

Biblical Background

MARK 12:28b-34

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING: Jesus is teaching on the Temple mount just before Passover. The Temple mount was a vast elevated platform that King Herod the Great had ordered to be built to surround the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. The area of this public space was the largest in the Roman Empire and would remain so for the next two hundred years. This "public square" was a favorite place for Rabbi's, religious teachers, and others to teach their disciples. Jesus would most probably have stationed himself along one of the covered porticos where his disciples could easily gather around him and listen to him teach. It appears that Jesus had been challenged quite a few times that same day by other religious authorities in the area who were trying to trip him up with their particular questions.

TERMS: Scribe Scribes were the Biblical scholars in the time of Jesus. They were responsible for creating copies of sacred scripture for synagogue use. They were well versed in all things Biblical.

Commandment A commandment is one of 613 "thou shall" and "thou shall not" laws recorded in the Torah (the first five books of the Bible). Jesus had this many to choose from in response to the question at hand.

Heart This is what we would call the "mind", and in the Middle East would be called the "heart/emotion infused thinking center". In the Middle East you think with your heart. The two terms are synonymous.

Soul This means our life force, the breath of God that animates a person and enables that person to act physically from what they believe.

Strength Think of this as our spiritual bank accounts. God banks all our good intentions (our heart/thoughts) that get expressed by our souls (action in the world with our bodies).

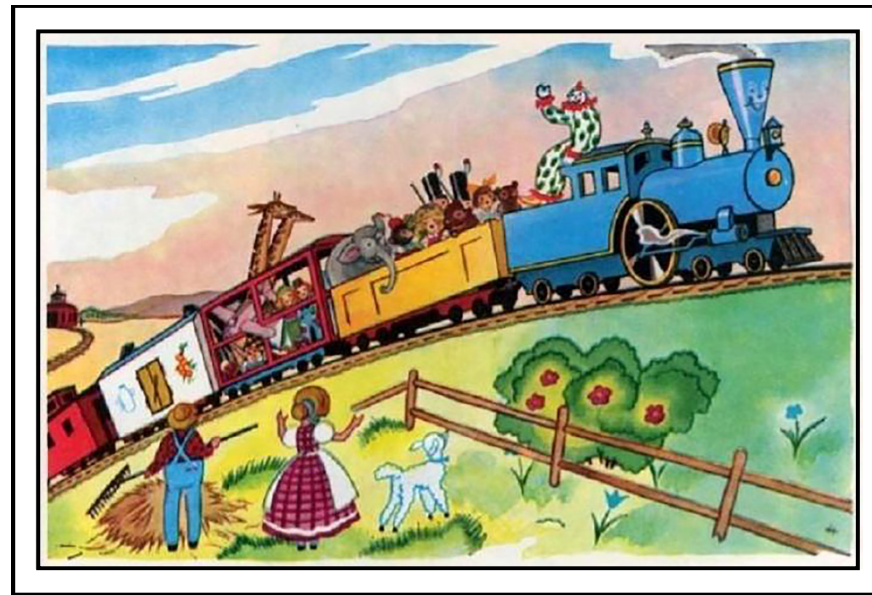
Love In this case, love is not an emotion, but rather the idea of attachment. When we love someone we remain attached to that person. Conversely, if we hate someone, we detach ourselves from that association.

CULTURAL INSIGHT: In this Gospel, it is surprising that Jesus did not respond to the scribe's question with a question of his own, which was the common practice of Jesus in a public setting. If someone came to him with a public question, Jesus would automatically assume that the intent of the questioner was to trip him up in some way. In the "honor and shame" based culture of the Middle East, one way to shame an opponent is to get the better of that person in a public exchange of question and response. The scribe in this week's Gospel hears the answer to his question directly. From this we know that Jesus already knew this man, and that his intent was to help Jesus secure honor by his answer. The scribe reinforces his understanding of Jesus' lesson, "...this is more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." The scribe is referring to the challenge presented to Jesus by the Sadducees (who oversaw the burnt offerings of the temple) who had challenged him just before our Gospel this week.

INSIGHT INTO MEANING: Jesus reminds this scribe, his disciples, and you and I, that God is interested in our interior desire to live a life pleasing to the Lord evident to the world through our daily actions. Our deeds, the way that we live our lives as Christians for others to see, are more important to God than any creed we profess. We cannot just say that we believe, we must act on what we believe.

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?

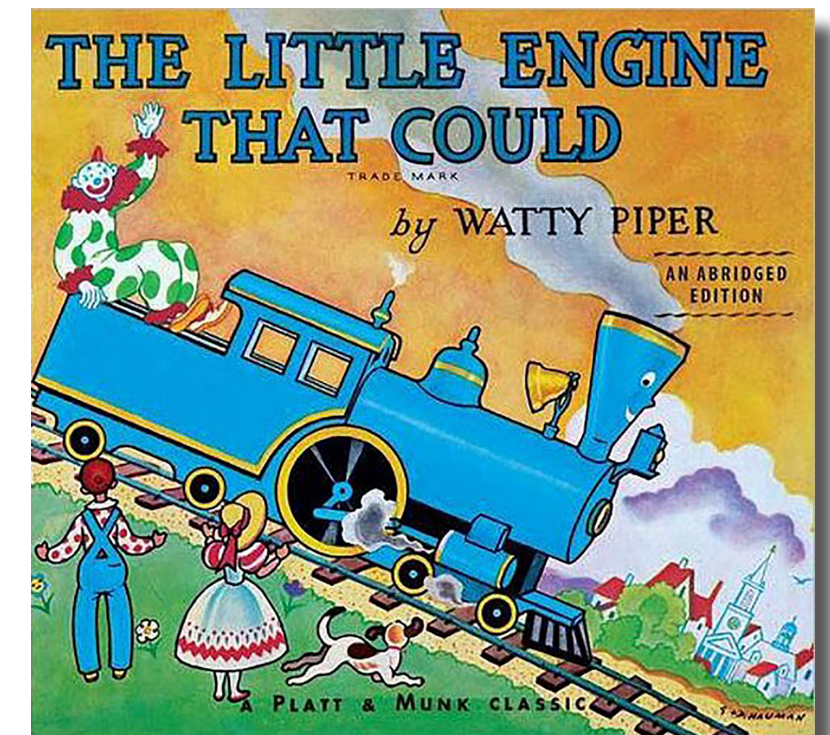
CHARACTER QUALITIES: SACRIFICIAL GIVING
HUMILITY

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.

CYCLE B 32ND SUNDAY
ORDINARY TIME

Living Grace

"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.

Art & Faith

CELEBRATING THE BEAUTY & TRADITION
OF SACRED ART



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".

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.

INTENSE ENCOUNTERS

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."

Read-aloud video link:

[THE LITTLE ENGINE THAT COULD](#)

Written by Watty Piper and Illustrated by George & Doris Hauman

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.**