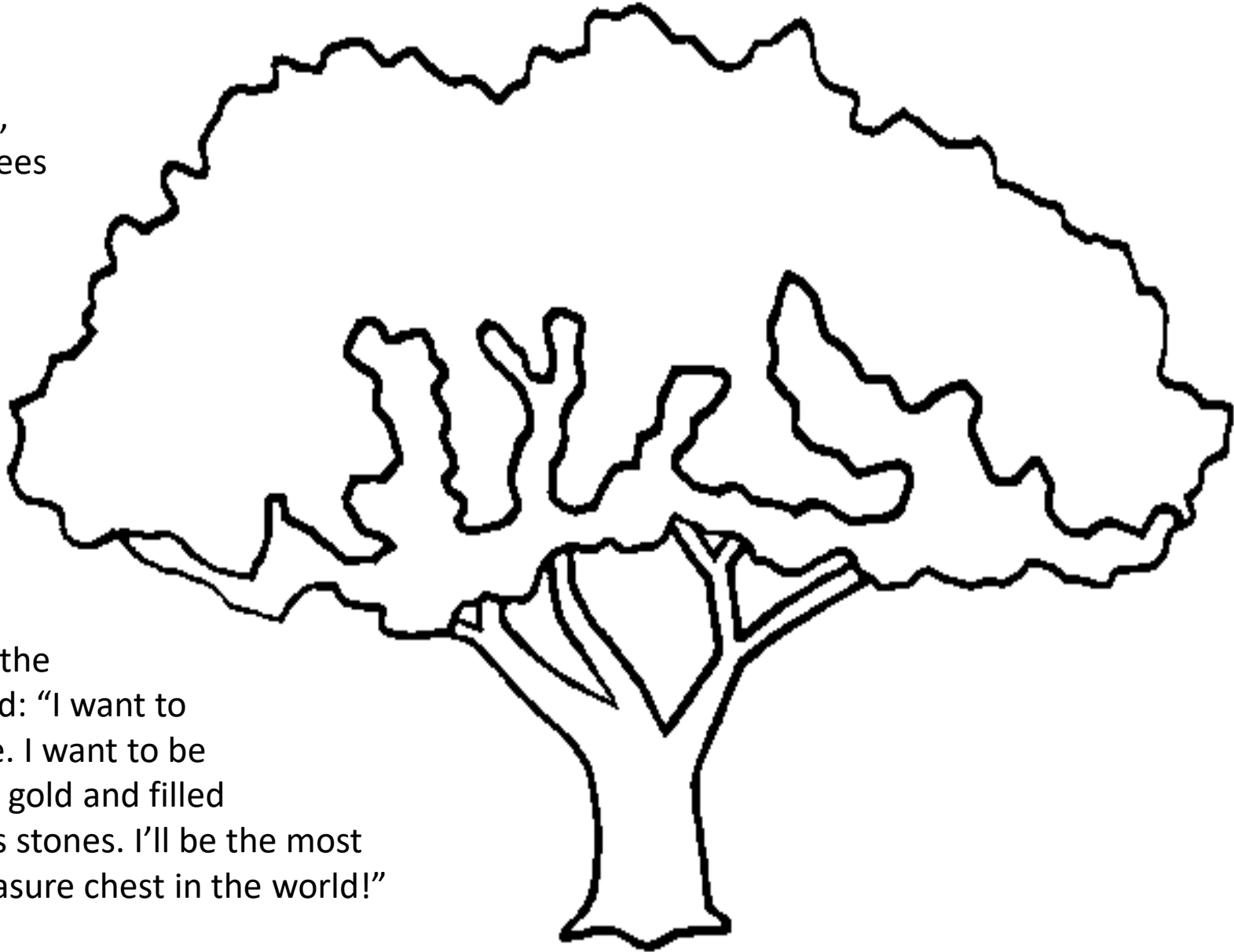


The Legend of the Three Trees

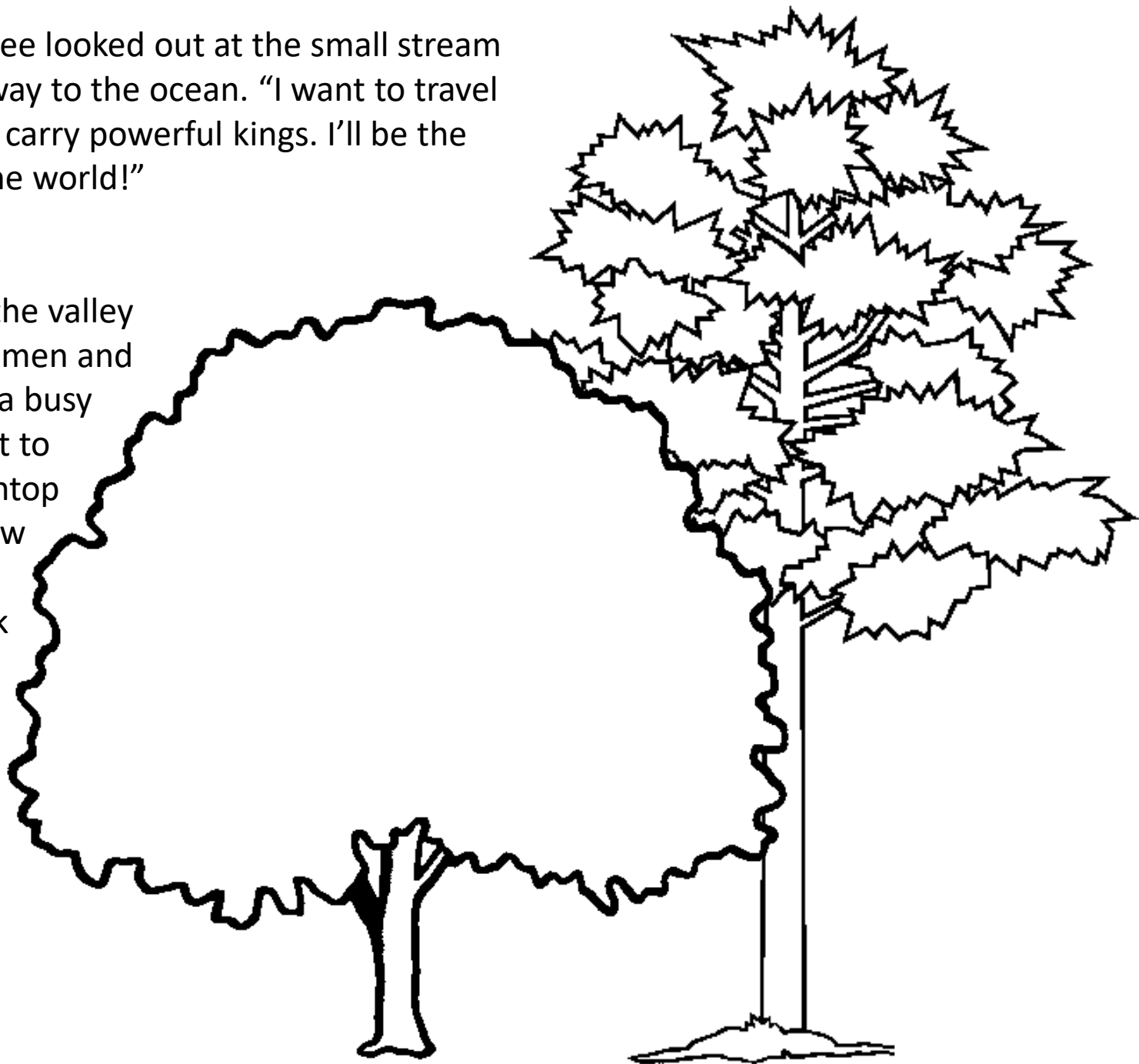
Once upon a mountaintop, three little trees stood and dreamed of what they wanted to become when they grew up.

The first little tree looked up at the stars and said: "I want to hold treasure. I want to be covered with gold and filled with precious stones. I'll be the most beautiful treasure chest in the world!"



The second little tree looked out at the small stream trickling by on its way to the ocean. “I want to travel mighty waters and carry powerful kings. I’ll be the strongest ship in the world!”

