: (From *The Heidelberg Catechism*)

Leader: Since no one in this life can obey the Ten Commandments perfectly, why does God want them preached so pointedly?

ALL: First, so that the longer we live the more we may come to know our sinfulness and the more eagerly look to Christ for forgiveness of sins and righteousness. Second, so that, we may never stop striving, and never stop praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, to be renewed more and more after God's image, until after this life we reach our goal: perfection.

We Hear God's Word

EMBODIED WORD FOR DISCIPLES OF ALL AGES

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Guide us, O God, by your Word and Spirit, that in your light we may see light, in your truth find wisdom, and in your will discover your peace. In the name of Jesus Christ our risen Lord we pray. Amen.

HEBREW BIBLE LESSON: *Exodus 19:16-20*

EPISTLE LESSON: *1 Corinthians 1:18-21*

GOSPEL LESSON: *Matthew 22:34-40*

SERMON: The Great Kiln Fire

MUSICAL MEDITATION: *Shine, Jesus, Shine*

We Respond in Faith

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

CHORAL RESPONSE

OFFERING INVITATION:

Leader: Jesus commands us to love God and to love each other. These two commandments form the basis of all that we do. Let us give our tithes and offerings so that we may do so effectively as a community. If you are here in person, please place your offering in the plate as it is passed. If you are worshiping from home, please mail in your checks or use our online giving option on the website. Now let us practice stewardship as we listen to today's offertory.

OFFERTORY *God Answers Every Prayer*

Ernest Boykin, Jr. & Carl Andersen

*DOXOLOGY (592)

**Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God, above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.**

*PRAYER OF DEDICATION: (Unison)

O God, our rock and our redeemer, we dedicate these gifts to you and to your law of Love. Give us your Wisdom as we seek to love you and to love others with sincerity and effectiveness. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

We Go into the World

***CLOSING HYMN:** "How Great Thou Art" (467)

BENEDICTION

CHORAL BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE *His Name Is Wonderful*

Audrey Mieir

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* So that we can properly greet people who come to the building during Sunday morning worship, Door A will be the only unlocked external door during the worship service.

PEEK AT THE WEEK:

SUNDAY 9/20:	Worship In Person & Online – 10:30 AM Fall Kick Off and Brunch
MONDAY 9/21:	GA – 6:30 PM Al-Anon – 7:00 PM Lake Shore Comm. Concert Mtg. 6:00 PM
TUESDAY 9/22:	Private Flute Lessons 2-8 PM (FH) AA – 7:30 PM
WEDNESDAY 9/23:	Private Flute Lessons 2-8 PM (FH) "Bring Your Own Bible" Bible Study 7-8 PM (Zoom) GA – 7:00 PM
THURSDAY 9/24:	Choir – 7:00 PM
SATURDAY 9/26:	Bill Holmes Visitation/Memorial –10:30 AM/11:30 AM AA – 6:30 PM

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **OUR FALL KICKOFF AND BRUNCH IS AFTER WORSHIP TODAY!** Our Session will provide delicious dishes for brunch, and you'll get a preview of all the exciting things happening this fall in the life of our congregation. Join us even if you didn't sign up!
- **FELLOWSHIP HOSTING IN THE FALL** We are asking folks to sign up to host fellowship time in the Fall. Our ministries and committees have been doing a fantastic job, and they are getting a well-deserved break! Hosting entails bringing a simple snack to share, setting it out, and cleaning up afterwards. On Sundays with no sign-ups, we will still have coffee and tea to enjoy.
- **CHOIR PRACTICE IS THURSDAYS AT 7PM** We need singers of all sorts and welcome singers of all skill levels! We have a great time, and singing is a great way to give glory to God!
- **MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION** BYOB (Bring Your Own Bible) will resume on Wednesday, September 23, at 7:00 PM. The Bible in Today's World will resume on Sunday, September 27, at 9:00 AM.
- **OUR ANNUAL BONFIRE AND HAYRIDE** will be on Sunday, Oct. 4, from 3-5 pm at Oak Ridge Prairie County Park in Griffith. All are invited and friends and family are welcome. The hayride starts promptly at 3 pm, and lasts almost an hour. Then we'll enjoy a bonfire including roasting hotdogs and marshmallows over the campfire, along with some fun activities and songs! Plenty of food, fellowship and fun for all! There will be a sign-up sheet in the narthex mid-September, or you can RSVP to Heather Casiano at hcasiano@fpchighland.org by October 1.
- **FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA!** If you don't already follow us on Facebook and Instagram, please start doing so @firstpchighland on both Facebook and Instagram.
- **INTERESTED IN BECOMING A MEMBER OF FPCH?** You are always welcome here, whether a member or not! If you are interested in joining as a member, though, we would love to have you! Please talk to Pastor Tyler if you would like to learn more.

