

"Teach Your Children Well" — by Rev. Dr. Adam Hange, May 10th, 2026

*Deuteronomy 6:1-9*

We've had several birthdays in our house lately. Which means wish lists. Which means shopping. Which means that particular kind of attention — setting aside time, money, imagination — to find, or make, that perfect gift.

It takes work, but it doesn't feel like work. There is an obligation, but it doesn't feel like obligation. It feels like joy.

There's excitement in the planning, delight in the surprise, and then — when the moment finally comes — something almost indescribable.

I think about grandparents I've known — people who will drive across the state, book the flight, fix the broken thing, stay up late, spend more than they planned — and never once call it a sacrifice.

*What wouldn't you do for one you love and adore?*

Love isn't supposed to be effortless. But it isn't supposed to feel like work, either. There is joy in love. And that joy is real — because it is freely given, not performed, never coerced. And that is the kind of Love we're talking about today.

Today is, of course, Mother's Day. And before we go any further, I want to say: I know this can be a day of complicated feelings.

Most of us associate it with flowers and brunch, cards and phone calls. But it's worth remembering that it didn't begin that way. Before Capitalism got ahold of it, it was more like a day of protest.

In 1870, Julia Ward Howe — poet, abolitionist, and author of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" — issued what she called a Mother's Day Proclamation. It was not a greeting card. It was a rallying cry. Having watched a generation of sons destroyed by the Civil War, Howe was furious — and she turned that fury into a call to action.

She summoned mothers of all backgrounds to stand up, to speak out, to refuse the logic of violence, and to insist on a different way.

She believed that the same love that shaped a child in the home could, and should, shape the world for the better. She was not describing a sentimental holiday. She was describing a vocation. A moral force. A legacy of love, justice, and peace.

I know not everyone carries easy feelings today. Not every experience of motherhood — or of being mothered — was a storybook. Some of you are sitting with complicated grief, complicated gratitude, or something in between. You are welcome here, exactly as you are.

But this much I want to say: the love we are describing today — love that shapes, that advocates, that refuses to be silent — that love is real. And more necessary than ever.

You may have glimpsed it in a mother, a grandmother, an aunt, a mentor, a teacher, a friend. However imperfect the vessel, Love like that points toward something true. And that is the love we are called, together, to pass on to our future generations.

The passage from Deuteronomy 6 is one of the most ancient and beloved in all of Scripture. The Jewish tradition calls it the Shema — named for its first word in Hebrew: *Hear. Shema, Y'Israel. Hear, O Israel.*

A generation before this moment, these people were enslaved. They knew what it was to be strangers in a foreign land — refugees, people without a home of their own. Now, liberated by a God who heard their cry, they stand on the threshold of a promised home.

Moses is old. He knows he won't be crossing with them. And so he speaks:

*"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words in your heart. Teach them to your children, and your children's children."*

What is remarkable is how seriously Jewish practice has taken that instruction — not as poetry, but as embodied, physical discipline. "Bind them on your hand" gave rise to *tefillin* — small leather boxes containing scripture, bound to the hand and forehead during morning prayer. The body itself becomes a place where the Word dwells.

"Write them on your doorposts" gave rise to the *mezuzah* — a small case affixed to the doorframe of a Jewish home. All who enter are to touch it coming and going. It is not decoration. It is ritual — a daily reminder: Love is the first thing and the last thing. Love is the threshold you cross every time you leave and every time you return.

Generations later, someone asked Jesus which commandment was greatest. Without hesitation, he quoted the Shema. Love God wholly. And then added: *and love your neighbor as yourself*. The entirety of the law, he said, hangs on these two things.

You see, Love is the heartbeat of the covenant. Not obligation. Not transaction. Love.

During the children's moment this morning, I shared "Teach Your Children Well" by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young — published in 1970, one hundred years after Julia Ward Howe's proclamation. It isn't really a song about instruction. It's a song about legacy — what we hope our children will carry long after we are gone.

In a way, Moses, standing on the edge of the Jordan, is singing the same song.

*Teach your children... and your children's children...to Love... teach them well.*

I love looking out at this congregation on Sunday mornings — especially on special Sundays - when I can see two, three, on rare occasions, four generations gathered together. Grandparents who have worshipped in these pews for fifty years, sitting alongside grandchildren who are just learning what this container - we call Church - holds.

What is being passed down in those moments? Much more than belief, or even tradition. A way of being. A way of Loving. A posture toward the world that says: this matters. These people matter. This earth matters.

Fostering more Love, and hope, and peace... matters. For us, and those who will come after us.

Which brings me to how we sustain all we do here — our ministry and mission.

My sincere hope is that we approach the stewardship of this church the way Moses approached the Shema. Not as a list of obligations. Not as a budget problem to be solved. But, rather, as a Love we inhabit.

This past year, we had to replace a boiler pump. That's not the kind of thing that gets people excited. But when a grieving family gathers in a cold sanctuary, when a child arrives for church in a winter coat, when a visitor pulls open our doors for the first time — *they are warm, and they are welcomed*. Because that pump was fixed. That warmth - is our Love, made real and practical.

And sometimes love isn't just about maintaining what exists — it's about imagining what is not yet. What does a sustainable future look like for this building, this ministry, this community? Every conversation about our long-term future is an act of love. Every week, we plant trees we may never sit under. We repair things for the sake of people we haven't yet met.

Moses never got to see the promise fulfilled. *He taught the people anyway*. He trusted that what he was planting would take root, and one day grow into something beautiful and life-giving.

As you prayerfully consider your pledge of support this year, I'd invite you to start, not with the numbers, but with the story. Think about the ways this church has blessed you, comforted you, and challenged you over this past year, and past years. And, when you consider your contribution - consider it for what it is. Not obligation. Love.

There is a moment I keep coming back to — the moment when the offering plate is passed into a child's hands for the first time. They hold it, a little uncertain, a little solemn, and then they pass it on. In that moment, they are learning something no classroom lesson could fully teach: this is who we are. This is what we do. This is how we love.

That is a legacy we are building. Not just a sustainable budget. Not just a well-maintained building. A legacy of love — freely given, joyfully offered, passed from one generation to the next.

God hopes, I believe, that we give in such a way that something outlives us. A warmth that remains. A welcome that endures. A love, written on the doorposts of this place, that the children who come after us will touch on their way in and on their way out — and know: here, we were loved. Here, we loved well.

Let us, teach our children well. May it be so. Amen.