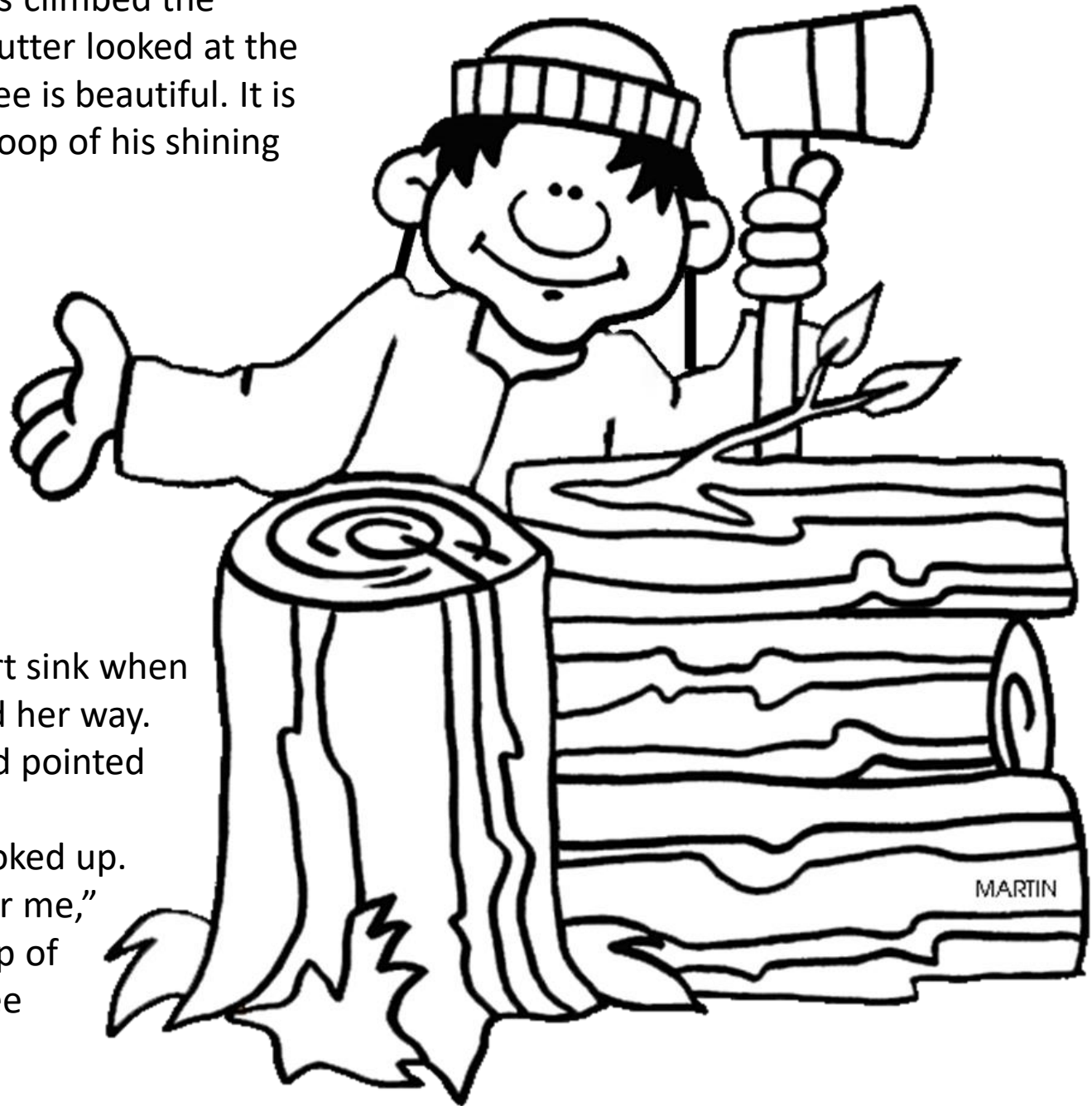
The third little tree looked down into the valley below where busy men and women worked in a busy town. “I don’t want to leave the mountaintop at all. I want to grow so tall that when people stop to look at me, they’ll raise their eyes to Heaven and think of God. I will be the tallest tree in the world.”



