All age idea:

Retell the ‘bigger barns’ story using pieces from a monopoly board, or a large paper mock-up of a property card, a few green houses and a red hotel.

A man had plenty of houses on Park Lane and Mayfair, but he knew in his heart he could make more money by bulldozing them and building hotels. But on the day his hotel was finished, he died, and God said to him “you fool. This is the end of your life, and all this work – who benefits from it now?”

Talk about how Monopoly leads to family arguments – in 2016 there was a Christmas Monopoly helpline, run by the manufacturers, to help resolve disputes – a publicity stunt that reminds us how angry the unfairness of one player dominating the game can make us. Monopoly is based on “The Landlord’s Game” made by a Quaker woman, Elizabeth Magie. Her property purchasing game had 2 sets of rules, which together taught that the modern economy made landowners rich at the expense of tenants. Her game showed that different tax systems could redistribute wealth more equally. However, as her patent ran out, a man “invented” Monopoly using only the unequal rules, and that is the game we still play today.

There are several points that could be drawn out of this – a feminist would not miss the familiar pattern that women’s ideas are often adopted by men, and the women get written out of their own story. Like God’s words to the dying rich man (Luke 12.20), Magie put in all that work, and what did she have to show for it? But what Magie wanted to show is that the rules of money in our world are not fixed, and it is not inevitable that the rich get richer whilst the poor struggle by. Another world can be imagined. Jesus imagines one (Luke 12.21)– in which wealth is not measured by money, but by the relationship we have with God.

*This service is prepared for Commitment for Life by Revd Dr Catherine Lewis-Smith.*