

With All Your Heart, And With All Your Soul

July 13, 2025 at First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, UCC

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“With all your heart, and with all your soul.”

It might seem strange to our ears to pair authoritarian-sounding words like “commandment” and “decree” with emotional words like “turn to,” and “heart,” and “soul.”

Surely commandments and decrees have more to do with fear than with love?

Maybe not.

Maybe it was never really about obedience. The commandments which Moses brought down from Sinai weren’t about scaring people or keeping them in line. They were always about formation: the shaping of a people after God’s own heart.

To live by the commandments is to be in a constant state of re-orientation – of turning back toward God. Re-attuning the ear and the heart, on the journey toward a covenant-shaped life.

And I’m grateful to the early church for insisting on holding on to the Jewish sacred scriptures, the Bible of Jesus, when many in the movement wanted to scrap those books altogether and just keep the New Testament writings. Because we would have been giving up so much depth of history in the process. We would have been sweeping so much of our own human complexity and struggle under the rug, and with it the story of God’s abiding presence with the people through it all. The times God got mad and then got over it, the times God reached out to heal and restore and forgive. The constant presence of God in the midst of the human mess. Because human

mess is nothing new. Amid the trauma of these days we're living through, it's good to be reminded that even when history has been a complete dumpster fire, which is most of the time, the incredibly disappointing failure of humankind to be better has never stopped God from loving us, calling us, shaping us, healing us.... Drawing us toward a future that as yet only God can see.

Yes, there are 613 commandments in the Torah, and yes, some of them seem pretty esoteric to us today. But it was never about fear. It was about closeness to God. The story we've inherited as followers of Jesus is the story of how God came to draw a people close to God's own heart – inviting them to weave their awareness of the sacred, their awareness of God's intimate presence, into the practices of their own daily lives.

The commandments at their heart express God's longing for heart-to-heart connection with the earth, beginning with God's people, and through them, reaching out to the whole of humanity, and ultimately all creation.

“Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away... No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.”

613 commandments, but really just one. One word, and that word is love. That's the word that came down with Moses from on high to dwell with the people. The same word that came down in Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us.

In our mouth, and in our heart.

Dwelling in our still center: God within us; distinct from us, yet at home in our deepest self, sharing, stirring, shaping our life.

The word is very near you. Can you sense it? The call sounding at the

heart of it all?

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.”

With this word in our mouth and in our heart, we can be hopeful even in the grimmest of times. We are not on our own. We are not abandoned. God is with us, yes, even in the midst of the human mess: the mistakes, the sadness, the sickness, the hurt. The suffering we help bring about, and the weight of suffering we bear in our own spirits.

As poet Paul Claudel wrote:

“Jesus did not come to explain suffering, nor to take it away. He came to fill it with his presence.”

And so we pray: Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus. Come to us as we are. Fill us with your presence, even here, even now. And may our lives proclaim your praise. Amen.