

October 18, 2026

Rev. Lisa Schrott

Deuteronomy 6: 4-9 & Matthew 22:34-40

All In with Our Hearts

Our scripture reading this morning comes toward the end of the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus has concluded his ministry in the region of Galilee and has entered Jerusalem, an event we celebrate each Palm Sunday. In chapter 21 verse 10-11 we hear, “When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.” In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus’ first act in Jerusalem is to cleanse the Temple from the money changers and those who sought to do unholy work in a holy place. This act led to the chief priests and elders questioning by what authority Jesus was taking these actions. Jesus answers the religious authorities – the Sadducees and the Pharisees -initially through parables. This does not satisfy them and they ask more and more direct questions toward Jesus, about paying taxes and the resurrection and finally about the commandments. This is where we pick up our text this morning from Matthew 22:34-40.

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, an expert in the law, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” Jesus 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.” **The Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.**

This morning is our first Sunday of the stewardship season which will culminate on Dedication Sunday, November 15 when we dedicate our pledges of time, talent, and treasures to the church. Our stewardship theme this year is “**All In**.” If you read the Grapevine you will have seen me refer to this theme in August and in October we began our preparations for this season. Why “**All In**”? And why begin with *All In with our Hearts*?

In 2024 the Session approved a visioning statement of who we at PCO are called to be in the near-term future. We are now two plus years into this *Journey to 2030*.

Guided by the Holy Spirit and looking to the future, at the Presbyterian Church of Okemos, we...

... open our doors wide in welcome, inviting all to join us in community, worship, service, and fellowship. We will continue to build a congregation where all people can feel accepted, encouraged, and embraced as beloved children of God.

... embark together on a life-long journey of faith formation. We will create opportunities for all ages to worship, study, serve, and make music alongside one another.

... know we can't do it alone. We will partner with other faith groups and local organizations to pool resources, form community, and work together in service of God's love and justice.

Embodying this vision requires that we be "all in" as a congregation. **All In** our ministry of worship, care for each other, outreach, faith formation, fellowship and the use of our facility. **All In** with our resources, beginning with our hearts.

In the words of preparation in the bulletin, I share a short reflection from the Rev. Joseph Yoo which speaks why we are starting not with dollars and cents, but with love. Yoo says, "Stewardship begins not in the wallet but in the heart. And not just some or parts of the heart. Jesus says all. If we give everything else but withhold our hearts, we're completely missing the point. Because love - sacrificial love- reshapes what we do with our time, our energy, our priorities, and, yes, even our money. That's why Jesus doesn't start with rules. Jesus starts with relationship."¹

With relationship. With relationship to God and with relationship to neighbor. While our scripture this morning may be familiar to us – or at least the sentiment is familiar – I think a deeper dive into the context of the scripture can help us appreciate why it is starting point for stewardship conversations in the church. After sharing that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God and to love your neighbor, the scripture ends with a curious phrase: "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." The Greek word that is translated as "hang" connotes an "image of a large mass suspended by the means of two ropes or hairs."² From our love of God and love of neighbor hang all of the laws in the Torah and all of the words of the prophets. One Greek lexicon translates the word "hang" as "to depend upon" or "only have meaning because of."³ All of the law and all of the words of the prophets only have meaning because of our love of God and love of neighbor.

The words of the prophets who spoke truth to power were based on these two precepts. I think about the prophet Amos' words to ancient Israel when the nation was wealthy and religiously active, yet full of social corruption. The rich and powerful exploited the poor, took bribes, cheated in business, and ignored the vulnerable while still performing empty religious rituals. And Amos said, "But let justice roll down like water and righteousness like an ever-

¹ Joseph Yoo. *All In. A Preacher's Guide to Topical Sermon Series*. Westminster John Knox, 2026; p98.

² Daniel Harrington. *Sacra Pagina*. The Gospel of Matthew. Liturgical Press, 1991; p315.

³ Johannes P. Louw, and Eugene A. Nida (Eds.) *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains; Mounce Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*; edited by William D. Mounce with Rick D. Bennett, Jr. Accessed through Accordance Bible Software. Version 13.3.4; OakTree Software; October 2022.

flowing stream.” (Amos 5:24). The prophet Elijah who called out King Ahab for worshipping other gods than the Lord God. And Isaiah and Jeremiah who called out kings and religious leaders for putting riches and power ahead of care for the needy in their lands; for failing to love their neighbors.

