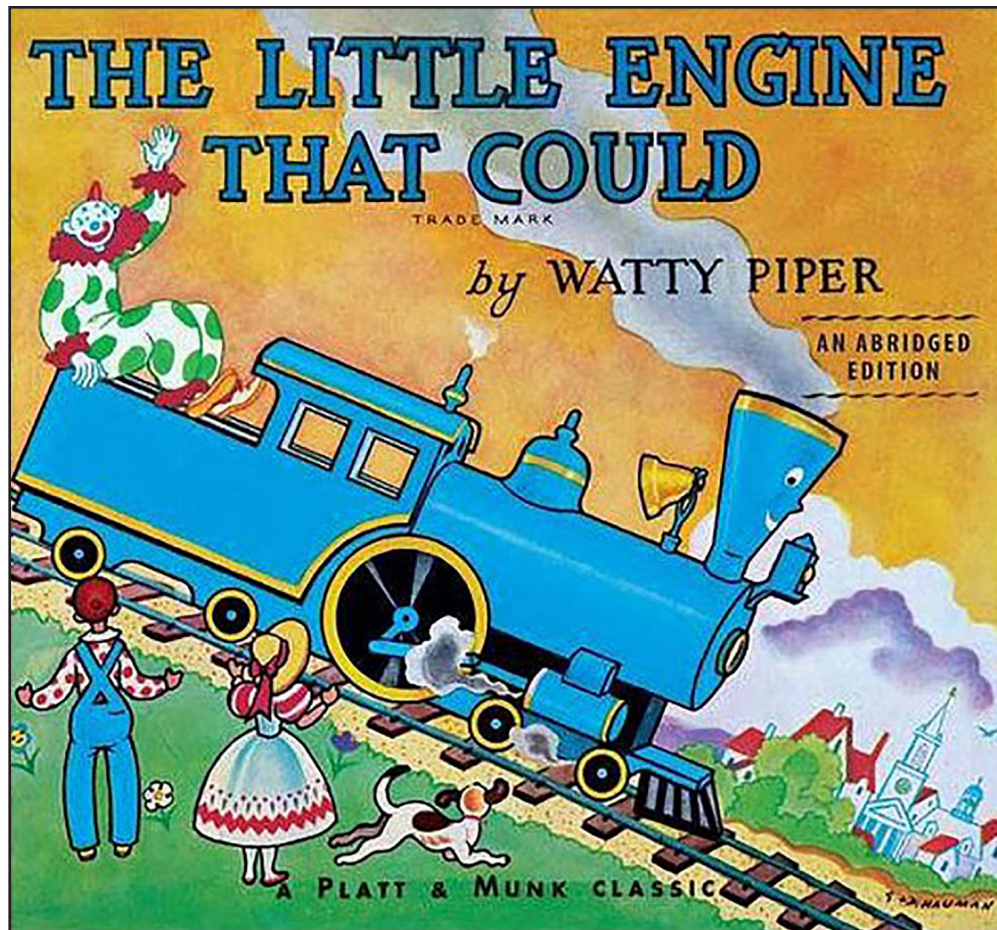


Living Grace

CYCLE B 32ND SUNDAY
ORDINARY TIME

"THE WIDOW'S MIGHT, SHE THOUGHT SHE COULD!"



Everyone loves *The Little Engine That Could*, that classic tale of the determined little engine! The story begins with a train filled with toys and gifts for little boys and girls that breaks down before reaching the children. After asking several passing trains for help over the hill, only a little blue train agrees to help the stranded toys. Even though she is small, the blue train finds the strength to bring the toys to the children on the other side of the hill.



RUTH GLEANING

*Lithograph by Marc Chagall ~ 1960
Cheltenham, Great Britain*

EXPLORING THE ART:

The Old Testament book of Ruth features the heart-warming story of Ruth and Naomi: two women who faced difficult circumstances and an uncertain future. In ancient Israel widows were some of the most vulnerable in society. The death of a husband was a social and economic tragedy - meaning that a widow lived a marginal existence in extreme poverty. Following the death of both her husband and 2 sons, Naomi decided to move back to her homeland of Israel. Although she freed her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, to stay in their home country and re-marry. Determined and loyal, Ruth refused to leave Naomi's side holding tightly to the mother-in-law she loved deeply and to the God of Israel whom she now called her own. The book of Ruth goes on to tell a fascinating account of how God lovingly cared for and blessed Naomi as He used the faithful friendship and kindness of Ruth to "renew her life and sustain her".

INTENSE ENCOUNTERS

Marc Chagall, was a prolific Russian artist whose bright, whimsical, iconic works catapulted his name into the art world. Long influenced by religion, he traveled to the Holy Land in what became a life-changing experience, both spiritually and creatively. His Drawings for the Bible series, which includes the painting above, conveys the struggles and triumphs of humanity. Drawing from his own sense of spirituality and faith, he carefully selected the scenes that he chose to illustrate - focusing on the intense encounters between God and humanity highlighting moments of triumph, sorrow, and prophecy - utilizing a vibrant color palette, dramatic shading, and fanciful imagery.

