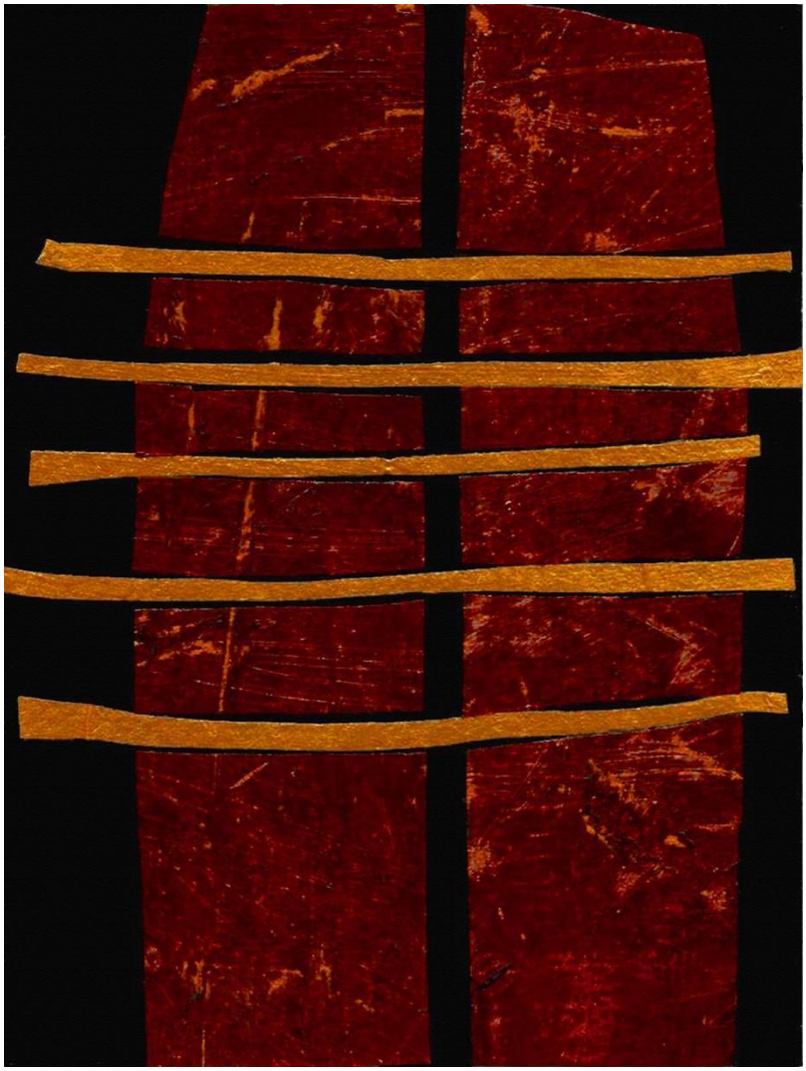


All for Love
Rev. Dr. Glenda Hollingshead; October 25, 2026
Deuteronomy 34:1-12; Matthew 22:34-40
22nd Sunday after Pentecost; Reformation Sunday

On the liturgical calendar, today is Reformation Sunday—a day when we remember a movement that changed the church and helped reshape the world. At its heart, the Reformation was motivated by a deep love of God and a desire to hold religious leaders accountable for their corruption and misuse of power. The gifts of the Reformation are undeniable. It called the church back to Scripture, renewed the proclamation of salvation by grace through faith, encouraged people to read the Bible in their own language, expanded opportunities for education, and reminded Christians that every believer has a place in the life and ministry of the church. It gave birth to the Presbyterian Church and other Protestant traditions, and it left us with an enduring

conviction that the church must always be willing to examine itself and reform when it strays from the gospel.

Yet the Reformation also came at great cost. Faithful people died for their beliefs. Religious property was destroyed. Communities were torn apart, and the unity of the Western church was broken. In fact, division remains a painful part of the Protestant story. Sadly, division is also a hallmark of the culture in which we currently live. Our nation is suffering. We are broken. We are divided. Looking out over the horizon, we cannot help but wonder: Is there a path that can lead us toward a brighter future for us all? Maybe our Scripture readings for this morning offer a place to start.

