

- STRONG YELLOW ROPE -

A six-part story for the season of Advent, Year B

What could possibly be more unstoppable than a child with a tricycle?

Confined to the sidewalk and hours of daylight, a child's world is more than big enough to explore God's unstoppable goodness. In their friendships, emerging character, natural sense of justice and ceaseless energy children participate in the playful work of animating God's kingdom. They are indeed participants in *God's unstoppable purpose*.

This six-part story intends to illustrate the many invitations of Advent, the church's annual opportunity to somehow fasten itself to God's unstoppable purposes. This is lifetime work, not just an invitation for youth. If God's purpose is an old restored tricycle, imagine a whole convoy of wheels and feet, hooves and hands that intend to participate in this redemptive movement.

God's purpose in this story is a tricycle, discovered abandoned in that time between testaments when Isaiah prayed for a reappearance, where the church prays vicariously for Jesus' return. In the season of Advent the church takes up John's charge to clear a path, Gabriel's charge to bear the gospel and, of course, Mary's revolutionary charge to manifest the Good News. Beneath the metaphor of toys and teddy bears there lies some very complex Christian doctrine of mission and moral formation. This is freight children should not have to carry in a literal way.

So, for this time in their lives, it need be no more complex than this: a wagon attached to a tricycle, a group of friends, a neighborhood in need. Is this not an apt description of the church participating in God's unstoppable purpose? Entirely free of prescription and moralism, these stories intend to engage the worshipping child's imagination and not much more. The closing prayer is a simple concluding form of pastoral care. Children are dismissed with an imagination implanted with miniature images of generosity and mindfulness, friendship and fairness that, in full faith, become a community working toward peace and justice. Layers of meaning will unfold, not in a single worship hour, but as this story comes around again in new forms, year after year. It is, after all, an unstoppable story.

Summary

Advent 1	Unstoppable Wonder
Advent 2	Unstoppable Friendship
Advent 3	Unstoppable Joy
Advent 4	Unstoppable Family
Christmas	Unstoppable Gathering
Epiphany	Unstoppable Journey

Weekly props

Tricycle
Tricycle and wagon, yellow rope
Tricycle and wagon decorated
Tricycle, wagon, bears, wheel barrow
Tricycle, wagon, pantry items, tin cans
Tricycle, wagon with flashlight

Chapter 1 Unstoppable Wonder

"Restore us, O God, that we may be saved." Israelites from Psalm 80:7

Imagine a time that is a little like our time with junkyards and backwoods and roads in between. Now imagine a time that is almost nothing like our time where nothing is disposable and people walk safely on every street. It is in this kind of time where Tricycles find friends and very important jobs and it's why some stories have to begin "once upon a time."

So, once upon a time, there was a Tricycle. He had so little paint he was nearly invisible which might be why he waited in the junk pile so long. "Long time ago I wore a green sparkle," he told an Old Truck. "but the thing I miss most is the sidewalk. I wonder how I can get to a sidewalk." The Oak Tree on the other side of the fence heard all this and wondered how to find a girl or boy to take the Tricycle home. Amazing things happen when people wonder. So, with the spare from the Truck and some new yellow Rope the Tree hung a swing from its branches. Children have a way of finding such things even in far off places. John, a boy who liked to wander in the backwoods, found the swing almost immediately. Since he was a baby John liked to jump so he jumped when he *saw* it and then he jumped *on* it and the tire spun 'round and John saw the bike. "Oh, wow!" cried John, quickly jumping down, "I wonder what *that* is!"

John's mom helped him fix the broken pedal and John's dad helped him paint it (blue). John's dog ran alongside as the Tricycle rode up and down the sidewalk up until bedtime. With lips full of honey and toast John said, "Mom! We're going to be unstoppable!"

Closing prayer

Give us eyes to see you in the most unexpected places.
Paint us the colors of our brightest joy and deepest sadness.
Run alongside us as we learn to jump and play and share.