Opportunities to serve as the HEART, HANDS, and FEET of Jesus Christ:

- **BLESSING BOX** Please continue to place items in the Blessing Box and take items if you are a person in need! Items most commonly donated: Canned goods with pull tabs, socks, toilet paper, non-perishable foods, small snacks, toiletries, baby wipes and diapers. Please check expiration dates!
- **HELP STOCK OUR PANTRY!** Please pick up a beautifully decorated grocery bag in the narthex and fill it to help the church's food pantry.
- **GOT SNEAKERS??** The sneakers that we all collect will help raise money to support our church's general fund AND will help our environment by keeping sneakers out of landfills. Bring the sneakers (athletic shoes only) to the church and put them in one of the blue bins...either by Door D (inside) or in the narthex.

Prayer List

Anthony
Brady Vanes
George Griner
Guy Hendricks
David Markley
David Kingen
Diana and Ray Mendoza
Janet Orem
Cindy Waltz and Sister
Yvonne Suroviak
Georgette and Garry Sknerski
Jakob Holden
Denise Matthys
Florance Cody
Kathy & Chuck Pumnea
The Windstrups
Rick Parker
Gary Everhart
Darlene O'Brien
Doug & Sue Matthews
Janet Terpstra
Glen Nahler
Tom
David Hamblin
Jana Tolley
Larry & Bonnie Perryman

Delta Rose
Winnie Owen
Breeanne
Mom Bechtler
Marian Clayton
Ella P
Rita Stronczek
Keren, Zuriel, and Gedeon
Edna Cruz
Charlie
Jerry & Rena Martinez
Tyler Gall
Luana Sulkowski
Sonny Buono
Tammy
Mike Kelly
Sue Heth
Oscar Ochoa
Jean and Clara
Dave Shelborne
Kali Rosalia
Wendy
Jessica S
Shirley McKnight
Kay Johnson
Loved ones of Bill Holmes
Loved ones of Jan Oprea

Exodus 19:16-20

¹⁶ On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were in the camp trembled. ¹⁷ Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God. They took their stand at the foot of the mountain. ¹⁸ Now all of Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently. ¹⁹ As the blast of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder. ²⁰ When the Lord descended upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain, the Lord summoned Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

1 Corinthians 1:18-21

¹⁸ For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scholar? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of the proclamation, to save those who believe.

Matthew 22:34-40

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵ and one of them, an expert in the law, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” ³⁷ He said to him, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

The Great Kiln Fire

Exodus 19:16-20; 1 Corinthians 1:18-21; Matthew 22:34-40

God, YHWH, the Great I Am Who I Am keeps showing up in the fire. First there was the burning bush bonfire, where Moses stood with bare feet on holy ground and received the promise of liberation along with God's holy name. I picture that as a small-ish fire, one around which people can gather and kick back and sit a spell for warmth and songs and stories. Then there was the towering pillar of fire by night and cloud by day, a brilliant beacon bright enough and big enough to show people a way where there seemed to be no way. And now we have fire on an even grander scale, descending upon Mount Sinai with such power that the entire mountain is wrapped in smoke. And the smoke is described as going up like the smoke of a kiln. Now that is a fascinating simile for what is going on here! The kiln is the oven in which heat activates the processes for creations of clay to be hardened into a more permanent form—with particles melting and flowing together to shrink the pores and create a solid ceramic. And as we are about to learn, God was forging a law and a people in that flame. The great potter was firing the clay creations into something more solid, something more durable, something more lasting.

In the kiln fire on Mount Sinai, God would melt and flow the people and the law together, creating a covenant community that would be solid, durable, and lasting—a concrete entity that could be recognized and identified because of commitment to a code of conduct and, by extension, commitment to the creator of that code, to the creator of the world. They would be in sacred relationship with the one who had made them and saved them, holding up their end of the covenant by living the law as a very part of themselves. They had a long history that we have read about throughout our study of *Genesis*, but this would be something new. Remember, this was a group of people who, though bound together by blood and covenants of long ago ancestors, had never truly had an established home or society with each other. Before being enslaved in Egypt, they had been many disparate nomadic families going their separate ways to whatever grazing lands could be found. Now that they had found liberation together along with their God, it was time for them to learn how to live the liberated life together long term. It was time for them to develop a system of community that would allow them to be true to themselves, interdependent upon each other, faithful to their God, and a blessing to the world.