Living Grace

READ-ALoud STORY



ABIDE IN ME

Vicki Shuck, Esperanza Arts

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love.

~ John 7:7-9

Read-aloud video link:

[THE LITTLE ENGINE THAT COULD](#)

Written by Watty Piper and Illustrated by George & Doris Hauman

Sunday Gospel

MARK 12:38-44

In the course of his teaching Jesus said to the crowds,
"Beware of the scribes, who like to go around in long robes
and accept greetings in the marketplaces,
seats of honor in synagogues,
and places of honor at banquets.
They devour the houses of widows and, as a pretext
recite lengthy prayers.
They will receive a very severe condemnation."

He sat down opposite the treasury
and observed how the crowd put money into the treasury.
Many rich people put in large sums.
A poor widow also came and put in two small coins worth a few cents.
Calling his disciples to himself, he said to them,
"Amen, I say to you, this poor widow put in more
than all the other contributors to the treasury.
For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth,
but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had,
her whole livelihood."

Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

JESUS INVITES HIS DISCIPLES TO GIVE THEIR ALL, WHETHER BIG OR SMALL!

The widow's mite and "The Little Engine That Could" share a very similar theme. In the story, a train filled with toys and treats for children on the other side of the mountain breaks down. Many fancy trains come by but refuse to help those in need, much like the Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees, the religious leaders in the time of Jesus. They were strong, powerful, smart and knowledgeable. They look good on the outside but their hearts are closed off and self-serving. Jesus speaks of the widow's mite, and the stark contrast of her response compared to that of the Scribes and Pharisees. The widow, who has very little in terms of monetary resources, offers a response of love and wholehearted giving. This stands in sharp contrast to the greediness and self-centeredness of the religious leaders.

In our children's book, *The Little Engine That Could*, the littlest, weakest, and most inexperienced train is the one that is willing to help. It has the least to offer, the lesser strength, but it still chooses to offer itself completely. The widow and the little engine both teach us what can happen in our lives if we surrender to the power of God in ourselves. When we act on the belief that we have a strength within us that is greater than ourselves, God will give us all that we need - not just for our own lives, but through our gratuitous giving, the spirit of blessing will reach many people.

Jesus speaks often of the "blessings of the poor". As the Beatitudes say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God". (Mt. 5:3) It is an unfortunate, but the poor in our world tend to have a greater awareness of their need for a humble reliance upon God. Thus their hearts are filled with gratitude and trust. This is the irony that Jesus points out - although the poor and weak may appear to have less than others, they actually have greater interior strength - more trust, hope, freedom, wisdom and generosity. It is in accessing these strengths that a widow, or a small train, can perform seemingly super human feats. They are filled with generosity, love, and strength. Both the widow and the little engine find their strength from deep inner resources.

Jesus is telling the religious leaders and his disciples that it is this inner well of strength that truly makes one strong, honorable, and blest in the sight of God and the community. Jesus also teaches that if you have the faith of the mustard seed you can move mountains - or get a broken down train filled with toys for children over a mountain in order to bring children happiness and joy. Much like the joy Jesus recognizes and celebrates in the heart of the widow.

Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

MY STORY: When have you felt strong, powerful, and smart? When have you felt little, weak, and not-so-smart? When have you notice other people littler and weaker than you? Did you try to help them? How did it make you feel?

THE CHILDREN'S STORY: What was the problem for the train that broke down? Who was it that would benefit from what the train was carrying?

THE GOSPEL STORY: Who has the most to lose in this Gospel story? Who has the most to lose of the trains? In both stories who is the one who gives the most? What does Jesus have to say about this? Where do the little engine and the widow find their strength?

Jesus teaches us that if we have the faith of the mustard seed we can move mountains (or, get a broken down train filled with toys for children over a mountain in order to bring children happiness and joy!) **When we act on the belief that we have a strength within that is greater than ourselves, God will give us all that we need.**

Biblical Background

MARK 12:28b-34

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING: This Gospel story takes place in Jerusalem in the temple area. The temple was the only place of worship for Jewish people. The synagogues, which held copies of the Torah, were in neighborhoods. People would gather to hear the word, the writings of the law, and the writings of the prophets. However, there is only one Temple where people could bring sacrificial offerings of doves, lambs, and the like. The temple is built upon the rock that Abraham was believed to have sacrificed his son Isaac on. It is the site of the Holy of Holies, where animals were sacrificed for atonement. Religious leaders run the workings of the temple. It is they who Jesus is addressing in this passage. The temple was destroyed by the Romans in the year 70 A. D., which Jesus prophesized. It has not been rebuilt since.

