

## **“We’re #1! We’re #1!”**

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts  
October 20, 2024 - Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost

[Job 38:1-7, 34-41; Mark 10:35-45](#)

Once upon a time, a man named Terry was unhappily cleaning out a cluttered storeroom at work as directed by his greatly despised boss when he found a dusty, old, unmarked bottle that was closed up with a cork. Curious about this discovery, Terry carefully pulled out the bottle’s cork to see if there was anything inside, when, all of the sudden, a genie flew out of the bottle! Grateful to be freed after being trapped inside the bottle for many years, the genie granted Terry three wishes, but let Terry know that whatever he wished for, the genie would also give a double portion to his reviled boss Lesley. Agreeable to this arrangement, Terry said to the genie, “My first wish is to receive one billion dollars.” The genie snapped her fingers, and immediately, Terry’s received a message on his phone from his banking app telling him that a billion dollars had been successfully deposited into his account. He also heard joyous shouts from Lesley’s office as Lesley also was notified that two billion dollars had mysteriously just been deposited into her bank account. The genie then asked for Terry’s second wish, reminding him that his boss Lesley would also receive a double portion of whatever he asked for. After thinking for a while, Terry asked the genie, “Could you create a beautiful, private tropical island for me to enjoy that has its own giant, glorious mansion?” Poof! Immediately Terry and the genie were no longer standing in the dusty old storeroom, but upon a beautiful beach on a tropical island with a gorgeous mansion perched atop a hill above them. The genie said, “This is all yours! And look, over there,” said the genie, pointing at two larger islands with even more impressive hilltop mansions just a couple of miles away. “These now belong to your former boss and new neighbor Lesley. Now, remembering that Lesley will receive a double portion of what you ask for, what is your third wish?” After thinking for a while, Terry replied, “In order to experience the joy of doing something good for others, I wish for you to take one of my two kidneys and give it to someone in need.” And Terry lived happily ever after on his private island with his great riches, one kidney, and no neighbors.

Now I hope that if you were granted three wishes, you would use them well, not only for your own good as Terry did, but for the good of others, even those you might prefer to see diminished rather than being lifted up. Sadly, though, human history teaches us that people who acquire the ability to have their own desires granted often times use their agency, like Terry, to grow their wealth and power while reducing those of their rivals and neighbors.

In our gospel lesson from Mark, we heard how two of Jesus disciples, James and John, following this common human way of seeking to grow their power over others, came to Jesus, and, as though he were a genie at their command, asked for their one wish to be granted. They asked that they would be lifted up above all others as the greatest people in the glorious new realm that Jesus would be establishing on earth. Though they were looking to become great rulers of others, Jesus instructed them that to be truly the greatest, they would not rule over others, but serve them, just as Jesus himself used his energies and his agency to serve those around him and, indeed, the all the world's people, friends and foes alike.

Too often, though, we followers of Christ don't grasp this lesson well enough, and we still seek greatness, not through Jesus' way of sacrifice and humble service, but through the worldly way of acquiring stuff and power. We, too often, are driven to become number one in ways big and small, and we don't expend enough of our energies and other resources on lifting and empowering others.

Imagine what our world could be like if the billions of Christians would truly practice this selfless way of Christ. Imagine how our nation would be blessed if Christians here, instead of using our energies this election season fervently praying for those who see things differently than we do politically to be either vanquished or held under our thumb, would fervently pray and work for the granting of God's wish for well-being and peace of all people to grow.

But will we ever put God's wish ahead of our own wishes? Will we ever make this wish of God our own? Will we ever truly seek to become number one in service, number one in kindness, number one in love?

Today, friends, is a day we have great power to either work towards granting God's wish to be number one in these ways or to work towards granting our own wishes to be number one according to the wisdom of the world. Thanks be to the

Creator of all things, whose ways are beyond our ways and whose thoughts are beyond our thoughts, for showing us the divine wisdom of love through Christ's serving love and breathing into us a mighty Spirit that empowers us to rise above the selfish ways of the world and to follow in Christ's better way. As God desires, let us choose this good path of Christ today and always and work to bless the world. Amen.