Oh, and the “how” of it mattered! The fire and smoke and thunderous noise was on purpose. It was meant to remind the people just how awesome their God was. That show of majesty was meant to inspire awe so that the people would know that they were following the one true God whose power was displayed throughout the universe. And, of course, it was meant to inspire a bit of trepidation as well. We’d better listen to *this* God! We’d better do what *this* God says!

And so there in the kiln fire, amidst loud trumpets and thunder and shaking and quaking, God gifted Moses and the people with the commandments:

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.

“You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above or that is on the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

“You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

“Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female enslaved person, your livestock, or the immigrant resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it.

“Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

“You shall not kill.

“You shall not commit adultery.

“You shall not steal.

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s household”

And so God gave them a law. It started with ten commandments, but it didn’t end there. Chapter after chapter tells of decrees and precepts and ordinances. An entire legal code was spoken by God in the fire, given to Moses, and relayed to the people. It would come to fill not only much of the rest of *Exodus*, but also *Leviticus*, *Deuteronomy*, and *Numbers*. This legal code would give guidance on almost anything you can imagine: how to worship, how to wash, how to build, how to bury, how to dress, how to drink, how to eat, how to earn, how to how to how to! The law was vast, and the law was beautiful. It was direct guidance from God on staying healthy, getting along with each other, giving God glory, and generally thriving as recently liberated people. In that kiln fire on Mount Sinai, the law and the people were melded together into a concrete covenant community built upon trusting and following God’s way.

But then over the years that age-old greed for power, domination, control, and self-righteousness reared its ugly head once more. The community of Israelites colonized a land and set up judges, and then they set up kings against God's guidance. They created political and religious hierarchies. And as people in power are wont to do, they weaponized that which once was sacred and beautiful. They turned the law into a cudgel to punish people rather than guide people in a right way of life. They used religious codes to exclude worshipers they deemed unworthy rather than as rituals to honor the God of radical welcome. They made ordinances into ammunition to shame and to shun rather than recommendations to live healthily. Through all of this, an especially dangerous thing happened for the priestly and political powers. Seeing how effectively they could control people and maintain their power with the law, they began to love the law as though the law itself were divine. In a wicked twisting of all that is good and holy, the law itself became an idol. The pact for peace between the people became a weapon of control wielded by the powerful. My goodness, how history repeats itself! It is for good reason that we delve into the stories of our scriptures so deeply! For as was then, so is now.

And so God decided once more to intervene with liberating love. This time God would become incarnate as a human and so transform the entire paradigm of human existence. This time God would show the world that there is a better way than power, domination, control, and self-righteousness and that humans are indeed capable of this better way—the way of Love. God came in the form of a baby born in Bethlehem, in what is now the occupied West Bank of Palestine. He lived his entire life under the violent occupation of the Roman empire and saw how the leaders of his own people chose to use the law as a way to mirror that violence—to create unnatural criteria for belonging and exclusion in order to solidify their power, domination, control, and self-righteousness. He saw how the political leaders and priests had used the law of life to take life.

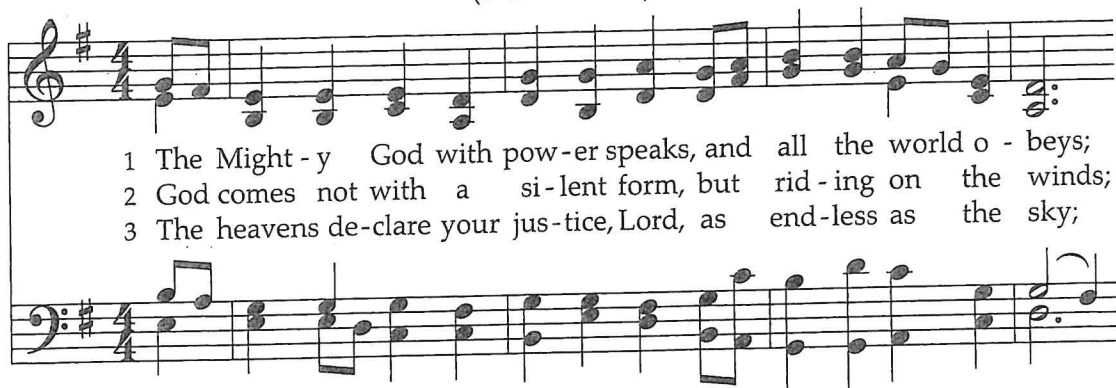
He mourned what had become of his beloved people. And he stood up and said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.” He stood in the courts of law. He stood in the temple. He stood before the powers and principalities that had weaponized this sacred, beautiful thing against the people, and he dared to speak the simple truth that would transform the world. They asked him: “Which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” Not punishment. Not exclusion. Not shame. Not control. Just love. Thousands of words summed up in one. Love. Love is the purpose. Love is the goal. Love is the fulfillment. The moment the law is used for anything other than love is the moment the law loses all of its purpose and meaning and becomes an empty idol. Full stop. It is as simple as that.

