



**Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue  
in the City of New York**

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**[www.SaintThomasChurch.org](http://www.SaintThomasChurch.org)**

**Sunday, April 28, 2013**  
***The Fifth Sunday of Easter***

***Festal Evensong***  
***at 4pm***

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A Sermon by  
The Reverend Michael D. Spurlock  
on  
Matthew 22:37-39  
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*Sermon Series: Commandments as Good News*  
**SERMON 12: LOVE GOD**

Over the past several weeks we have addressed each of the Ten Commandments in some detail. And now we come to a question that was once posed to our Lord. Is any one of the commandments greater than the others? Jesus answered, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment...”<sup>i</sup> This is what we Christians have come to call the Summary of the Law. But before it was that, Jesus would have known his own answer as the *shema*. In his summary, he is quoting a Jewish daily prayer taken from the book of Deuteronomy: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”<sup>ii</sup> So for centuries before the advent of Jesus Israel had been summarizing the commandments as a command to love God. The questions that arise about our loving God are just as old.<sup>iii</sup>

Why should I love God? The short answer is that we love God because God is himself. God is the source of all that exists. God is the source of my existence and of yours. We live because God is. The world we live in exists because God is. He is entirely creative and he is entirely eternal, meaning that before any thing was, God was there. He is first and last, there is nothing that preceded God, there will be nothing to come after him. But what’s more, God has searched each one of us out and has known everyone and every thing he ever brought into being. He knows everything that you and I we do, whether we sit down or stand up and he understands every thought that has ever crossed our minds. God has surrounded us and he knows and understands all our ways. There is not a word that I can speak that God won’t hear and there is not a thing that I can do that he won’t see. His hand has touched every one of us. Wherever we go God is there, whether we invite him there or not. God was there with me when I was knit together in my mother’s womb (in fact God knew me before I was knit in my mother’s womb, all my days were numbered in his book) and he will be there with me when I make my bed in the grave.<sup>iv</sup> All that knowledge about who God is has an effect on me. The effect is to draw love out of my being.

Sometimes we make a slight error in our loving. We live in a world that is fearfully and wonderfully made. I admire the buds that bloom with such profusion all on a spring day. A breeze caresses my face and my heart is moved for the beauty of the earth. I stand in awe of the majesty of the vast sea or the towering mountains. My heart skips like a ram when I look into the eyes of my wife or my children. The error is for all that admiration and devotion, awe and love to stop at the thing inspiring it. But when any one of us wakes up to the absolute truth that there is a being on the

other side of all that beauty and glory who must be that much more beautiful and glorious to have made it all, we wake up to the possibility that our love can go deeper and farther than we thought possible. The end of our deepest love is not creature, but creator.

But then I ask, how much should I love God? The short answer is I should love God with my whole being. When a couple comes to me to prepare for marriage, we inevitably talk about their life together as being one endless oblation; an offering of self one to the other. Marriages that rise to the sacramental level are marriages wherein a man and a woman come to be joined together unreservedly. They hold nothing back. With this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship and with all my worldly goods I thee endow. Nothing is held back, nothing is off limits. They give themselves to one another physical, spiritual, material and do so in all manner of circumstances, for richer, poorer, better worse, sickness and in health until they are parted by death. And we have long recognized that the image of a man and wife joined in holy matrimony is an image for the union betwixt Christ the bridegroom and his Church the bride.<sup>v</sup> And we know how Christ loved us; with body, mind and soul, and in the face of all circumstances: he held nothing back. And that is an image for how we are to love God, in all circumstances and with our very being.

Lastly, we might ask, can I love God unreservedly? The short answer is yes, you can. The irony is that you cannot do it without the object of your love. God holds a claim and title to our love. His claim is staked on the fact that he made you and sustains you. It is also staked on the fact that he came to earth in the flesh and gave his life as a ransom for your life. God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.<sup>vi</sup> Therefore, your love for God is not a gift that you give him, but it is a debt that you owe him. A debt that has already been paid in God's own blood shed for you.

A favorite poet in a favorite poem provides an image.

A poet, or maybe a composer, is pacing the floor. He is muttering a scrap of verse, "My joy, my life, my crown!" perhaps hoping that this seed of an idea will blossom into a greater work of art. But then the author says, don't slight these few words. If they are said with sincerity they might take their place among the best in art. The fineness of any hymn or psalm is to be found when the soul and the text are in harmony.

Whereas if the heart be moved,  
Although the verse be somewhat scant,  
God doth supply the want;  
As when the heart says, sighing to be approved,  
"O, could I love!" and stops, God writeth, "Loved."<sup>vii</sup>

Why should I love God? Because he is himself. How much should I love God? With my very being. Can I love God with my very being? Yes. We love God because he first loved us.<sup>viii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Matt 22.37-39

<sup>ii</sup> Deut 6.4-5

<sup>iii</sup> One source that seeks to answer these questions is one I have drawn on heavily: Bernard of Clairvaux's *On Loving God*.

<sup>iv</sup> Psalm 139

<sup>v</sup> The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony, BCP.

<sup>vi</sup> Rom 5.8

<sup>vii</sup> George Herbert, "A True Hymn"

<sup>viii</sup> 1 John 4.19