Chapter 2 Unstoppable Friendship

"I am sending my messenger ahead of you." Jesus from Mark 1:2

Imagine a time that is a little like our time with grass and flowers, tears and hugs that make the tears feel better. Now imagine a time that is almost nothing like our time where people faithfully care for the earth and every kind of feeling. It is in this kind of time that little (blue) Tricycles find friends like John to take them home to make them new and why some stories have to begin "once upon a time."

So, once upon a time there was a happy little Tricycle. Actually, he wasn't happy when he lived in the junkyard but John took him home and gave him a sidewalk. The Tricycle loved to ride with John. They were unstoppable. One day, as the Tricycle was zooming around the corner it bumped into a little red Wagon. The Wagon belonged to Angela. Angie proposed that because John had wheels and the Wagon had room, the two should

be tied together and used for various things around the neighborhood. John jumped at the sound of her idea, knowing just where to find some rope. He ran to the oak Tree next to the junk yard and untied the swing where he'd first seen the bike. In no time, the little red Wagon was attached to the little blue Tricycle with bright yellow cord. And just like he said, they were unstoppable.

Closing prayer

Help us to remember the things we need and to know where to find them.
Give us the courage to make new friends.
Tie us together with those things that allow us to do good things in our neighborhood.

Chapter 3 Unstoppable Joy

*“The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me to bring the Good News.”
Isaiah the Prophet from 61:1*

Imagine a time that is a little like our time with bullies and parades, broken things and fixed things. Now imagine a time that is almost nothing like our time when every day feels festive and no one is scared, not even the bullies. In this kind of time everything broken gets fixed, bikes have sidewalks and wagons have friends. It's why some stories have to begin “once upon a time.”

So, once upon a time, a blue Bike and a red Wagon, tied together by yellow Rope went zooming around the neighborhood. John had polished the paint and Angie had greased the wheels. “We're unstoppable!” cried the tricycle, “Look at our big flag!” “We're beautiful!” said the wagon, “Look at our tassels!” Some kids from the biggest neighborhood in town heard all this racket and suddenly blocked the sidewalk. “Hey,” said Levi, “Are you Larry? You look like you might be Larry.” “No,” said John, “I'm just John.” “Well, how 'bout you, missy - are you Miriam? You look like a Miriam I once heard about.” “No,” said Angie, “I am just Angela and we're having a parade. We've cleared the sidewalk and decorated our toys. You're welcome to join us.” Levi felt sad that he didn't have something colorful to wear. So the tricycle offered him the flag and John gave Levi his vest and in no time they were on their way again. This parade was unstoppable.

Closing prayer

On days that don't feel like parades remind us of your love.
May we remember that everyone is invited to the parade, even bullies.
In the play of sharing Jesus we will remember the work of taking care,
caring for others and sharing the joy.

Chapter 4 Unstoppable Family

"Here am I, the servant of the Lord" Jesus' mother from Luke 1:38

Imagine a time that is a little like our time with afternoons in the backyard and food in a basket. Now imagine a time that is almost nothing like our time where no one fights – not neighbors, families or countries. Imagine a time where there are no poor people because there are no rich people and for this reason, everyone has groceries. It's the kind of time where Tricycles and Wagons have very important jobs and why it's necessary to begin some stories "once upon a time." This is definitely one of them.

So, once upon a time, a Tricycle that was blue and a Wagon that was red were tied together with strong yellow Rope. Angie loved to pedal and she was unstoppable. John liked to ride and he laughed the whole time. One day, as they were zooming around the corner they nearly bumped into Mary and Elizabeth. Each was carrying an armful of bears. "These need to go over to David's." said Mary. "We're playing in his yard today." "Hop in," said the Wagon, "I've got lots of room." "Hop on," said the Trike, "I've got lots of speed." They were unstoppable.

But somewhere between Mary's house and the house of David was the house of old Ms. Gabrielle. She set down the Wheelbarrow and waved them all down. "Greetings!" she said, which is like other people's "hello." "Look at how you're all hooked together!" "We're unstoppable!" cried the Wagon, and the Wheelbarrow wished it could join them. This seems to be a common wish for things with wheels and feet and shoes and hooves.