He would go on to live that love in a way that would have gotten him booted off of many stages, banned from many libraries, expelled from many campuses, teargassed, pepper-sprayed, and detained today. After all, it took him all the way to the cross back then. For, he constantly made it clear that the simple commandments of love translate into courageous action to lift up those who have been brought low, to liberate the oppressed, to feed the hungry, to heal the broken, to make the stranger belong, and to always ALWAYS save children from harm. In other words, those commandments of love have the power to transform the world. And there is nothing that people with power fear more than transformation! And so, with his teachings and his actions, he became a beacon shining with just as much brilliance as that awe-inspiring fire on Mount Sinai from long ago.

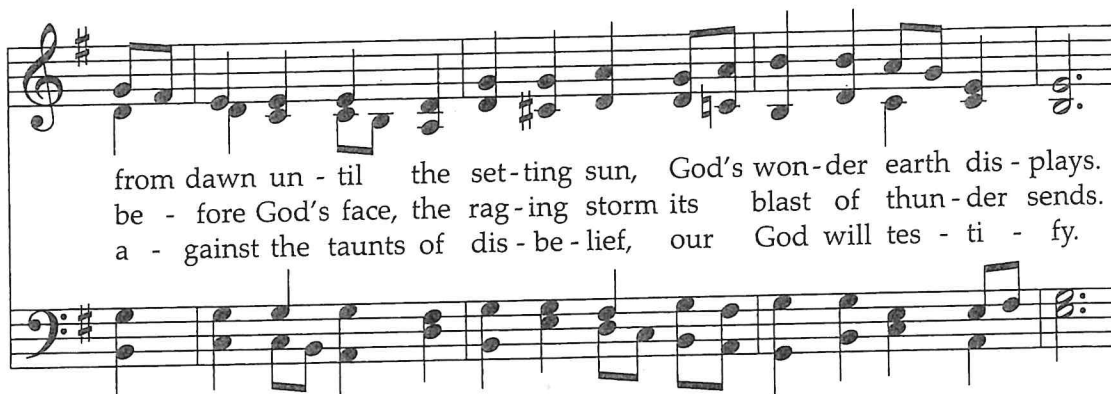
And his kiln fire would forge a new creation. He would hold up a ceramic vessel and say, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” His covenant community would be one in which love was what melded the people together with each other and with God. Indeed, love would flow and melt into their very being, filling in the pores of the clay and making something solid, durable, and lasting. Loved ones, we have been forged by that kiln fire! May we live love in such a way that shows it. May we shine with the brilliance of it! In the eyes of the world, may we be fools on fire for love! Amen!

13 The Mighty God with Power Speaks

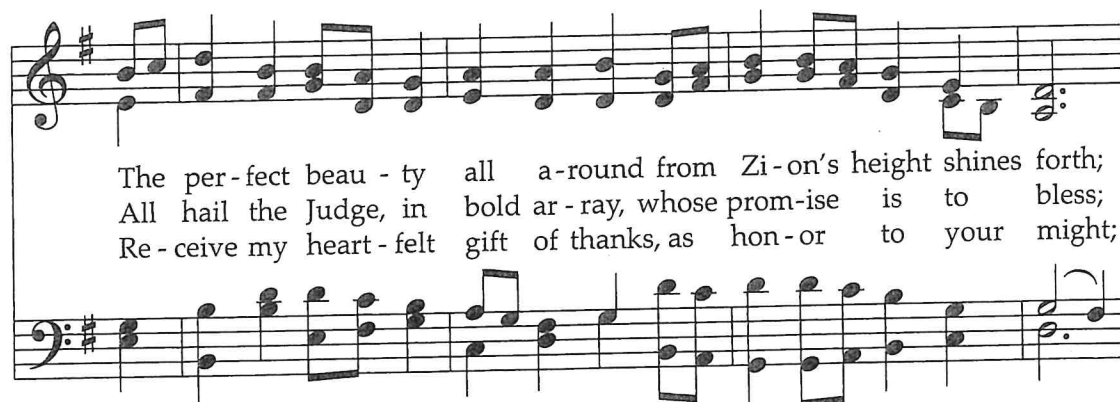
(Psalm 50)



