

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 difference does it make to “know” that you are connected to everything? Talk about it as a family, “Do you belong to creation? Who do you belong to? Who are we responsible for?”

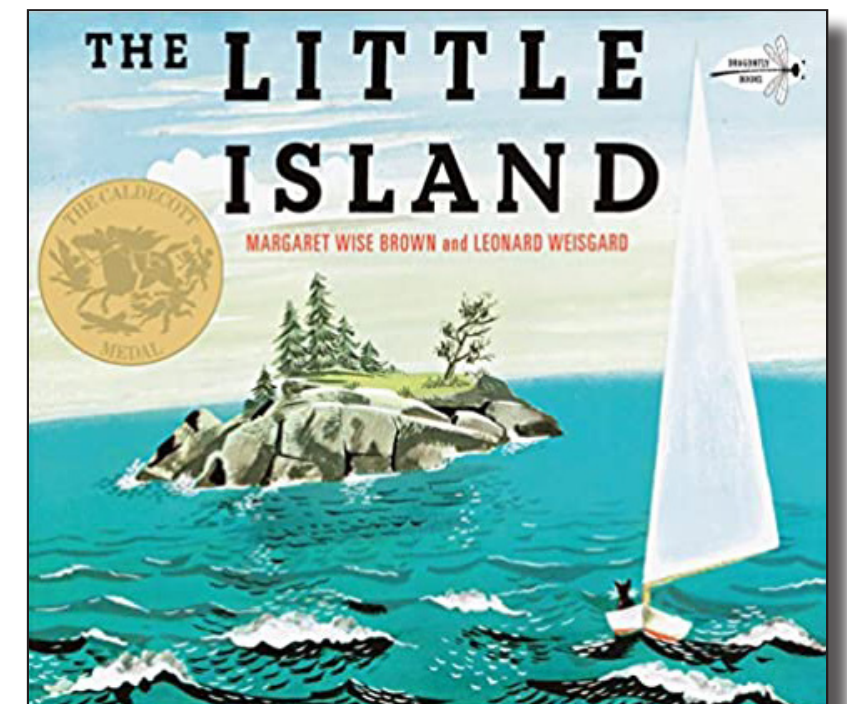
CHARACTER QUALITIES: WE BELONG TOGETHER IN GOD
ALL ARE OUR NEIGHBORS

FAMILY ACTIVITIES: Do a tour of your community. Who in your neighborhood might not be feeling like they belong? Make a list of some of the effects of not belonging? What are the effects of feeling like you belong? Make a list. Create of family collage of your “island” and all that belongs to you as a family. Now pray together as to what asset, what strength do you have, that you might offer to someone who suffers from the effects of not belonging? How can these shared strengths demonstrate your love of God as well as your love for neighbor?

CYCLE B 31ST SUNDAY
ORDINARY TIME

Living Grace

“WE BELONG TO YOU, AND YOU, AND YOU!”



In *The Little Island* we find a story about a little island in the midst of the wide ocean. As the seasons pass, the island and the creatures who call it home, witness an ever-changing array of sights, smells, and sounds – proving that, no matter how small, we are all an important part of the world. One day a kitten visits the island with a family on a picnic. The kitten thinks that the island is small and isolated, just floating in the sea. The island retorts however that it, like the kitten, is also a part of the world. When the kitten disputes the island’s claim, the island suggests that it ask any fish. The kitten catches a fish and demands to know how the island is part of the bigger land. The fish invites the kitten down into the water to see, which the kitten of course cannot do. The kitten demands to be shown another way. “Then you will have to take it on faith”, says the fish, “to believe what I tell you about what you don’t know.” The fish then tells him “how all lands are one land under the sea.” The kitten learns a secret about the island and a lesson about faith.