Gabrielle had a special plant whose fat leaves had clear ointment that worked like lotion. "Bring it to Harold down the street," she instructed, "and tell him to use it on his crusty exterior." And she also had a note for Zechariah, who was John's Dad, but no one knew what it said and John's Dad couldn't read it out loud because God shut his mouth for a while. For the longest time Gabrielle did her own delivering, visiting people with Good News and good gifts but now, it seemed, she preferred the Tricycle do it. So, by the tender mercy of God, John's tricycle brought joy and comfort to those who needed it most.

Closing prayer

We live in neighborhoods that you brought together.

Help us to notice the needs of those around us and the courage to help them.

We promise to work together by sharing our ideas and belongings.

Please add your blessing to the things we do to be nice to each other.

Chapter 5 God's Unstoppable Gathering

"Let us go now to Bethlehem and see for ourselves." Shepherds from Luke 2:15

Imagine a time that is a little like our time with barns and stars, babies and gifts. Now imagine a time that is exactly like our time with barns and stars, babies and gifts but the baby is God and the gifts are for Jesus and the stars tell us exactly where to find him. It is a time where little blue Tricycles pull Wagons full of good things, announcing to the neighborhood the fun of friendship with God. It's why some stories must begin "once upon a time."

So, once upon a time, a little blue Tricycle pulling a red Wagon was doing exactly that. They were unstoppable. John and Angie took turns pedaling while the others ran alongside picking things up and dropping things off. "Can I play too?" asked Joseph. He's an older kid that few people understand. Too often Joseph gets left out of the story.

Gabrielle was deep in her tool shed when the blue Tricycle pulled up. "Ooo!" she exclaimed, "I wish I'd known you were coming! I have some carrots for Anna. She has good eyes and a good heart. These are for her. You can probably find her at the temple."

So, the bear went to David's and the carrots to Anna who had a blanket for Simeon and soon the wagon was very full. Simeon was very old and a little deaf and he too wished he'd heard them coming. So, they picked through his recycling and tied some cans to the back of the wagon. Now they were not only unstoppable but unmistakable too!

John's dog seemed frightened by the clatter and that great big load. "Don't be afraid," Gabrielle had said, "It's just a delivery of good news and great joy for all people in the neighborhood." And so the dog ran alongside to see just what this delivery was all about.

Closing prayer

Today is Christmas and we remember that all gifts come from you. Thank you, God.
We promise to share these good things with other people.
And we will tell of your love by singing songs, and saying thank you
and clapping our hands.

Chapter 6 God's Unstoppable Journey

"He will be a light for revelation to the Gentiles" Simeon from Luke 2:32

Imagine a time that is a little like our time with New Years' and old years, midnight and morning. Now imagine a time that is almost nothing like our time with forever and ever and always and never. It's the sort of time where light is a flashlight that's taped to your handles and even though it belongs to your bike, it belongs to the whole entire street because of the way it shines. It's the kind of light that makes it necessary to begin some stories "once upon a time." This is that kind of light and that kind of story.

So, once upon a time, well past bedtime, a little blue Bike tied to a little red Wagon were zooming along. "Nice job clearing the sidewalk," said Angie. "Nice job clearing the sky," said John. For eight days Mary, Joseph and Elizabeth had played with the bear and now it was time to bring him home. They had tin cans to announce their arrival and a light for when it got dark. Just then, as they were zooming around the corner they saw Anna and old Mr. Simeon walking arm in arm. Simeon smiled as he admired the Tricycle's headlamp. "It lights up the whole world!" John said with pride. "It must," said Simeon. "And it will," said Anna. She had picked up Mary's teddy and was giving it a hug. She praised him for being so brave and yet so soft. "It's not really my bear," said Mary, "He lives with me but anyone who wants to can hold him." As Tricycle and Wagon drove away, the light ahead of them and the cans behind, the bear became strong, filled with wisdom and the favor of God was upon them all.

Closing prayer

We thank you, God, for a whole year of being with us.

You are the bright light that we carry in our thoughts and actions.

May it shine into every shadow of the world,
so that everyone feels safe and warm and loved.