

Dying to Your Self

Matthew 16 21-28

*Bottle flip challenge with 6 volunteers.
Each person to flip a bottle of water 5 times
to win the big prize.*

*Then: each person who hasn't won the big
prize to flip again; but they are told they will
all win the same prize anyway.*

*How different did it feel playing the second
round to the first round?*

*It should have felt a lot less stressful and
more enjoyable playing the second round,
knowing that not so much was riding on it.*

When I was a kid we used to play Monopoly a lot – particularly my brother and I. I got a reputation as being a sore loser from playing those games. But when you have watched your world slowly taken apart, piece by piece by some fat-cat landlord who constantly hits you with exorbitant rents, and you are down to your last \$100 and you are rolling the dice to come up to Mayfair and Parklane again with hotels on both, which somehow your brother has managed to buy, yet again, and as you count up the dice and then trace with your eyes that you're going to end up landing on Mayfair, yet again, and you realise that you are going to have to go through the humiliating process of mortgaging all of your properties, and watch your gleeful brother's face as he extracts every last penny from you and crushes you into nothing, nothing!

Then you also might think that tipping over the board and scattering all the pieces everywhere and running off crying is probably the best solution.

Thanks to the wonder of videos on the internet, I have realised that I'm not the only

Rev. Ben Arcus

person in the world to have taken Monopoly that seriously.

How is it that we can get so upset by something that is just a game? We know that it's not real and that after the game finishes, we go back to being our usual selves where we haven't lost anything.

The reason we get so upset is that we get identified with our role in the game. That is, we become so invested in the circumstances of the game, and thinking of the properties and the cash as what makes me who I am, that we feel like we've really lost something when they are taken from us. As an adult, it should be easier to play the game without getting identified with the role that you are playing in the game.

Thinking about this helps me understand what Jesus is talking about in today's reading. Jesus is heading towards Jerusalem, and he knows that he will be put to death there by crucifixion. And he teaches his disciples that to follow him means to lose your life. He says that in losing your life, you will find it.

Now, that is a strange idea. What could it mean to lose our life so that we can find it?

I think it's like the Monopoly game. The life that most of us live, is one where we think that who we are is the money that we have, the things we own, the reputation that we have, our job, our popularity – any of the many things that Jesus would call "the world".

But Jesus has come to show us that we are actually more than just what “the world” tells us we are. We are actually like him, children of God, made for a love that is unending, and that doesn’t need to be earned.

But until we stop identifying with those smaller things of the world, we will never experience the bigger life that is who we really are. When Jesus invites us to take up his cross and follow him, he is inviting us to stop identifying with the role that we are playing, and to become the bigger self. This bigger self has already won the game. It couldn’t lose, because it is eternal, one with God, always already everything it needs to be, in order to be loved.

While we will all discover this larger self when the smaller self physically dies, Jesus teaches us that we can let go and die to this smaller self even while we are living. Then when we are not so invested in this smaller self, we can enjoy playing the game of life a lot more, knowing that it is just a game, that doesn’t need to be won. When we die to our smaller life, then we find our larger life, which is the real life that Jesus has come to show us.