

# Sermons at Christ Church

## *Building Relationships through Love.*

Maundy Thursday  
The Reverend Emmanuel Ato Mercer

*“Love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another”* In the gospel story, Jesus gathers with his friends, the twelve who had been with him since the beginning of his ministry, His journey with them has seen the best and the worst of human conduct. It has also been a journey where they witnessed at first hand the glory of God being made manifest in Jesus Christ.

But tonight is a night of commandments: **“Do this in remembrance of me.” “You also should do just as I have done to you wash each other’s feet.” “Love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another”** These sacred commandments are our life blood. They bring forth life and the gift of these commandments is nurtured around the Eucharistic table and lived out in the world.

Tonight we remember the mandate of the Passover. The Israelites are preparing to depart from Egypt after so many years in slavery. As they gathered around their tables to eat the Passover meal in Egypt, each Israelite was welcome to each any table. A meal and a drink were made available for every Israelite-young and old. In fact, people were mandated to join with others if they thought they were going to be by themselves.

Tonight, just like the Passover tradition, the disciples gather with Jesus around a common table to eat. This was Jesus’ last meal before his heartbreaking moment in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was his last meal before his arrest and crucifixion. This meal has become our Thanksgiving meal. A meal of simple bread and wine to which everyone is welcome to partake.

There’s something powerful about the meal that Jesus shared with his friends and there’s a powerful symbolic message about the table upon which the meal was set. Around that table sat Peter-who would betray him three times and Judas who had betrayed him to his enemies for 30 pieces of silver.

Around the table sat friends who would run away to their homes and families leaving Jesus to fend for himself.

The mystery is, no one knew what was in the other's heart while they sat at table and ate together. But Jesus knew. And how troubling must that have been for him.

For this reason, the table shouldn't discriminate between those who would follow Jesus or betray him. The table shouldn't discriminate between those whose hearts are pure or impure. The table should be open and invite all to come for sustenance, because it is when we are broken that we need it the most.

For me, the table of thanksgiving is unique because of its ability to disintegrate human categories and welcome both the sinner and the righteous, the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor, the slave and the free, the king and the janitor, the famished and the full, the weary and the energetic, the lost and the found-and each drink from the same cup and eat the same bread because each of us need it.

Here is another commandment. Wash the other's feet. According to the gospel, after the meal Jesus poured water into a basin, pulled a towel to wash the disciple's feet. Peter resisted because he was an old school guy who believed that the leader has to be served by the followers. From this story, we learn that leadership is about service-it isn't about being served. It is an alternative form of leadership. The leader is supposed to offer himself or herself through the sacrifice of love and to serve those he or she leads.

Tonight, unlike many other nights that Jesus and his friends had been together and shared a meal, Jesus does something different after the meal-he pours water into a bowl and washes the feet of his friends. Love one another just as I have loved you. Wash each other's feet. It is a symbolic wash, but it speaks volumes about our responsibility to each other.

Listen to Jesus, if I, your teacher can wash your feet, then you should be able to wash each other's feet. In fact, it should be your joy to do so. Through the practice of washing each other's feet, we are exposed to a kind of service which is rooted in love.

That is what the washing of feet looks like. It means bringing ourselves to the level of the people with whom we serve. It means identifying with those with whom you want to share the good news. To wash another's feet is to be willing to carry that person's burden. To wash another's feet is to say that you value that person. To wash another's feet is to make this claim, I see you and I honor you. To wash another's feet is to proclaim that they deserve everything that we have-including our dignity. To wash another's feet is to say I can stand shoulder to shoulder with you, eat the same food and drink from the same cup, and kneel before the same altar table with you and serve with you.

That is why for me, the table of thanksgiving-Eucharist should remain open. For the table is a symbol of a love which is counter-cultural. The table of thanksgiving represents to me the idea that the teacher and the student, the master and the servant, the slave and the free can drink from the same cup and eat the same bread. More than that, the Table of Thanksgiving affirms that we are not only willing to eat in remembrance of the one who washes not only our feet, but also our sins.

Around the Table of Thanksgiving, we will find all sorts of saints. You may ask yourself, why would Jesus share a table with these men even though he knew what was in their hearts? The point is that we do not have to agree with someone or know what is in their heart before we stand around the Table of Thanksgiving with them.

Each moment that we receive the broken body and blood of Jesus; we affirm that God in his infinite goodness has made us fit for purpose. It is an acknowledgement that it isn't by our own individual merit, but it is God who makes it possible for us to receive God in our hands.

When we walk to the table, kneel or stand around the table, stretch out our hands and receive the bread and the cup, we make this promise that although we do not know what is in each heart, we will still wash each other's feet. The call to wash your feet supersedes anything that I can do for you. It is the heart of service.

It is this gift which reminds us that although we do not know where we are going, we all have one destination in mind that's why we are here, that's why we strive to be with each other even when we vehemently disagree with each other.

For this reason, the moment the Table of thanksgiving becomes closed to some, we become like Peter who refuses to have his feet washed because he believes he is undeserving. But Christ makes this point to him, each is deserving. The moment the table becomes closed to some, we arrogate to ourselves the task of determining the recipients of God's grace and mercy. But we are not in the position to do so.

For me, the openness of the Table is not only a reflection of the openness of the master who is also a servant, it also reflects the openness of the kingdom of God to all those who have within themselves the gift to love and serve as Jesus did.

The commandment is to love one another as you have been loved. The mandate is to wash each other's feet. The instruction is to eat the broken bread and drink the wine in remembrance of the gift of salvation.

The question really is, what do you need in order to love, wash and eat? What prevents you? What stops you from loving, washing and eating?

Remember, nothing stops you because the Teacher knows that even in your brokenness, you are deserving. The good news is that each of us has the capacity to follow the Savior's command to love, to wash, to eat and drink-and we do all of these in thanksgiving for the love that we first experienced from him. I pray that we will keep these commandments.

**Amen.**