

Sunday March 12, 2023
Third Sunday in Lent
John 4:5-42
Seeking: Will you Give Me a Drink?
Rev. Karen R. Stunkel

Many of us know the game Monopoly. Maybe we played the version with the metal game pieces, a train or top hat, boot, or Scottie dog. The hotels and houses made out of wood. Or maybe, we played the version with plastic game pieces. Or we were introduced to the game on Nintendo or other gaming device. There are some who play Monopoly through an app on their phone. Since 1906 Monopoly is a popular board game many of us have played. Each of the reinventions of the game have two things in common. The first is money. The second is winners and losers. How many of us were part of those property trades that we knew were ultimately going to lead us into a losing position in the game. And yet we took the trade because we wanted the win in the moment. Monopoly has shaped and formed our understanding of money and what it means to be a winner and a loser.

We have been preprogrammed to understand winners and losers. It seems that in our system it is about luck. What zip code were we born into? Was it the Marvin Gardens neighborhood or on the corner of Baltic Avenue? What school could we attend? Was it a college preparatory school? Or was it the only school on the corner? Did we always get the Chance Card that said, "Bank error in your favor."? Or did we consistently land on the Water Works or the Electric Company and have to pay up? Did we have the good fortune to have a parent who invested time and energy shaping and forming hopes and dreams with us? Were we the recipients of heaps of love from extended family and neighbors, friends at church. If we went to school with the benefit of the GI bill or a Congressional Scholarship or a Pell Grant it's as if we landed on Free Parking and got to collect all the money in the kitty. If we got saddled with school loans, it is as if we are in Jail still waiting to roll doubles or draw

the Get Out of Jail Free card. It seems that with the roll of the dice for our birth we become winners or losers.

Press a little deeper. In Jesus' world there were winners and losers too. The Samaritans did not have a very good roll of the dice. They were the decided losers in the time of Jesus. Originally the Samaritans were believed to be a part of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, two of the lost tribes of Israel. They were lost to the invading forces of the Assyrians, carried off to reeducation camps. The remaining remnant of those who were not kidnaped received Assyrian residents in return. In time they married and adopted the traditions of their guests. Even though they had a lineage that stretched back to the time of Moses, the Samaritans were perceived to be unclean, assimilating foreign religious and cultural practices into their lives. The tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh were understood to be less than the greater tribes of Israel. Now Samaria was sandwiched in between the regions of Galilee and Judea. It was as if they lived on Mediterranean Avenue sandwiched between Boardwalk and States Street. For five hundred years the Samaritans were always inferior, never good enough. Maybe some of them made it to Vermont Avenue, but they are not leaving that side of the board. The forces against them are great. In Jesus world there are winners and losers. The Samaritans are the losers.

The disciples return and they are shocked. Here's Jesus talking to a woman and a Samaritan woman at that. See Jesus didn't play Monopoly. He didn't strut around the board saying, "I'm from Boardwalk, pay up!" No, Jesus sits down by the side of the well on Mediterranean Avenue and asks for a drink. He is a guest of the Samaritan people. He is an interloper on their property. This man covered in the dust of the day, makes himself small. Possibly to grab a sliver of shade from the well. He has nothing, no bucket, no money to pay, just himself. The woman she would make herself small too, out of respect or maybe fear. As they speak to one another they speak as equals as if all the hotels and

houses on the gameboard have been swept away and money is all back in the bank. It is just Jesus and the woman. Let's be clear, the conversation may not have happened if Jesus had not been vulnerable. Vulnerable in a way that invited a conversation. We've heard the stories of some poor soul who gets a flat on a dark and stormy night and the most unsuspected helper extends a kindness. Pretense and posturing are laid aside. Five hundred years of enmity are abandoned for the sake of needs exchanged. Jesus receives a refreshing drink of water and the woman is seen for who she is beyond the label of widow and Samaritan. She is human, a cousin, lost and found. In the shocking exchange the disciples observe, Jesus rewrites the relationship of Samaritans with the God of Jacob.

Wonder is Jesus still rewriting the rules of how, we who believe, we who are winners, by the roll of the dice, could live? Lizzie Magie created the original Monopoly game in 1903. The game she copyrighted in 1906, had two sets of rules. One game was an anti-monopolist set in which all were rewarded as wealth is created. The other game was monopolist set in which the goal was to create monopolies that crush opponents. The game that made it to our tables is the Monopoly game. And don't we crush opponents. Wonder if the anti-monopoly game is more in line with whom we are called to be as followers of Jesus. Imagine what could happen when the powerful sit with the disenfranchised. And those with wealth sit with those who have little and in the sharing of refreshment truths are revealed that could change the lives of everyone. Wonder what could happen when Israelis sits down with Palestinians in humility and need. Or when China sits with the Uyghurs. When will Eastern European nations sit down with Roma peoples. Here within our nation what could change when we begin to hear the damage of generational racism and its effects on formerly enslaved persons? Can we begin to listen to indigenous peoples and share their understanding of what it means to be one nation? Wonder if the quality of life in this world and the next is improved for each person when we share

conversation and refreshment in humility and need. See, what Magie found in the anti-monopoly game was that as wealth was distributed it raised everyone up. There were no losers. If we would ask the Samaritan woman if she received the gift of everlasting water in her encounter with Jesus. Wonder if she who was the first to announce Jesus as Messiah, wonder if she would say, “Yes!”

Friends some time ago each of us said yes to Jesus. We have that Living Water. We do not thirst. We are most wealthy. Our wealth is not counted by the balance in the checkbook. Our wealth is measured by our capacity to share the Living Water with those who are thirsty. A Living Water that provides community, safety, acceptance, and a word of hope. We are thirsty too. We thirst for the way it was, and yet nostalgia will bring no comfort or way forward. We are grieving. Over the last three years thirty-eight members of our congregation have died, many to covid or it's aftereffects. Yet those who have gone before us show us the way of compassion, joy, and abundance by the witness of their lives. We are tired, for each have given of ourselves these past years. Notice it is when Jesus himself, tired, hungry, thirsty, and vulnerable that he has a most significant conversation. Maybe that is where we are living right now. And despite our own sensibilities we must speak our need out loud so we, Westminster Church, will be made whole, not for ourselves but for those in our neighborhood, who have a great need and thirst also.

We live in a world of hurt. A world that asks, “Will you give me a drink?” It is a world that begins at our doorstep on Ventnor Avenue or Saint James Street and extends to the ends of the earth. Because we are a church for all people, filled not with winners or losers, rather Children of God.