Art & Faith

CELEBRATING THE BEAUTY & TRADITION
OF SACRED ART



RACE AND RECONCILIATION MURAL

*Mural by Gregory King and community members ~ 1995
Exterior wall of a thrift store ~ Chicago, Illinois, United States*

EXPLORING THE ART:

ART UNITES A COMMUNITY

Before becoming the mural it is today, the brick wall pictured above was originally used by local gang members as a memorial for people they lost. The intersection where the mural is located was considered one of the most dangerous intersections in the Uptown neighborhood in Chicago, with over eighteen rival street gangs roaming within a few blocks of one another. Street gangs in Uptown were a response to displacement and a form of self-defense for communities of color settling in a new environment. The decision to use this wall in particular emphasized the importance of unifying both the religious and secular members of the community. Rather than being pitted against one another, underlying the religious theme is the message of a community joined through the common purpose of love, peace, and acceptance. In 2001, the mural was accidentally painted over, but with the help of over 300 community members, compared to 50 people in 1995, the artwork was successfully restored. The mural serves as a symbol of constant rebirth - from its beginnings as a gang memorial, to the development into the first mural, and again coming back to life after restoration. It is never too late for a community to pave a better way of life. No matter the obstacles, they can be overcome together as long as the community recognizes that they are not as different from one another as they may think. Although the mural embodies the act of past endeavors to unify the community, the message remains relevant today.

Sunday Gospel

MARK 12:28b-34

One of the scribes came to Jesus and asked him,
"Which is the first of all the commandments?"

Jesus replied, "The first is this:

Hear, O Israel!

The Lord our God is Lord alone!

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul,
with all your mind,
and with all your strength.

The second is this:

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

There is no other commandment greater than these."

The scribe said to him, "Well said, teacher.

You are right in saying,

'He is One and there is no other than he.'

And 'to love him with all your heart,

with all your understanding,

with all your strength,

and to love your neighbor as yourself'

is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

And when Jesus saw that he answered

with understanding,

he said to him,

"You are not far from the kingdom of God."

And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Read-aloud video link:

THE LITTLE ISLAND

Written by Margaret Wise Brown & Illustrated by Leonard Weisgard

Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

THROUGH "LOVE OF GOD" WE ARE ALL CONNECTED TO EACH OTHER. THERE LIES THE "KEY" TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

In our two stories this week, both the scribe and the kitten have some big questions. How, what, where, who, and why does the world work the way that it does? Both characters are taking a 'deep dive' (the fish on behalf of the kitten, literally) to discover the most important things to understand. They are both seeking wisdom about the world and the meaning of life. Both the little Island and Jesus wisely expand the questions of the kitten and the scribe to direct the listener to a bigger reality.

In our children's story, many people come to visit this little Island in the big blue sea, including the kitten. He is a curious little kitten and decides to challenge the little Island by pointing out that the little Island is cut off, isolated, and alone in the deep blue sea, which means that the island is not connected to the rest of the world like the kitten. When the kitten learns from the fish that all land, including islands, is connected under the sea, his eyes grew and gleamed with a joy that could not be contained. He now understood a secret of the world. We are all connected, we are all one!

In a similar way, the scribe in the Gospel challenges Jesus. The Jewish people have tens of thousands of laws, and the scribe asked Jesus to "choose one" as the most important. The scribe tries to trick Jesus with a seemingly impossible question, to demonstrate that the scribes and other religious leaders have all the answers. Jesus knew it was a trick, as to choose only one commandment would minimize the rest. When Jesus answers that to love God and neighbor are the most important, the scribe agrees and adds that to love God "with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself" is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." Jesus then realizes that the scribe understands this teaching and tells him that he is not far from the Kingdom of God.

Jesus proclaims at his baptism that he has come to bring the Kingdom of God. This is how we bring forth the Kingdom of God on earth - lions and lambs, kittens and islands, Jesus and the scribes - we all meet each other in our need for one another. That is the secret. There lies the kingdom. We are all connected, we are all one! This is how we grow a family, a community, to be a place and a people where grace dwells. NOW...it is time, especially in our present day, to embrace this teaching and act on these words.

Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

MY STORY: Have you ever been to an island? How did you get there? Were there many people on the island? What lived and grew on the island? If you have never been on an island? What do you think it would be like? Do you think you would get lonely if there were not many people on the island?

THE CHILDREN'S STORY: Do you think the Little Island got lonely? How does the fish's "secret of the world" that we are all connected, bring heaven to earth?

THE GOSPEL STORY: What is the first commandment that Jesus tells the scribe is important? How do we love God with our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength? Do you know someone who truly does that? Jesus tells the scribe "to love God and your neighbor as yourself" is what the Kingdom of God is like. What do you think he means by that?

What do you think the Kingdom of God is like? How can you bring people together in your own life? How can you help them find connection, and in doing so, bring heaven's ways, to earth?