

October 25, 2026 • The Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 25)

The Rev. James Wyatt

Deuteronomy 34:1-12 • Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17 • 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8 • Matthew 22:34-46

Heart and Soul and Mind

The tests and traps continue! Last week, we heard the story of the Pharisees and Herodians plotting to entrap Jesus by asking him if it was lawful to pay taxes. And he amazed them with his very clever answer—which is actually sort of a double answer: he told them to give the emperor the things that belong to the emperor, and to give God what belongs to God. And what belongs to God? Everything!

And then in our reading this morning a group of Pharisees got together and tried to stump Jesus with one more question: In all the law of Moses—out of all 613 commandments, according to rabbinical tradition—which one is the greatest? And again, Jesus gives sort of a double answer: love God, and love your neighbor.

“ ‘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.” That’s actually a lot like what he said last week: Give God what belongs to God—which is everything. Your whole heart, your entire soul, and all your mind. Your whole self.

Now, I want to reiterate what I said last week: when I say that all our everything belongs to God, that doesn’t make us subjects or property, it doesn’t make us slaves—no, we are beloved children. The commandment is not to *obey* the Lord our God, not to *fear* God, but to *love* God. Last week, I quoted Cuban-American theologian Kat Armas talking about how “we are a people no empire can possess.” The other week I saw a post from her on Facebook, talking about our reading from Deuteronomy this morning. She said, “In Deuteronomy, after Moses dies, God takes him to a hidden place and buries him. I don’t think we sit with that image often enough. Like in Genesis, when God takes the time to sew clothes for Eve and Adam. Empire doesn’t know what to do with this kind of God because it insists that power doesn’t sew or tend or handle a body with care. But you know what? Empire can keep its stoic, domineering tyrant-god. Give me the seamstress God—the one who bends low to stitch together clothing. The one who digs a grave and prepares a beloved body for burial. Give me the embodied God. The one who weeps and comforts and labors and nurses. And don’t believe them when they try to convince you that tenderness is not the language of God.”

That, I think, is a God worth loving with all my heart and soul and mind—not because God commanded it and demands my obedience, but because God loved me first, and God loves me well, tenderly and sweetly and humanly. God weeps with me and over me, and comforts me, God labors over me and alongside me, God nurses me, feeding me from God’s own body. What is not to love?

There’s a quotation from St. Augustine, which is often translated as “Love God and do as you please,” as if that first commandment is the only one that matters. But it’s better rendered as, “Love God—and then, what you will, do.” Because the idea is that we become more like what we love. The more we love God, Augustine would argue, the more our will is brought in line with the will of God. The more we love God, the more we love the things God loves—including our neighbors, which I think is why Jesus says the second commandment is very much like the first. So to the extent that our love for God has transformed our will and our loves and our desires, then we can trust our own desires to lead us in the right direction. “Love God—and then, what you will, do.”

That idea also relies pretty heavily on the assumption that our love for God is more than just an idea in our heads. It’s not just something we say, but something we do, something we practice, something that occupies all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind. Loving God so deeply that our will and our desires and our loves are brought in alignment with God’s really only happens if we steep ourselves in God, if we spend time getting to know the heart and the mind of God.

I think loving God with all our mind is helped by reading and studying Scripture—not just hearing it, but engaging with it, sometimes arguing with it, threshing it like grain to find the truth amidst the chaff. And it's helped by learning about the world around us, observing the mysteries of the creation, marveling at the intricacies of science and the abstract beauty of math, and also humanities and social sciences, using the brains God gave us to engage with the world, and the marvels of our own and each others' minds.

I think loving God with all our soul is helped by time we spend in prayer, time spent talking to God, and especially time spent listening, trying to hear whatever God might be saying in any particular time and place. The mind-boggling claim of Christian spirituality is that not only is God always present with, alongside, and all around us, but also that we can cultivate an awareness of that presence. We can learn to be more aware of God's presence, moment by moment, and that awareness deepens our love.

And I think loving God with all our heart is helped by the time we spend together in this community of faith. Because in big ways and small ways we show each other what God's love looks like, we show each other God's face, and we encourage each other, guide each other, sometimes correct each other, and support each other as we journey together along the road of our lives. And, of course, loving our neighbors, and even loving our enemies, is how we live out our love for God.

We are invited to love God with our whole selves—all our heart and soul and mind, all our everything. Can I tell you how liberating it was, the first time I preached a sermon at St. Columba's that talked about my work in fantasy gaming? For so long, I kept that part of myself in a separate compartment from my life in the church, probably because so many people presuppose a hostility between Christianity and fantasy, going back at least as far as the "Satanic panic" about *Dungeons & Dragons* in the 80s. But when I preached about angels in D&D and Magic, as well as angels in the Bible, I got to bring my whole self to the pulpit. I got to love God with my whole heart, with my entire soul, and with all my mind. Because the part of me that loves telling and playing and reading fantasy stories with angels and dragons and demons and magic and elves and horrible monstrosities ... that part of me is God's. That part of me is made in God's image and belongs to God just as much as the part of me that loves the Bible and theology and liturgy and God. What belongs to God is everything.

I suspect it's not just me: Are there parts of your life that you're inclined to leave outside when you come to church? Do you have interests, hobbies, ideas, beliefs that you feel you have to set aside or hide when you gather with this community at God's table? Are there injured, suffering, grieving parts of you that you cover up on Sunday mornings? What do you suppose it would feel like to bring all those things inside? What would it feel like to accept the truth that there is no part of you that God does not want, that God does not love, and that God will not receive?

The flip side is equally interesting to me. If I am striving to love God with all my heart and soul and mind, and I'm bringing my whole self into church, how am I continuing to love God with all my heart and soul and mind when I'm engaged in the work of the week? How do I love God with all my everything while I'm writing books about imaginary places, the horrible monsters that live there, and the valiant heroes who face those monsters? I think about that a lot, as you might imagine. And I think about my commitment to make the games I work on open and accessible to all people, to address and repair the places where some of the racist roots of fantasy are still tainting our work, to tell stories that lift up heroism and justice and love, and to celebrate our creative God as I engage in my creative work. I also think about doing my work with integrity, treating my co-workers with respect and love, participating in efforts to unionize our office, and helping others in any way I can.

There's no part of me that I can't bring to God, and there's no part of my life where God does not belong. Which is also an opportunity for me to give a little preview of the conversation about money and stewardship we'll be having during coffee hour today: just to emphasize that —when I say there's no part of my life where God does not belong, that includes my bank account. The way I think about money—budgeting for our family's expenses, what I do with my

earnings, what the government does with my taxes—that is God's, too. Like it or not, money is a part of our lives, and our lives are God's. So how do we love God with all our everything as we are dealing with our personal finances? How do we align our spending with our priorities—and how do we make sure our priorities are aligned with God's?

It starts with loving God, friends. Loving God with all our heart, as part of a loving community living in service to our neighbors Loving God with all our mind, studying and arguing and learning about how God relates to God's people and to this magnificent creation. And loving God with all our soul, steeping ourselves in the presence of God, in contemplation and prayer. That's how we learn to love what God loves, to will what God wills, to dream what God dreams—and that's how we find the fuel we need to bring those dreams to life in the world.

Thanks be to God.