All of the law – the 613 commandments in the Torah – 248 positive “you shall” and 365 negative “you shall not” depend on a recognition that we are “all in” in with our love for God and our love for neighbor.⁴ And these commands harken back to two passages from the Hebrew scriptures. Two weeks ago Kent preached on what it means to be a neighbor, sharing this text from Leviticus 19:18: “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.” And we heard Aaron share a few minutes ago the command 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.”

To our Jewish siblings, this passage is known as the Shema Yisrael – the Hebrew word for the opening of verse 4 – Hear, O Israel – it is an imperative – a command. This is the way we are to live. Not only are we to keep all of God’s decrees and commandments, but we are to recite them to our children and talk about them no matter where we are and at all times. For the Israelites wandering through the land, waiting to Canaan, they needed to be reminded that the law – the statutes and the ordinances— that Moses taught them were the real deal. This was not a practice quiz – these were guidelines that they were to live by, beginning with the first commandment, with Lord telling them through Moses “You shall have no other gods before me.” That commandment is then retold in the positive: 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.” This commandment is then repeated in the gospels. The law and the gospel share this message of embodiment – it is who we are to be, who we are to become.

Part of the task for Moses as he led the people from slavery in Egypt into freedom in Canaan was to help them form an identity – a new identity as worshippers of the Lord God. The Deuteronomy passage – the Shema – ends with Moses telling the people to “Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead...” The Hebrew word for “bind” has the connotation to knit together to make stronger, for two things to become inseparable. That is God’s plan for us – for God’s word to become inseparable with our being – with our heart and our mind and our soul. For us to be “All In.”

In our world today it can be hard to have the sense of belonging that those of previous generations might have had – where neighborhood, work, church, and school ties were tightly interwoven. In his book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, political scientist Robert Putnam writes about the changes in our society that reflect our looser connectedness to each other, from declines in church membership to the dramatic decrease in

⁴ Harrington, p315-316.

involvement in social and philanthropic organizations and bowling leagues. These losses of social capital can be seen in the fragmentation and polarization of our society, where we fail to recognize that what we have in common is greater than that which separates us. And we too often miss out on the joy of belonging – the joy of being part of something bigger than our individual selves. The joy of being “All In.”

This is the place where PCO excels – being a place where cares and concerns and joys and the good news of the gospel are all bound together. All bound together and shared. We do it imperfectly, as humans do; but we keep trying. We forgive the slights and we give each other grace when we mess up, remembering the grace upon grace bestowed on us by our God. And we commit, we commit to being a community of faith. We commit to be a community who are “All In with Our Hearts.”

I appreciate the way Henri Nouwen sums up what it means to live as this type of people. He says, “To set our hearts on the kingdom therefore means to make the life of the Spirit within and among us the center of all we think, say, or do.” This quote was included in a wonderful compilation of Nouwen’s work entitled *A Spirituality of Fundraising*. Nouwen shares that as we raise funds for the “creation of a community of love, we are helping God build the kingdom. We are doing exactly what we are supposed to do as Christians.”⁵

My friends, we are all called to this is exciting and joy-filled work. Giving of ourselves is an opportunity, a privilege and a responsibility we have as followers of Christ. Over the next few weeks we will hear how we can be *All In with Our Hands*, *All In with Our Resources* and *All In for Our Future*. I encourage you to prayerfully consider how you can share your gifts or how you can “let your talents and tongues employ, reaching out with a shout of joy: bread is broken; the wine is poured; Christ is spoken and seen and heard”⁶ to quote the lyrics of the song the bell choir will play in a moment. I encourage you to prayerfully consider how you can be **All In** as we continue our Journey to 2030 of being and becoming more of

A welcoming congregation where meaningful connections are made.

A congregation that is intergenerationally inclusive.

A congregation actively building partnerships.

May it be so. Join me in prayer.

⁵ Henri J.M. Nouwen. *A Spirituality of Fundraising*. Upper Room Books. 2010 edition; p23-25. The first quote was originally published in *Making All Things New*.

⁶ Fred Kaan. Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ. #526. Glory to God Hymnal. Westminster John Knox Press; 2013