Cedar Heights Community Presbyterian Church Rev. Johnny Janssen
Reformation Sunday—*Abundant Love, Abundant Commands (to Love)*
10/25/2026

Old Testament Lesson—Psalm 1

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

New Testament Lesson—Matthew 22:34-46

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, 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." Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." He said to them, "How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, "The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"? If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?" No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Jesus is serious about love, y'all. Dead serious, actually.

In fact, as the Church knows, Jesus shows us just how serious he is about love a few chapters later in Matthew. He'll lay down his life for the sins of the world—including the sins of those religious leaders trying to test him in this story.

You see: Christ doesn't just "talk the talk" when it comes to love. No, he "walks the walk," too. You might even say he "dies the death."

And I don't think he's embellishing here, either. I don't think he's being hyperbolic when he says that "on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." On these two commandments—loving God and loving neighbor—hang all the law and the prophets.

I could rephrase another way: Everything we would call the Old Testament today could be summed up in just those two commands. The entire Law of Moses—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy—all the careers of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah, and the other prophets—that's a lot, right?

Well, all of it (says Jesus) rests on the foundation of those two essential commands. Each of those texts and every rule and tradition that came before has been in service of loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself.

In other words: If you're striving with all sincerity to love God and neighbor, then you're doing everything Moses and the prophets taught. You're doing everything you're supposed to, according to Christ.

You've satisfied the Torah. You've fulfilled all those nagging judgments shouted by the prophets for centuries. And yes: You've checked off all the Ten Commandments (half of which are about loving God, half about loving neighbor).

Yes, Jesus is serious about love, y'all.

Most Biblical scholars, if counting all the Jewish laws and precepts in the Old Testament, will reach a total of 613. Six hundred thirteen religious obligations to manage—six hundred thirteen things to be mindful of—six hundred thirteen ways to please or to fail the God of Israel.

Now that's a lot of pressure. Isn't it? That's a lot of spiritual weight to carry. Now, to be fair: I'm oversimplifying things and leaving out a lot of nuance. But, just humor me for a moment, please.

Let's set aside the intimidating list of rules to follow. Instead, let's imagine that huge, overwhelming number the way Jesus might have. Imagine, instead, six hundred thirteen clear-cut commands to love; maybe half about loving God, half about loving neighbor—three hundred and some change for each.

Lord, have mercy. Now THAT'S a whole heck of a lot about love! I mean, that's not just redundant. That's overkill. That's making your point, and then making it six hundred and twelve more times just to be safe!

I've said it again and again, my friends. Those things the Bible tends to repeat across book and testament and time and genre—those are the things we should take as seriously as possible. These are what we're called to wear on our sleeve—the things we live by—the things we needlepoint and show off to our friends.

And you know…if I wasn't aware of the state of the world these days—if I wasn't acutely concerned about how we talk about and treat other human beings (especially those we disagree with), then I just might be tempted to think, "Ok, I think you've made your point, Jesus. I think you can move on to other topics, now. I'm pretty sure Scripture has enough references to love at this point."

Maybe cut back a hundred or so commands about love to make room for some other important stuff? I don't know, stuff like cancer or natural disasters or pandemics? It'd be good to know your thoughts on those things.

But, unfortunately, I'm not tempted to think like that most days. Because, siblings in Christ, the truth is I look at the world in the year of our Lord 2026 and I think, "You clearly didn't talk about love enough!" Are you tired of the political smear campaigns? Goodness gracious, I can't wait!

If the way we treat our neighbors is any indication, then we must be reading a completely different Bible. Or perhaps we just don't care what the Bible says; maybe we just aren't listening to what Christ is saying these days…

In our lesson from Scripture this morning, Matthew tells us the religious leaders don't approach Jesus in good faith. Right? The Pharisees aren't interested in learning. They don't care what Jesus actually thinks about the Law of Moses.

Nah. They show up because they want to put him in his place. A lawyer asks Jesus a question to "test" him. They're hoping to entrap him. They want him to publicly blaspheme—want him to screw up and say something horribly offensive so they have an excuse to arrest him and throw him in jail.

Obviously, the Pharisees know what the greatest commandment is. They've grown up reciting it on a regular basis, just as Christ has. Any moderately faithful Jew in those days would've known the right answer was.

It's called the Shema—a critical passage from Deuteronomy 6: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might."

It goes on to say these words must always be kept close to the heart. They're to be taught to children and grandchildren. They're to be remembered and recited at home and away—posted on doors and signs and basically everywhere you can.

Every Jew there knew what the greatest commandment was. Maybe the Pharisees were hoping to catch Jesus in a weak moment—hoping he might give an answer about himself or what it means that he's come.

Instead, he gives the right answer and then refines it—reforms it you might say. He tacks on "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" from Leviticus. Jesus gives an answer that's even more "correct" than what they were expecting!

And I'd imagine the Pharisees are pretty frustrated at this point. They needed him to blaspheme—to say something about himself that couldn't be true—something like how he's the promised one and is here to save everybody (blah blah blah). Instead, Jesus flips the script. He turns their trap upside down and asks the Pharisees a question about the Messiah!

You want to play the "gotcha" game? Think you know everything about God's Messiah? Ok, then tell me about the Messiah's relationship to King David. How are they related? Go ahead, let's hear it. We're all waiting…

But there was no response from the religious leaders—nothing but the sound of silence. In fact, they must've been quite stunned from what Matthew tells us: *No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions*.

Y'all: It's not wise to challenge the Christ in a battle of wits. You want to come at Jesus, you better be prepared. And you should probably practice being disappointed.

Now, I don't think Jesus was trying to humiliate his brothers in faith (though the reverse was certainly true). But he had to make a point here because his brothers just tried to weaponize the greatest commandment. Are you kidding me?

Imagine the blasphemy of weaponizing our common calling to love God! This is not okay. This is never okay.

Friends, we've become far too accustomed to using Scripture as a sword to cut others down. We've become far too comfortable with Bible bashing and pointing self-righteous fingers. Because, let me tell you something. Whenever we do these things, we've broken at least 613 laws—and that's before we even get to the New Testament!

I wonder what kind of Reformation we need for today—for such a time as this. How is God reshaping the Church in 2026? In what ways should the eyes of our hearts be opened?

Well, I think we start by reminding ourselves that God's not done with us—that God's still speaking to us today—that revelation is ongoing. So we've got to keep listening and working and discerning where the Spirit is leading.

Here's one thing I know beyond all doubt. Even in the dark, when we can't see, when nothing makes sense, I know the Spirit is leading us toward love. The ridiculous amount of love commands isn't an accident or coincidence.

We're absolutely inundated with them so that we never forget why we're here—so we never forget why we're breathing. As our Church confessions say, our purpose is to love God and enjoy God forever. That's what it's all about—what life is all about.

It's not rocket science, y'all! But getting it right makes all the difference in the world.

And I know this too…Where there's an abundance of commands to love, there's an abundance of love itself from which those commands come.

Before all else, know that you are beloved children of God. Because: In the grand scheme of things, nothing else matters—except that we act like it.

So, let's act like it. There're at least 613 reasons to try our best.

Amen.