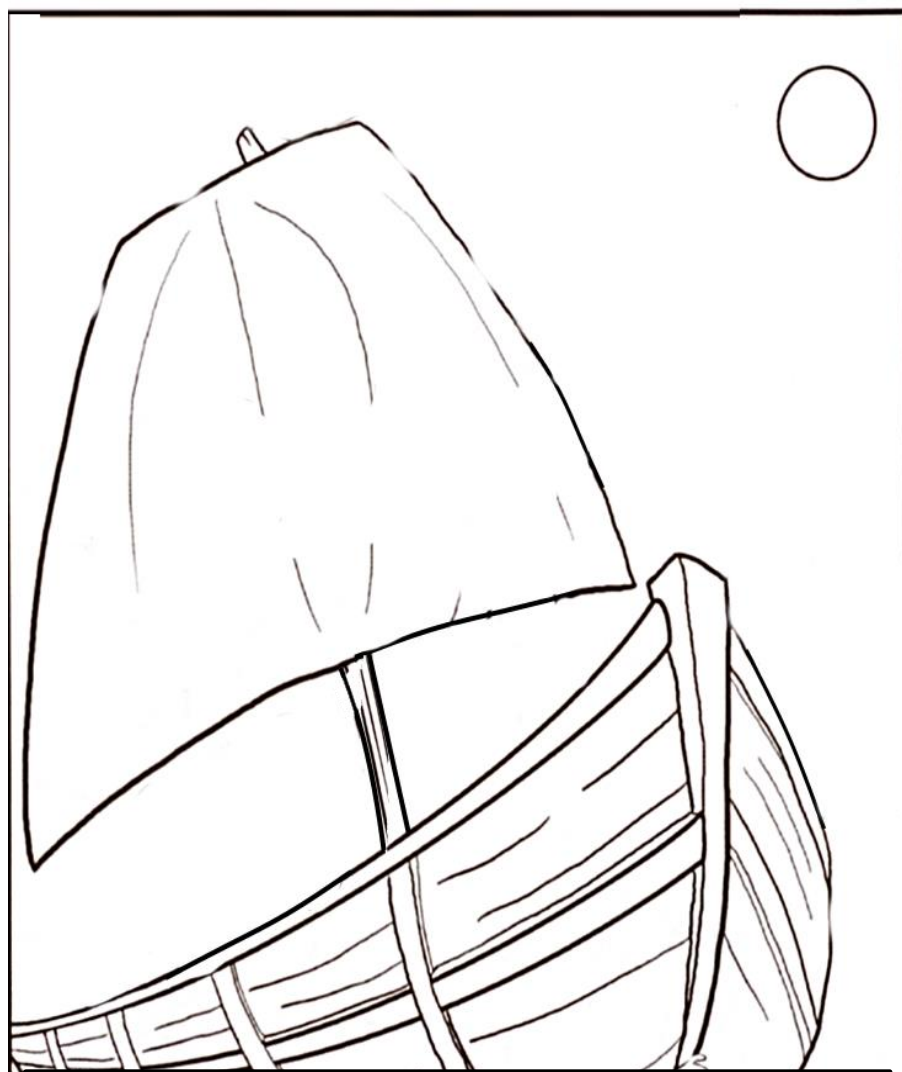
One day three woodcutters climbed the mountain. The first woodcutter looked at the first tree and said, "This tree is beautiful. It is perfect for me." With a swoop of his shining ax, the first tree fell.

The second woodcutter looked at the second tree and said, "This tree is strong. It is perfect for me." With a swoop of his shining ax, the second tree fell.

The third tree felt her heart sink when the last woodcutter looked her way. She stood straight, tall, and pointed bravely to Heaven. But the woodcutter never even looked up. "Any kind of tree will do for me," he muttered. With a swoop of his shining ax, the third tree fell.

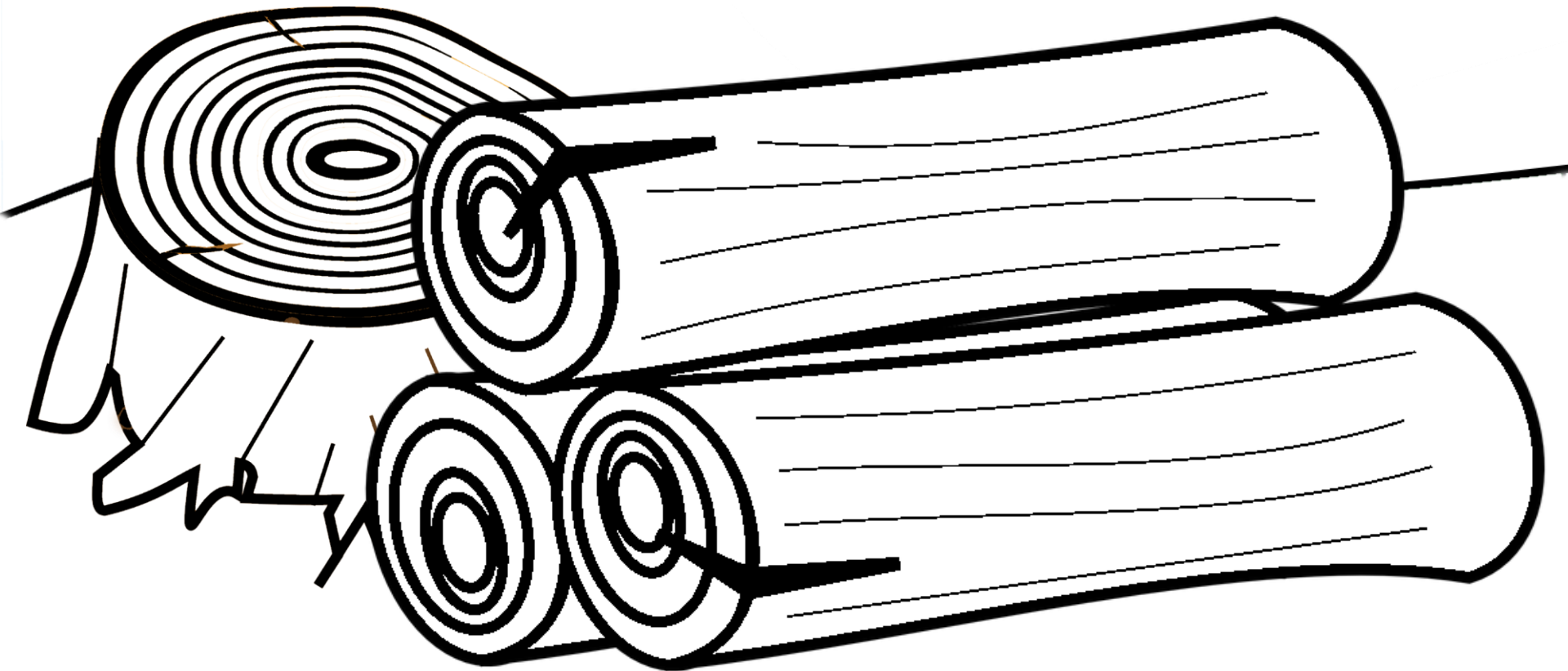


The carpenter fashioned the first tree into a feed box for animals. The once beautiful tree was not covered with gold, or with treasure. She was coated with sawdust and filled with hay for hungry farm animals.



The second tree was hammered and sawed into a simple fishing boat. She was too small and too weak to sail an ocean, or even a river. Instead she was taken to a lake.

The third tree was confused when the woodcutter cut her into strong beams and left her in a lumberyard. “What happened?” the once tall tree wondered. “All I ever wanted was to stay on the mountaintop and point to God. ...”





One night, golden starlight poured over the first tree as a young woman placed her newborn baby in the feed box. "I wish I could make a cradle for him" her husband whispered. The mother squeezed his hand and smiled as the starlight shone on the smooth and sturdy wood. "This manger is beautiful," she said. And suddenly the first tree knew he was holding the greatest treasure in the world.



One evening a tired traveler and his friends crowded into the old fishing boat. The traveler fell asleep as the second tree sailed out into the lake.

Soon a storm arose. The little tree shuddered. She knew she did not have the strength to carry so many passengers safely in the wind and the rain.

The tired man woke up. He stretched out His hand, and said, "Peace." The storm stopped as quickly as it had begun. And suddenly the second tree knew he was carrying the King of Heaven and Earth.

One Friday morning the third tree was startled when her beams were yanked from the forgotten woodpile. She flinched as she was carried through an angry, jeering crowd. She shuddered when soldiers nailed a man's hands to her. She felt ugly, harsh, and cruel.

But three days later, the third tree knew that God's love had changed everything. And every time people thought of the third tree, they would think of God. That was better than being the tallest tree in the world.



But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. (1 Corinthians 1:27-29)