In our reading from Deuteronomy, we find Moses experiencing one final encounter with God on a mountaintop. Accompanied by the Lord, he ascends to the heights, where God shows him the Promised Land from a distance. Moses can see the destination, but he will not enter it. There, in the presence of God, Moses dies. His life and leadership have come to an end, but the story of God's people continues. Looking back on his remarkable life, Scripture declares, "Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. He was unequaled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel."[i]

Moses was an extraordinary man of God, a prophet unlike any other in Israel's history. Yet even Moses, for all his faithfulness, had his limitations. He could lead God's people toward the Promised Land, but he could not bring them all the way there himself. His story reminds us that even the greatest among us are not the fulfillment of God's promises. We are all, in one way or another, people who see the horizon from a distance, trusting that God is leading us toward something greater than ourselves. For Christians, that something greater is revealed in Jesus Christ. Moses was a faithful servant in God's house, but Jesus is the Son through whom God's promises find their fulfillment. As the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us, "Therefore, brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. Yet Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself."[ii]

In many ways, Matthew portrays Jesus as the New Moses, and the parallels are striking. Consider just a few examples. When Moses is born, his life is spared even as Pharaoh orders the deaths of Hebrew baby boys. When Jesus is born, his life is spared even as King Herod orders the deaths of young children in and around Bethlehem. When Moses' life is threatened, he flees Egypt for Midian, eventually returning to Egypt to lead God's people to freedom. Jesus, on the other hand, flees from Bethlehem to Egypt as a child and later returns to the land of Israel. Moses performs

signs and wonders through the power of God, and God provides manna from heaven to feed the Israelites in the wilderness. Jesus, too, performs signs and wonders, including feeding five thousand people with five loaves and two fish. And finally, Moses ascends the mountain to receive God's Law, while Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, ascends a mountain to teach the people how to understand and live out that Law. Matthew wants us to see the connection—that even though Jesus stands in the tradition of Moses—he brings with him a new and deeper understanding of what it means to live as God's people.

I suppose it's no wonder that the religious authorities turn to the Law when they want to test Jesus. The Law was a gift from God, given to guide the people in faithful living. But over generations, interpretations and applications multiplied until Jewish tradition came to identify 613 commandments in the Torah. And the challenge wasn't simply knowing the commandments but understanding how they fit together and how they should be lived. That is the setting for our Gospel reading.

So, with the goal of trapping Jesus, the religious authorities send in one of their brightest minds, a lawyer well versed in the Scriptures. Think of him as the Walter Brueggemann of his day—a brilliant Old Testament scholar who knows his stuff! He poses what seems like a straightforward question, but one that carries enormous theological weight: "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" Now, for the Pharisees, keeping the Law was central to living a holy life. So, beneath the surface, this is really a question about holiness. What does it mean to be faithful to God? What matters most? Jesus answers, "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."

In answering the question, Jesus reframes our understanding of holiness. He doesn't pit the Law against people, or people against the Law. It isn't one or the other. Because, at its heart, the Law is not simply a list of dos and don'ts. It's about relationships. It's about being guided by love to act in loving ways. And this is precisely what we see embodied in Jesus. In all that he does, Jesus models what it means to be in relationship with God and with the people God loves. Moses may have delivered the Law to God's people, but Jesus has the authority to bring its deepest meaning into focus. Not ten commandments. Certainly not 613. Just two that hold everything else together: love God, and love God's people as you love yourself.

Undoubtedly, Jesus shows us what it means to love God every time he walks away from the crowds to pray, every time he spends the night in communion with his Abba Father, and every time he boldly prays, "Thy will be done." But if we're honest with ourselves, we know that loving God with all our heart, soul, and mind—loving God as Jesus does—is not something we can accomplish on our own. We fall short. Our priorities get confused. We put our own desires ahead

of God's desires. The truth is—we need God's grace. We cannot love as Jesus loves by our own strength. We need God to keep working on us, to keep reforming us.

While Jesus shows us how to love God, he also shows us how to love our neighbor. Throughout his ministry, Jesus shows mercy when mercy is needed. He shows compassion when compassion is needed. He speaks the truth when the truth is needed. He stands alongside the forgotten, welcomes the excluded, and reaches out to those whom others would rather leave behind. Jesus embodies the words of the prophet Micah: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, points us toward the spiritual Promised Land—a land where love reigns supreme, and where our neighbors are no longer strangers or enemies, but people created and beloved by God.

And so, on this Reformation Sunday, we recognize that we are part of a story that began long before us and will continue long after we are gone. The Reformers sought to bring the church back to the heart of the gospel. They challenged corruption, confronted the misuse of power, and called upon the church to remember what matters most. And the work of reformation continues in every generation. Perhaps our part in that work is to stop focusing solely on what divides us and to start asking what love requires of us.

The church is faithful to the spirit of the Reformation when all our theology, all our traditions, all our worship, and all our work lead us back to these two commandments: love God with all that you are and love your neighbor as yourself. Like Moses, we may not reach the Promised Land—we may see it only from a distance. But even if we don't live to see the divisions of our church or our nation fully healed, as long as we have life and strength within us, we can take the next step along the path that Jesus trod—the path of love. Amen.

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[i] Deuteronomy 34:10-12, NRSVue
[ii] Hebrews 3:1-3

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