

HE CHOSE A TOWEL

(John 13:1-17)

- Fill in the chart below by identifying what kinds of service you are comfortable and uncomfortable providing and receiving.

	Comfortable	Uncomfortable
Providing		
Receiving		

- Why do you think you filled in the chart the way you did? (Explain your reasons to the best of your ability.)
- Read John 13:1-17 below and answer the questions that follow.

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.²The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. ³Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God;

⁴so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

⁸"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."⁹"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

¹⁰Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of

you."¹¹For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

¹²When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. ¹³"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

- What do you think were some of the reasons Jesus washed the disciples' feet?
 - What is the meaning of the dialogue between Jesus and Peter?
 - What important principles of life and leadership do you learn from this passage?
- How would you have felt if you were *receiving* the foot washing from Jesus and how might you have felt *providing* it for the group?
 - What could you do in the coming week to increase your comfort level in either receiving or providing service or to thank those that provide it for you?

The only really happy people are those who have learned how to serve.

- Albert Schweitzer, 20th century philosopher, physician, humanitarian

FOLLOWING JESUS

(Mark 2:14)

1. What has been a significant decision in your life that took some time for you to make?
2. Describe the journey that brought you to the point where you were able to make the decision you made.
3. Read Mark 2:14 and the background information below and answer the questions that follow.

As he [Jesus] walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

As a tax-collector, Matthew was a social outcast. He was disqualified from being a witness in court. He was excommunicated from the synagogue. His disgrace extended to his immediate family, who were also disqualified and excommunicated.

He was the ancient equivalent of a corrupt customs agent. Tariff collectors usually charged people huge amounts, whatever the market would bear. They paid Rome the minimum and pocketed the rest. They were wealthy extortionists.

Jewish tax-collectors were regarded by other Jews as traitors because they worked in the service of a foreign oppressor, the pagan Roman Empire. In short, Matthew was part of a class of people that were detested everywhere by everyone and classed with the vilest of humanity.

Matthew's gospel reveals that he was steeped in knowledge of the Hebrew Bible, probably from his childhood. His gospel contains more Messianic references applied to Jesus than any book in the New Testament.

Using the information above—and your imagination—describe what Matthew's journey to faith may have looked like.

- Why might he have betrayed or discarded his faith?
 - What might have been his disposition toward fellow Jews?
 - What might have been his disposition toward the Romans?
 - What might have clicked for him when he heard the call of Jesus?
4. How would you describe where are you on your journey, and what decisions are you facing presently?
 5. What will you ask God to provide that would allow you to take another step forward on this leg of your journey?

To follow means to follow, not to lead. To point not to our own superior moral character but to the dimly seen figure out there that we are stumbling after.

- Frederick Buechner, *The Magnificent Defeat*

THE BOOK OF WHAT AND HOW

(Matthew 28:18-20)

1. Share a story of frustration from your past when someone expected you to do a project or task, but failed to give you clear instructions, so that you knew *what* to do but not *how* to do it.
2. What were the consequences of their failure to provide the how-to, for you personally as well as for the project you were to accomplish?
3. Read Matthew 28:18-20 below and answer the questions that follow.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The Bible has been called our Message book, telling us *what* to do, and our Method book, telling us *how* to do it.

- What words and phrases encompass the one central command of the above passage, i.e. what tells us *what* to do?

- What words and phrases instruct us how to carry out Jesus' commission?
 - What other "how-to" instructions are not stated, but implied in Jesus' words and phrases or in what you know of how he related to the disciples during his three-year ministry with them?
4. Where in your life do you currently need further instructions, not about what to do, but on "how-to" do what you know you need to do?
 5. Where will you go this week to get help with how-to so you can complete your task successfully and move on?

Leadership: The skill of influencing people to work enthusiastically toward goals identified as being for the common good.

