

### Reflection: No Negotiation Necessary

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Risen Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

It started off as a friendly visit to the Honda dealer. First there were the smiles and then the opening and closing of doors and finally the test drive. At the end of the day, I was ready to purchase my first new car. A green, four door, Honda Civic had captured my heart and I was off to do business and negotiate with the man behind the smile. We sat down in his office and filled out the usual plethora of paper work. We discussed leasing and buying and decided that purchasing the car would be a better deal. I wrote the check for the down payment and was ushered into a separate office and introduced to the man who would turn out to be my new best friend. This man, turned out to be the finance manager for the dealership and his smile was as wide as the payment coupon book I would be receiving just two weeks later. We talked, he typed—we signed, he stapled. Finally, we were down to the last few details and my new best friend leaned over his desk and asked me if I wanted to buy an extra warranty for my new purchase. Before I could open my mouth, my mom, who was sitting by my side, spoke up and said, “Now remember Chris, your dad really wants you to get the 100,000-mile warranty.” I was caught. My mom, innocently enough, had played my hand and now as I looked across the table—I am sure his smile widened to more of a Cheshire cat grin than a simple smile of “have a nice day.” The finance guy then took out a piece of paper and wrote a number on the sheet and slid it across the table saying, “I can give you the 100,000-mile warranty for this price a month. The paper said \$25 and I smiled politely and pushed the paper back across the desk and explained to him that I was already at the limit of my monthly budget for the car payments and would not be able to accept his offer. He must have thought I was a shrewder and more-seasoned car buyer than he had originally predicted. He smiled and then crossed out the first number and wrote down a second number. He then proceeded to slide the paper across the desk to my side. The new number said, \$19. I thanked him again and slid the paper back across the desk reiterating once again that even \$19 was still over my budget.

Smiling and asking me if I wanted something to drink, he crossed out the nineteen and wrote another number on the piece of paper and slid it to my side of the desk. Now instead of 19, it read 12. I told him how much I appreciated his flexibility and willingness to try and accommodate but stood firm on the fact that anything over the original payment plan would still be outside of my budget. This time he did not wait for me to slide the paper back across the desk—this time he grabbed it himself and scribbled out the twelve and wrote down one more number saying that this would much more in line with what I was thinking. The new number said seven and although by now I was enjoying the cat and mouse back and forth—even at seven dollars a month monthly payment was too high. Finally, he reached across the desk one more time and took the paper back. He crossed out the seven and wrote down the number two. He slid the paper across the desk and said, “I can give you the 100,000-mile warranty for \$2 a month.” At that price I thanked him and agreed that for \$2 a month I would take the 100,000-mile warranty.

Lease with an option to buy. Negotiate with an option to close. Lost with an option, an invitation to come home. *“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places,”* Jesus said. *“If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.”* Jesus offers us everything. He speaks words of comfort in the midst of the disciples fear, *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me.”* No negotiation. No wheeling and dealing. Just a simple promise that offers us hope in the midst of our doubt. Light in the midst of our darkness. Belonging in the midst of our loneliness.

Jesus offers what the world cannot. A place to call home for all of eternity. A place where we will be known and claimed and loved and accepted. Not only when we are good or well-behaved but when we have been to the very worst of ourselves and have needed help finding our way back. Robert Frost knew of this home, when he wrote about home in his poem, “Death of the Hired Man.” “Home,” Frost writes, “is the place where, when you have to

go there, they have to take you in.” Jesus, in today’s Scripture, tells us that home is not a place where they have to take you in—but a place which Jesus, himself, has prepared for each of us that we might find the option worth buying, worth closing, worth accepting, worth coming home to.

How many funerals have you attended where this was the main reading for the day? It is by far the most chosen Scripture I have been asked to preach on at funerals in the last 20 years. The reading speaks to God’s own house – and it will never be too full. This is also far more than a guesthouse we are speaking of. The Father’s house is home. It is the place the Prodigal son eventually headed for when he came to himself. It is the place you and I long to return to when we are homeless and heart-broken. What is more, Jesus the shepherd, the gate from last week’s gospel, is going to make sure that everything is ready “back home” where the Father is, and when he has turned back the covers, and put the chocolate on the pillow, checked and refreshed the flowers on the nightstand and aired the room, he will come and take us to be there.

I wonder what your room will look like? Will a favorite blanket rest over the back of a chair? What will the view from your window show – mountains, forests, ocean, farmland? Will the frames on the wall be filled with the pictures of family members or artwork? Will there be music playing? Who will be down the hall? In my Father’s house I expect to be greeted by a long line of loved ones – family and friends – who wait to greet me with open arms. In my father’s house I plan to sit down at a table with loved ones of my life – laughing, listening to stories, and eating mostly fine desserts and drinking French-pressed coffee. In my Father’s house I believe there will be bedtime stories told around the fire as the night draws deeply under the stars. And somehow, in such moments, I will know deep down in myself that I have finally come home. And perhaps I will remember the promise Jesus makes to us today.

*“I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.”* No need to lease any longer—we have been purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ. We don’t have to negotiate or deal or continue to be lost. Jesus tells us to look toward home and to trust in the places he has prepared for each of us in the kingdom of God. Places he has prepared so that we may give up our bargaining, negotiating, wheeling and dealing lives for God’s unbroken promise of coming home to the fullness of eternal life with Jesus in the Kingdom of God. Thanks be to God! Amen.