



## CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

In the name of the loving, liberating, life-giving God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Okay, so here we are in the middle of Holy Week, and for some reason the good Lord has saw fit to put on my heart a conversation about cars. Are we okay with that? I know this is Michigan, right? We can handle that. So when I first moved to Michigan, I was driving a Kia Sportage. And it was an okay car. I kept wanting to call it an IKEA Sportage for some reason, which always befuddled the oil change guys. But it didn't take long for me to realize that this is called the Motor City for a reason. It seemed like everyone I met – at least half or so, or maybe a third. But nearly everyone I met had some kind of connection to the business, to the automobile industry, right?

It was very clear to me very soon that my next car had to be an American. I needed to get on the, on the right team, right? So I found a Buick that I really liked, thanks to Richard Whitten who had an in. It had a middle console for my coffee. Plenty of room in the backseat for the girls' car seats. I'm a person of pretty modest needs when it comes to cars. And I've since learned that Buick was built in South Korea, by the way. So I don't know if I've really made any progress on that score, but I still feel like I'm supporting the home team somehow.

Anyway, my lease came up last month, so I went back to Buick and I said to the salesperson, look, I'm looking at either the Buick Envista or the Chevy Trax. I had done my research. I knew that they were basically the same car underneath. The drive train, or powertrain, whatever that is, under – it's the same car, I learned, just has a different emblem on the hood. Well, this salesperson, she looked at me as if I had just insulted one of her children. She was like, oh, no, no, no, no, no. Are you kidding me? You don't want to go down to a Chevy. You need to stay with the Buick. That's a step up.

And I had to laugh because these two cars I'm talking about, to be honest, they are kind of like on the lowest end of the SUV range, okay? Neither one of them are prestige cars by any stretch. They're really the same car, and yet here she is trying to sell me on this idea that if I go with the Buick, I'm going to somehow have some status over those poor Chevy drivers.

It was just such a reminder to me about how seriously we can take our status symbols in this country, how concerned we can get with the business of social comparison. It is literally everywhere. It shows up in the brands that we wear. Does it not? It shows up in the brands we no longer wear. It shows up in what side of town we choose to live on and whether or not we have a second house of our own.

It shows up in the schools we attend, the clubs we belong to, the celebrities we claim to know, the number of followers we brag about on social media. Even whether you have an iPhone or an Android. Have you – yeah? Did you know that on dating apps, there are people that will literally swipe right by you if you're using an Android phone. And just to be clear, Joe, I am not talking from personal experience at all. I heard that on a podcast. Okay? To be clear.

And I get it too, by the way, because before I was ordained, I had my own law practice for a while and without really questioning it, without really intending to do this as we grew and as we could afford to, well, we too, we moved right into that big prestigious high rise with a view of the bay and marble floors. And it had this great espresso machine in the lobby.

The problem of course, is that these symbols of status, these social signals of power and influence, which we can get so caught up in, they're more than just an ego trip that we hopefully all will grow out of one day. The problem is they draw lines between us. They dehumanize us. They can create a pecking order. They demark those who have and those who don't. Those who need help and those who can provide help. Those who have access and those who don't. Those who are in and those who are out. And it feeds a system of social and economic red lighting that leaves some people forever marginalized and others in a state of constant comparison, anxiously trying to keep up with everyone else.

But the good news, the good news is that Jesus comes to declare a new kingdom and to overthrow all of that. Jesus is the king who arrives, not surrounded by chariots and soldiers, not in a motorcade with private security, but on a donkey, a beast of burden, a symbol of humility and peace, not power, and certainly not status.

And tonight, as Jesus demonstrates what this new kingdom might look like, He leads with another unexpected symbol. Not a sword, not a crown as the kings of old, not with a power suit or a private jet, but with a towel. A towel. The tool of janitors and busboys, housekeepers, dishwashers. They're carried by midwives at our birth, and they are carried by hospice workers at our death.

Towels are not symbols of power. They don't intimidate our enemies. They don't impress the crowds. They don't get us on the A list. They don't close corporate mergers. They dry our dishes. They clean our tables. They're used to wash our children and to wipe away our tears. And when the world seems like it's become too much, when we feel that we can no longer keep up, throwing them in becomes a sign of our surrender. They are the symbol of our willingness to serve and to be served. Our need for help and our ability to offer help. Towels invite our humility. They remind us of our common human frailty.

You do not know what I am doing, but later you will understand, Jesus says. Removing His garments, getting down on His hands and his knees with a towel, Jesus demonstrates the great commandment that we are to love one another as He loved us. Not by drawing lines, not by deciding who's above and who's below, who's deserving and who isn't, but by erasing the religious and economic hierarchies, by inhabiting their lowest rung.

When Peter objects, it isn't out of embarrassment for himself. He's not worried about Jesus touching his dirty feet. He's embarrassed for Jesus. He's witnessed Jesus violate any

number of religious laws and purity codes. He's watched Him break bread without outcasts and with sinners. But this, this is going too far. It's almost as if Peter is saying, you know, it's one thing to heal them. It's one thing to eat with them. It's one thing to accept them as your followers, but don't lower yourself to their level. Don't become one of them. By getting down on His knees, by assuming the role of a servant, Jesus is modeling for all of us, not only how we are to act toward one another. But how God will one day heal and reconcile this world. By taking on the role of the lowliest of servants and inviting the rest of us to do the same, Jesus is showing us a glimpse of the kingdom having come. The day that God's people go to the margins, not to visit them, not even to serve them, but to stand with them, to kneel before them, to inhabit them until the margins are no more, until there is no more them, just us.

That same vision is also at the heart of the Last Supper, which we celebrate tonight, and which we reenact each Sunday. A table where all are invited, where all are welcome, where the pecking orders and the hierarchies are left far behind where there are no more lines to draw. Where we kneel together, elbow to elbow, and see each other as God sees us. Not as rich or poor, not as young or old, not as married or divorced, gay or straight, black or white, but as one people sitting at a common table, being fed a common meal, being sent from that table for a common mission to love one another as God loves us. That's the kingdom. That's the vision that we seek to build. That's the world that we seek to create when we leave these doors where divisions are no more, where discrimination has disappeared, where we are one as the Father and the Son are one. It is the world we seek to model here tonight as we wash one another's feet, where we feed one another.

And so if you have ever been the person not invited to the party, this is the table for you. If you have known what it feels like to be left out, this is the table for you. If you've spent too many years knocking on doors that were never opened and having more than a few slammed in your face, this is the table for you. If you've ever been denied your dignity, if you've ever been treated as an outsider, if you've ever felt less than, if the church has ever denied you a blessing for whatever reason, this is the table for you because this is the table, not of the church, but of the Lord, and it is made ready for those who love Him and for those who want to love Him more.

So come, you who have much faith and you who have little. You who have been here often and you who have not been here for a long time or ever before, you who have tried to follow and you who have fallen short, come. Not because the church invites you. It is Christ and He invites you to meet Him here once more, right here tonight. You do not know what I am doing, but later you will understand. May we come to understand so that the world might come to know your love.

Amen.