- James C. Hunter, *The Servant*

BUILDING TRUST

(Romans)

1. Describe a time when you experienced a strong sense of safety and trust or danger and mistrust from a group of people.
 - *“Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way.” (Rom 14:13)*
 - *“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” (Rom 15:7)*
 - *“Greet one another with a holy kiss.” (Rom 16:16)*

2. What was it about the group, setting, or circumstances that made you feel this way?

3. The book of Romans contains a special set of instructions for building community. Because they all contain a phrase that means *one another of the same kind*, we know they address the way members of the faith community are to treat each other. Read the list. How might these look when put into practice? What kind of community might be created if these instructions were carried out?
 - *“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.” (Rom 12:10)*
 - *“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.” (Rom 12:16)*
 - *“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.” (Rom 13:8)*

4. Which principles are most important to help you experience safety and trust?

5. What will you do this week—as an individual and a small group—to help produce an environment of safety and trust in our faith community?

***Spiritual community is at once the safest place on earth
and the place of greatest danger.***

- Larry Crabb, counselor and author

MEDITATION

(*A Testament of Devotion*, Thomas Kelly)

1. What's your response (intellectual, emotional, physical) when you hear the word *meditation*?
2. What experiences or lack thereof might that response be rooted in?
3. Consider the following excerpt from Quaker philosopher and educator Thomas Kelly. (Or substitute reading Pss 48:9; 119:27, 97; 143:5 and ask the same question.)

Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continuously return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto Itself....

Let us explore together the secret of a deeper devotion, a more subterranean sanctuary of the soul.... What is here urged are internal practices and habits of the mind..., secret habits of unceasing orientation of the deeps of our being about the Inward Light, ways of conducting our inward life so that we are perpetually bowed in worship while we are also very busy in the world of daily affairs....

There is a way of ordering our mental life on more than one level at once. On one level we may be thinking, discussing, seeing, calculating, meeting all the demands of external affairs. But deep within, behind the scenes, at a profounder level, we may also be in prayer and adoration, song and worship and a gentle receptiveness to divine breathings.

- What do you think Kelly is prescribing and what are his reasons for doing so?
 - From Kelly's writing and what you know of Scripture, what do you imagine might be some benefits of meditation? (Look at Psalm 1:1-3 if you need help.)
4. Can you identify times in the coming week when you'd be able to visit the inner sanctuary to encounter the Living Word? When are they and where will you be?
 5. We encourage you to choose one or several of these times and experiment with the practice of meditating on the written Word. You might also think of someone you'd be willing to describe your experience to as the week progresses.

Pray supportively for your upcoming experiments and encounters with the Living Word.

Meditation is simply the art of thinking steadily and methodically about spiritual things.

- Evelyn Underhill, British author and mystic

THE PAIN OF CHANGE

(Various quotes)

1. To what kind of changes are you most likely to respond negatively?

Progress is a nice word. But change is its motivator. And change has its enemies. (Robert F. Kennedy, U.S. Attorney General 1960-64)

2. What does it take to have you respond positively and supportively?

Everyone thinks of changing humanity, but no one thinks of changing himself. (Leo Tolstoy, Russian novelist and moral philosopher)

3. Discuss the quotes from today's message below. Where do you agree or disagree?

Nothing is permanent but change.... You cannot step twice in the same river, for other waters are continually flowing in. (Heraclitus, Greek philosopher, 535-475 B.C.E.)

Change is not made without inconvenience, even from worse to better. (Richard Hooker, 16th century British theologian)

Change is the law of life and those who look only to the past and the present are certain to miss the future. (John F. Kennedy, 35th U.S. President)

Change means movement. Movement means friction. Only in the frictionless vacuum of a nonexistent abstract world can movement or change occur without that abrasive friction of conflict. (Saul Alinsky, 20th century American political activist)

A wise man changes his mind. A fool never will. (Spanish proverb)

I resist change even as I call for it. (Mason Cooley, American aphorist)

The goal of the family is homeostasis. (Murray Bowen, father of family systems theory)

4. Which of these thoughts are particularly pertinent to your present situation and/or this organization's present situation?

5. What specific steps will you take in the weeks ahead to maintain a positive perspective on change and draw on resources from God and his people for doing so?

In churches or synagogues the underlying homeostatic forces are sometimes more difficult to identify because they tend to be camouflaged in religious terminology. (Edwin Friedman, rabbi and family systems therapist)

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.

- Jesus, Matthew 10:34-35