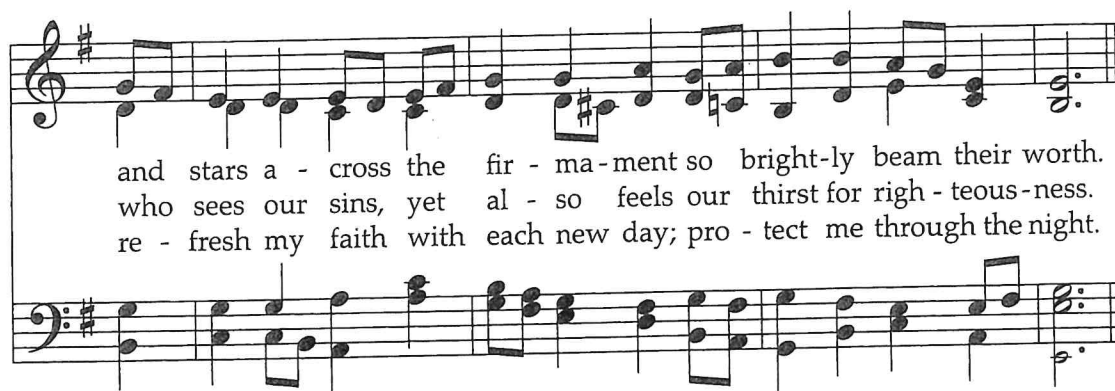
1 The Might - y God with pow - er speaks, and all the world o - beys;
2 God comes not with a si - lent form, but rid - ing on the winds;
3 The heavens de - clare your jus - tice, Lord, as end - less as the sky;



from dawn un - til the set - ting sun, God's won - der earth dis - plays.
be - fore God's face, the rag - ing storm its blast of thun - der sends.
a - gainst the taunts of dis - be - lief, our God will tes - ti - fy.



The per - fect beau - ty all a - round from Zi - on's height shines forth;
All hail the Judge, in bold ar - ray, whose prom - ise is to bless;
Re - ceive my heart - felt gift of thanks, as hon - or to your might;



and stars a - cross the fir - ma - ment so bright - ly beam their worth.
who sees our sins, yet al - so feels our thirst for righ - teous - ness.
re - fresh my faith with each new day; pro - tect me through the night.

How Great Thou Art

O STORE GUD 11.10.11.10 with refrain

Carl Gustav Boberg, 1885

English version: Stuart K. Hine, 1953

Transliteration of Korean: Myung Ja Yue, 1989

Swedish folk melody

Harm. Stuart K. Hine, 1949

1. Joo ha nah nim jee eu shin mo dun seh geh Nae ma um
 2. Soop sok ee nah hum hahn sahn gol jjak eh suh Jee juh gee

1. O Lord my God! when I in awe-some won - der Con - sid - er
 2. When through the woods and for - est glades I wan - der And hear the

so geh geu ree uh bol ttae Ha neul eh byul ool
 nun juh sae so ree deul gwa Ko yo ha geh heu

all the *worlds Thy hands have made, I see the stars, I
 birds sing sweet - ly in the trees; When I look down from

lyuh paw jee nun nweh sung Joo nim eh kwon nung oo joo eh chan
 reu nun see nae moo reun Joo nim eh som ssee no rae ha doh

hear the *roll - ing thun - der, Thy power through-out the u - ni - verse dis -
 loft - y moun-tain gran - deur And hear the brook and feel the gen - tle

Hooryum Refrain

neh Joo nim eh nop go wee dae ha shim ul
 dah

played; Then sings my soul, my Sav - ior God, to Thee,
 breeze;

Nae young hon ee chan yahng ha neh Joo nim eh nop go
How great Thou art, how great Thou art! Then sings my soul, my

wee dae ha shim eul Nae young hon ee chan yahng ha neh
Sav - ior God, to Thee, How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>3. Joo ha nah nim tok seng ja ak kim up see
Oo ree rul wee hae ddang eh bo nae uh
Seep ja ga eh pee heul lyuh juk keh ha sa
Nae mo dun chway rul goo sok ha shun neh
<i>Hooryum</i></p> | <p>3. And when I think that God, His Son
not sparing,
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on the cross, my burden gladly
bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin;
<i>Refrain</i></p> |
| <p>4. Nae joo Ye su seh sahng eh dah see ol ttae
Juh chun goo geu ro nal in doh ha ree
Na kyum son hee up deu ryuh kyung
bae ha myuh
Young won hee joo rul chan yahng ha ree rah
<i>Hooryum</i></p> | <p>4. When Christ shall come with shout
of acclamation
And take me home, what joy shall
fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration,
And there proclaim, my God,
how great Thou art!
<i>Refrain</i></p> |

*Original English words were "works" and "mighty."