TERMS: **Scribes** These men were experts in the Law of Moses - scholars to whom people turned for proper understanding of God's will as revealed in Scripture. They contributed to the development of rabbinic law in the third century of the Common Era, the forerunner of modern day Judaism.

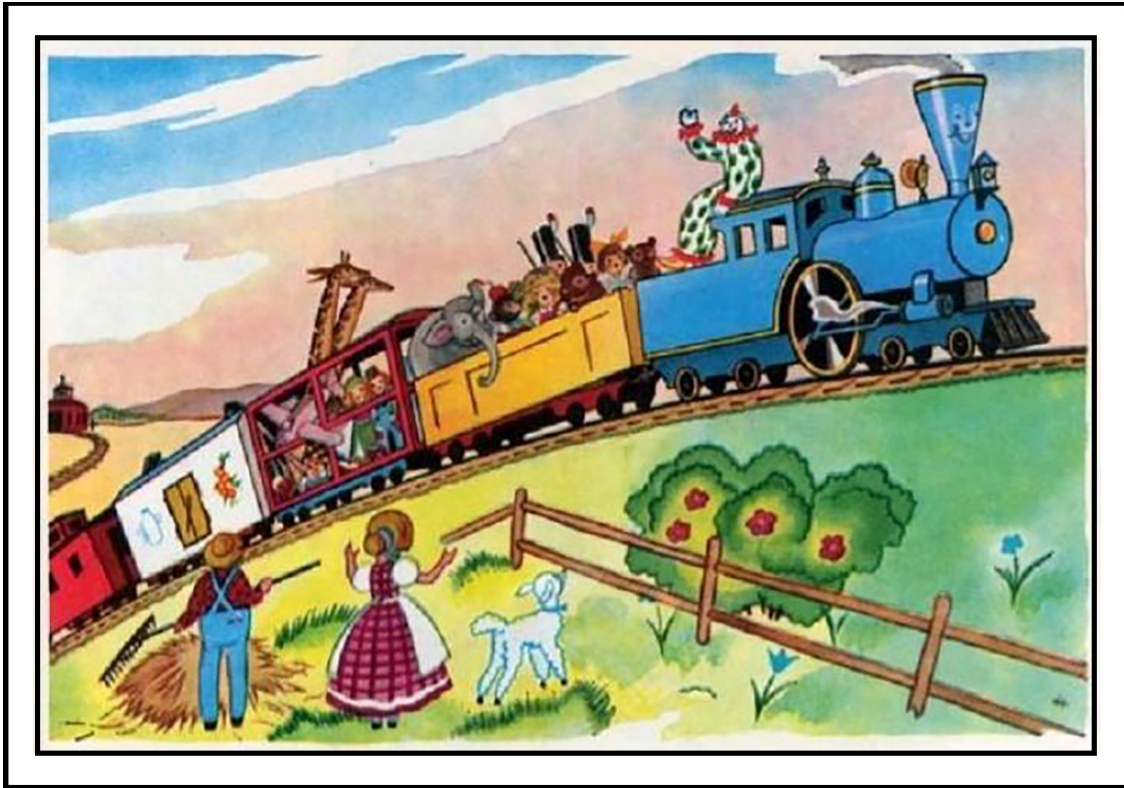
Widows The word for widow in Hebrew carries the meaning of one who is silent, who is unable to speak. Mediterranean culture was divided among gender lines. The men enjoyed the public sphere, and woman remained the home with children. Woman didn't speak publicly - the Jewish husband would do that for them. When a widow loses her husband, she therefore also loses her voice. She is therefore unable to speak for her needs. This loss of care and status is problematic for safety of the culture.

CULTURAL INSIGHT: The widow represents the vulnerable people of the world - those who are small and stand in need and reliance upon the mercy of others to provide for their care. In the synagogue, the scribes (those who wrote and copied the Torah) claimed the best seats. They would sit against the same wall that held the ark that contained the Torah scrolls. No one knew the law as well as the scribes, thus they basked in the recognition. Jesus is calling them out as status seekers who only care about their fame, and are not paying attention to the work of mercy they should be undertaking in caring for the widow.

INSIGHT INTO MEANING: Jesus honors the widow for giving away any chance she has at status. She gives all the financial resources she has to honor God and for care of the community needs. This shames the scribes as status grabbers. The widow gives away all the security she has as well as her status. This is the way of sacrificial love that Jesus points toward.

Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME
AND IN THE WORLD



QUESTION OF THE WEEK: What is something that you are afraid to give your life to? How can we ask for God's strength and believe "I THINK I CAN!"? How might we 'save the day' for others by doing this?

CHARACTER QUALITIES: SACRIFICIAL GIVING
HUMILITY

FAMILY ACTIVITIES: Parents, share an example from your own life or from the life of your family, about a time you or others gave their all for something. Talk about the difference it made for others and how you/they benefited in return.