
Love is That Tremendous and Fascinating Mystery

**From the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip**

This week's article is an excerpt from Sam Candler's sermon of 3 March 2013. (See more at stphilipscathedral.org/leadership.)

, Most of us, when we see a fire, we note it as fire. But it takes time to see a miracle. We are required to pause, sometimes for a long time, if we are to observe that the fire is not consuming anything. It had to have taken Moses some time to figure this out. He had to take off his shoes. It takes a while, it takes patience, it requires taking off your shoes and getting down to earth, to figure out that the bush was not being consumed. He was fascinated.

That burning bush is the symbol of the name of God forever: "YAHWEH" was the name spoken to Moses. We usually translate that word as, "I am who I am." But it can also mean, in Hebrew, "I am becoming who I am becoming." And the word can also mean, "I will be who I will be." In other words, God is never complete. God is still becoming. And creation itself is still longing for the completion of the children of God.

This fire of God burns and gives forth light, yet it never consumes us. That is what Moses saw in the wilderness. That was his vision. One of the great German philosophers of the early twentieth century described religious experience this way. God, he said, was "mysterium tremendum et fascinans." A tremendous and fascinating mystery. The mystery of God is tremendous, but it does not confound or frighten us. Rather, it fascinates and attracts us.

The fascinating experience of love is like that, isn't it? I hope every one of you here has been in love before. (I hope you are in love right now!) Well, true love has this same characteristic. When you are in love with someone, you feel like "no matter how well you know your lover" still you do not know everything about him or her, and you want to know more. You are fascinated. A tremendous and fascinating mystery.

And the more we love, the more love we have. Love replenishes itself the more we use it. That is its miracle. Why do we give everything we have for the one we love? Because we know that our love will provide more in the future.

Yes, the only way to get more "the only way to get more love!" is to give more love. That is one of the great principles of the Christian faith. The only way to get things is to give them away. The only way to be forgiven is to forgive someone else. The only way to be loved is to love someone else. The only way to gain your life is to lose it.

And in the end, the love you take

Is equal to the love you make. (That's the way Paul McCartney and John Lennon expressed it.)

The love and the presence of God never run out. That is what Moses saw; that was his vision. There is some mystery, some fascinating mystery about God that both amazes us and fascinates us "without end. It is worth pursuing because the more we seek, the more we find, and then the more we want to seek some more.

God is like that fire that never burns out. And we can find that fire, that passion, in all sorts of ordinary experience: from

people and flowers in the gardens, to conflict and grief in the city, to bushes and solitude in the wilderness. Every piece of God's creation can show us something of the eternity and majestic grace of God.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning said it this way:

*Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God:
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it, and pluck blackberries.*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip