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kevin
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God unlimited

Theme Don't underestimate God – be open to what he can do

Scripture Jeremiah 1:4-10; Luke 13:10-17

Running order	Total: 50 minutes
Welcome	Unlimited prayer – making a paper chain (<i>10 minutes</i>)
Introduction	Opening the theme
Storytelling 1	Dialogue – Jeremiah's call (<i>5 minutes</i>)
Music	My God is so big (<i>5 minutes</i>)
Storytelling 2	Interactive sketch – Jesus heals the crippled woman (<i>5 minutes</i>)
Exploring/Activity	How does God work in our lives? The chocolate challenge (<i>15 minutes</i>)
Prayer action	'There's nothing that God cannot do' – gesture prayer (<i>5 minutes</i>)
Music	Give thanks (<i>5 minutes</i>)
Conclusion	Closing prayer and invitation

Resources

- Lots of strips of coloured paper for the paper chain
- Sticky tape
- Scissors
- Pens
- Two large signs: 'GASP' and 'CHEER'
- A king-size chocolate bar
- A tray
- A plate
- A knife and fork
- A hat
- A scarf
- Gloves
- A dice
- Music and words

Leaders

Minimum: 5

- Leader
- Cast x 4

Optimum: 9

- Leader (*Introduction and Conclusion*)
- Cast x 4:
 - Leader of the synagogue*, wearing a rich robe / cloak
 - God/Jesus*, wearing white
 - Crippled woman*, wearing a head-cloth and using a walking stick
 - Jeremiah/Voice (in the congregation)*, wearing a head-cloth
- Music Leader
- Explorer
- Activity Leader
- Prayer Leader

Suggestions for additional music

- Amazing grace
- Come, Lord, to our souls come down

Service

Welcome

As people arrive, invite them to write their prayers on strips of paper and add them to an ever-growing paper chain of prayers.

Introduction

How long is our paper chain of prayers so far?

Invite volunteers to stretch it out.

If we had an infinite supply of paper, we could go on making this paper chain of prayers for ever, because there's no limit to the number of prayers we can offer. Today we will be thinking about the fact that God has no limits. We begin with the story of a reluctant prophet.

Bring forward Jeremiah.

His name is Jeremiah and he tried to limit God's plans for him by protesting that he wasn't cut out to be God's spokesman. However, God was having none of it, as we'll hear in the following conversation.¹

Storytelling 1

God Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.

Jeremiah Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for
I am only a boy.

God Do not say, 'I am only a boy';
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you.
Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you.

God reaches out with two fingers and touches Jeremiah's mouth.

Now I have put my words in your mouth.
See, today I appoint you over nations and over
kingdoms,

1. This dialogue is taken directly from Jeremiah (NRSV). You may prefer to use a different translation.

to pluck up and to pull down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant.

Music My God is so big

Storytelling 2

Leader Our next story requires some participation on your part. Let's practise.

The Leader holds up the 'GASP' and 'CHEER' signs and encourages the congregation to respond.

Now wait for your moment to take part in our story.

Leader of the synagogue We are gathered in our synagogue on this holy Sabbath day to hear the word of God and listen to the teaching of his rabbis. Are we all seated? Men and boys here (*indicate the main body of the church*) and women and girls separate in the balcony above? (*indicate an area high up*). Then let us begin. Our rabbi today is Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus Let me tell you a story. A man owned a vineyard and in it there was a fig tree. He went to see whether there was any fruit on it, but –

Crippled woman (*hobbling down the aisle*) Help me!

The service Leader holds up a sign – 'GASP' – and encourages the people to respond. The congregation gasps.

Leader of the synagogue Excuse me, madam, I think you're looking for the balcony.

Crippled woman (*ignoring him*) Jesus of Nazareth, help me!

Jesus Come here.

The service Leader holds up a sign: 'GASP'. The congregation gasps.

Leader of the synagogue Really!

Jesus lays his hands on the woman's back.

Jesus Woman, you are cured.

She stands straight up, stretches and jumps for joy.

Crippled woman I'm better! Praise the Lord! Thank you! God has made me better!

The service Leader holds up a sign: 'CHEER'. The congregation cheers.

Voice *(from the congregation)* Me next! Me next!

Leader of the synagogue Now look, don't get excited. Today is the Sabbath, and the law is quite clear: DO NO WORK. There are six days when work ought to be done: if you need healing, come and be cured then, and not on the Sabbath.

Jesus You hypocrite! Don't you untie your donkey and give it some water on the Sabbath? This woman, a daughter of Abraham, has been suffering for 18 years: shouldn't she be freed from her pain on the Sabbath?

The service Leader holds up a sign: 'CHEER'. The congregation cheers.

Exploring/Activity

In both our stories, people tried to impose limits on God's power and restrict his ability to work in the world. Of course, they failed and God did exactly what he wanted to do.

Bring forward Jeremiah.

First of all, there was Jeremiah. God had big plans for him: he wanted a spokesman to tell the truth to his people, however hard it might be for them to hear. Jeremiah complained that he was too young; he objected that he was no good at public speaking and wouldn't know what to say. He clearly had no confidence in his own ability to do the job. Nevertheless, God promised his help and protection and gave Jeremiah the words he needed.

In the end, Jeremiah worked as God's spokesman for 40 years, preaching to his people at a time when they were under attack from powerful enemies. He constantly told them to turn back to their God, but they ignored his warnings. In the end, Jerusalem was invaded, the Temple was destroyed and God's people were deported. Jeremiah never stopped reminding them that God would not forget them and that he would make a new covenant, or promise, with them. That promise became a reality with the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus, hundreds of years later.

Bring forward the leader of the synagogue.

In our gospel story, the crippled woman ignored the rules of the synagogue by approaching Jesus directly in the men-only area. This was reason enough for the leader of the synagogue to turn her away, but then he tried to enforce God's own law about doing no work on the Sabbath. It's as if he expected God to work only during office hours! Jesus healed the woman anyway and argued passionately that this was the right thing to do.

Both of our stories are about God getting things done in spite of people's attempts to put obstacles in his way. Our activity today will help us think about this.

Hold up the big bar of chocolate.

Who would like to eat some of this chocolate?

Invite responses.

That's fine – but you can only eat some chocolate if you throw this dice and get a six. Then you've got to put on this hat, this scarf and these gloves. Oh, and by the way, you can only eat the chocolate with a knife and fork.

Invite volunteers forward to form a circle. Place the chocolate bar on a large plate on a tray with the knife and fork. Put the hat, scarf and gloves next to the tray. Pass the dice around and as soon as someone throws a six, they take on the chocolate challenge. Keep passing the dice as they do so: as soon as someone else throws a six, they take over. When you have played for long enough, stop the game and divide any remaining chocolate between the volunteers who haven't had any.

Even though our volunteers had to work with all those restrictions, such as the gloves and the cutlery, they still managed to eat some chocolate! They were quite determined to overcome all the obstacles in their way.

God works like this. He is determined to work in our lives, regardless of the obstacles we put in his way. He worked through Jeremiah in spite of his spokesman's reluctance and lack of confidence. Jesus healed the crippled woman in spite of strict religious laws, showing that God doesn't always obey his own rules! In our own lives, we can expect God to work through unexpected people – even us. He might work in surprising, challenging or inconvenient ways. We must never underestimate God's ability to get things done; instead, we need to be open to his limitless possibilities. Imagine what he could do!

Prayer action

Our prayer today is inspired by the words of our first hymn: 'My God is so big, so strong and so mighty, there's nothing that he cannot do'. We will use the following actions: let's practise them together now. First there is a 'stop' gesture.

Hold your hand out with a flat palm, as if stopping traffic. Encourage everyone to do the same.

Then there is a 'holding' gesture, as if you're trying to catch running water in your hands.

Cup both your hands together. Encourage everyone to do the same.

Finally there is the 'reaching' gesture, as if you're trying to stretch your arms around a very big tree trunk.

Stretch your arms out and encourage everyone to do the same.

Let us pray.

Almighty God,
forgive us for the times we have tried to stop you,

Make the 'stop' gesture.

through weakness, fear or the desire to control.

Make the 'holding' gesture.

Your power is so great that none can contain it;
your grace overflows like a river bursting its banks.

Make the 'reaching' gesture.

Your might is beyond anything we can encompass.
May our hearts and minds stay open
to your limitless possibilities.
In Jesus' name.

Amen.

Music

Give thanks

Conclusion

God unlimited,
send us out into the world with confidence,
trusting that with you, nothing will be impossible.

Amen.

Give notices, announce the next all-age service and invite everyone to the feast.

Christmas Day

God's Glory

Theme The Word made flesh

Scripture John 1:1-14

Running order Total: 50 minutes

Welcome Lighting all the candles on the Advent wreath
(5 minutes)

Introduction Opening the theme

Music Once in royal David's city (5 minutes)

Activity Addressing the envelopes – spelling out our place in
creation (10 minutes)

Music Ding dong merrily on high (5 minutes)

Exploring How does God show us his glory? – brainstorm and
opening the envelopes (5 minutes)

Storytelling Reading John 1:1-14 (2 minutes)

Music Joy to the world (5 minutes)

Prayer action 'The light of all people' – interactive supplication
(8 minutes)

Music O come, all ye faithful (5 minutes)

Conclusion Closing prayer and invitation

Resources

- Advent wreath, matches and tapers
- Hand-held candles, given to each person as they arrive
- Felt pens for every pew or row of seats
- A selection of stickers: gold and silver stars, moons and planets if possible
- A sealed envelope under every seat, (including the Leaders') containing the printed Christmas card
- The printed Christmas card (*see 2 pages at the end of this service, showing the front and inside of the card*). Make double-sided copies onto A4 coloured card. Cut out, fold and seal one card inside each envelope
- Whiteboard or flip chart and pens
- Music and words

Leaders

Minimum: 1

- Leader

Optimum: 6

- Leader (*Introduction and Conclusion*)
- Activity Leader
- Explorer
- Storyteller
- Music Leader
- Prayer Leader

Suggestions for additional music

- The Virgin Mary had a baby boy
- Infant holy, infant lowly

Service

Welcome

Light all the candles on the Advent wreath.

Introduction

Merry Christmas! Who has opened some presents already today?

Invite responses. If the church is bristling with children carrying new toys, you may like to invite some to show the congregation what they have received.

Now we begin our celebration today by singing.

Music

Once in royal David's city

Activity

Christmas is a time for thinking big – and I don't just mean presents and turkey. In our familiar Christmas carols, we sing 'Joy to the world' and 'Unto us a boy is born! King of all creation', but do we ever stop to think about what huge things we are describing? Joy to the world: all 6.8 billion people and 197 million square miles of it. And what about 'King of all creation'? How big is *creation*? Today's Bible reading describes it as 'all things that have come into being' – in other words, 'life, the universe and everything'.

Our activity today is going to help us think big. Under your seats you will find an envelope. It is yours to keep, but don't open it yet – it is waiting for an address. Your address. Start right at the top and write your address on the envelope.

Allow time for people to do this, and fill in your own envelope, using your church's address.

You have probably finished your address with your county or postcode – but now let's see how long you can make your address. Which country do you live in? Which continent? Which hemisphere? Which planet? Which part of the solar system? Use all your knowledge of geography and space to address your letter so that it could reach you from the other end of the universe! You may need to carry on writing on the

back of the envelope. When you have finished the address, you may like to decorate the envelope with stars and planets for its journey through space.

Allow plenty of time for people to complete their envelopes. Complete your own address (see Exploring, below).

Music Ding dong merrily on high

Exploring Let's hear some of your universal addresses. Don't read out the first bit – start from the country and go on from there.

Hear some addresses and then read out your own example:

(Your name),
 (Your church),
 (Your town),
 (Your county),
 (Your country),
 (Your continent),
 Planet Earth,
 3rd Planet in the Solar System,
 Orion Arm,
 The Milky Way Galaxy,
 The Local Group,
 The Local Supercluster,
 The Known Universe,
 The Unknown Universe.

There's a lot of universe out there! A science fiction writer summed it up like this: 'Space is big. Really big. You just won't believe how vastly, hugely, mind-bogglingly big it is. I mean, you may think it's a long way down the road to the chemist's, but that's just peanuts to space.'² And all of this – the known and unknown reaches of space – are part of God's creation, just as we are part of it, too.

Now here's a big question for you. Imagine you were God, the Creator of EVERYTHING. You don't want to stay in the background: you want to reach out to the individual people on earth. You want to say to them,

2. Douglas Adams, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

'I am your God!' and show them your glory and power. What would you do? Would you send them each a letter, like this? (*Show your envelope.*) Would you do something big with weather, such as making a rainbow? Would you show them a miracle? If you were God, what would you do to show people that you loved them?

Invite suggestions, valuing all contributions by writing them on the whiteboard or flip chart.

Let's see what God actually did to show us who he is and to let us know that he loves us. Your envelopes are addressed to you: open them and see what's inside.

Everyone opens their envelopes, including you.

This is what God did to show that he loves us (*read the words on the card*): 'God became a human being and lived among us.' Although he created the whole universe, he didn't terrify us with some earth-shattering display of power, or dazzle us with his glory. He was born as the little baby, Jesus, so that we might know him and could say, 'We have seen his glory.' That is what our carols, cards and presents are all about, and that is why we celebrate Christmas. Although we are a tiny part of his creation, God gave himself to us today. Joy to the world!

Storytelling

Read John 1:1-14.

Music

Joy to the world

Prayer action

Turn out the lights.

Today's Gospel says this about Jesus: 'In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.' For our prayers today, we wait in the dark and remember all those known to us who need the light of life, especially in this Christmas season.

Pause. Light your own hand-held candle from the central candle of the Advent wreath.

In Jesus was life, and the life was the light of all people.

Pass the light among the people. When all the candles are lit, say the closing words.

Jesus, Light of the world,
shine among us this Christmas Day
and for evermore.

Amen.

Music

O come, all ye faithful

Conclusion

Heavenly Father,
we thank you for the gift of your Son.
In him we have seen your glory.
As we celebrate his birth,
may our hearts be open to receive him.

Amen.

Give notices, announce the next all-age service and invite everyone to the feast.

God became a human
being and lived among us



and we have seen his glory

(From John 1.14)

God became a human
being and lived among us



and we have seen his glory

(From John 1.14)

**Joy to you
and to all the world
this Christmas Day!**

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and to all the world
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