

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Sunday, December 15, 2019
Third Sunday in Advent

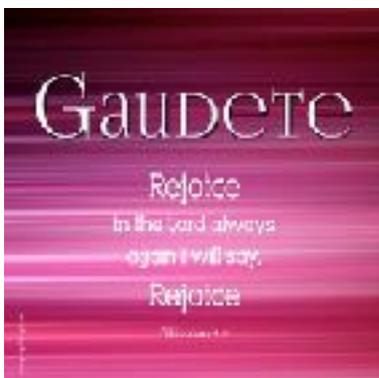
**“Get Ready...Get Set...Rejoice”
Third of Four in “Are You Ready?”**

The Reverend Dr. Scott Everett Couper
Hebrew Scripture: Isaiah 35:1-10
Christian Scripture: Philippians 4:4-5

Welcome to the *third* of four sermons dedicated to Advent
entitled “Are You Ready?”



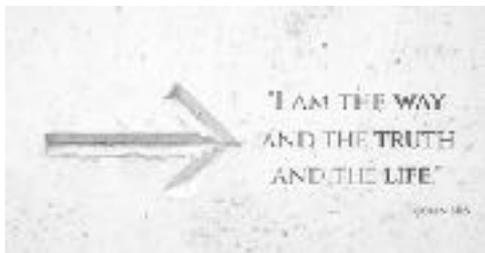
As you can read in your service bulletin, this Sunday is ‘Gaudete Sunday’, the third Sunday in Advent. Gaudete means ‘rejoice’ in Latin. [Pink, or rose, is the liturgical color signifying ‘joy’].¹



¹ Text in brackets were not preached on Sunday, but are included in this draft of the sermon.

‘Gaudete’ is taken directly [from Greek to Latin) from our Christian scripture reading which reads in part, “Rejoice in the Lord always”.

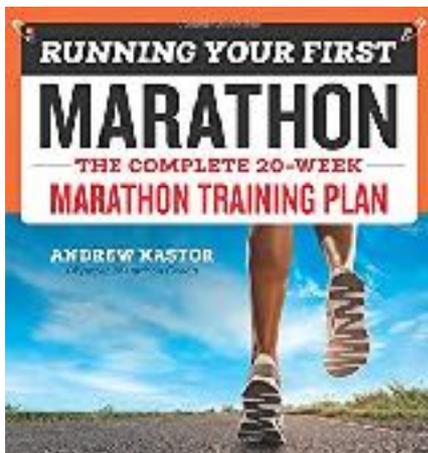
As our sermon series suggests, during Advent we ‘get ready’. We are waiting; we are preparing; we are anticipating. Waiting, preparing, and anticipating often include some worry. As it is well known by our fundraising committee and deacons [and anyone panicking about Christmas shopping], they also include a fair bit of work.



As we continue to get ready and prepare for the new age, we begin to see the culmination, the climax, of that for which we hope and pray: the birth of Jesus, the Christ. Jesus is the one who gives our lives meaning. And this is a big deal! A huge deal! That for which we are waiting is the meaning of our lives! If Jesus is not the meaning of your life - I get that, I understand that. But if you are here, you at a bare minimum, like me, see others who you admire and you too desire to have Jesus as the meaning of your life.



I'm not sure if any of you saw in last week's local paper. I finished tenth in the annual Chamber of Commerce Jingle Jog. I was bitterly disappointed that tenth place did not carry a several thousand-dollar award as it does in the Boston and New York City marathons.



In 2009 and 2010, I ran quite a few races. Much training preceded each race. Before each race started, I was worried. Was I fit enough? I was anxious. Did I eat the right the foods and drink the right drinks? Did I apply enough sunscreen? As I waited and waited at the starting-line for the race to begin, I would almost burst with tension.

Like your lives and mine, like much of your work and mine, running an ultra-marathon is a curious mix of agony and ecstasy. There are points during the race, like the tenth hour of running, that one

wishes “by any means necessary” to end the race. It is much more agony than ecstasy. Yet if anyone knows about running and races, like the Kindopp boys, there is much rejoicing when one passes the last mile-marker. There is a bit of giddy anticipation that no agony can overwhelm when one hears the bell announcing the last lap around the track.



And, oh, I cannot describe to you the sense of profound joy when one sights in the distance, the chute! That channel that funnels you to the finish-line where ‘it is accomplished’.



Friends, like the last mile-mark and sight of the approaching chute, we begin to experience the *initial* feeling of rejoicing today on

Gaudete Sunday! With much of the race taking its toll, we are in the midst of an agony of anticipation and endurance as described by the prophet Isaiah. But we are not hopeless and disillusioned. We are not so tired that we cease running, anticipating, and persevering. We continue because we are close.

On this Sunday, midway through Advent, we *begin* to see that the birth of our Savior is close and in sight. So, this morning, we *begin* to rejoice. Even if we are weak and weary. Even if we are even at the end of our rope, even if we are in our deepest point of impatience and anxiety this morning, rejoicing breaks through!



One lesson I have learned is that the capacity to experience and demonstrate joy is in direct proportion to the capacity to experience and endure suffering. The bigger the blisters, the more exhausted the muscles, the more severe the cramps, the more one's energy is sapped from dehydration, the greater the joy when one sees the last mile mark, the chute, and the finish-line.



In our scripture reading this morning, the prophet Isaiah describes the ‘joy of the redeemed’. The joy envisioned by Isaiah is extreme, because as the prophet states the heart and mind fear, because the hands are feeble, and the knees give way. Isaiah describes, in the extreme, the finish-line when all will see, all will hear, and all will walk. Even Creation, the animals and the land will be restored. Like runners in a race entering that finish-line chute, all of God’s people “will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away” (Isaiah 35:10).



Friends, this Gaudete Sunday we begin to experience the joy of Jesus’ birth though still waiting for it. This Sunday, the finish-line is in

sight, we are in the chute. This Sunday is our “Ready...Get Set...
Rejoice!”



Next week, we will continue to (yes, prematurely) celebrate the joy of Jesus’ birth by singing Christmas carol sing during worship. For the next two weeks, I invite you to tease out, observe, and recognize every opportunity to be glad, to celebrate, to appreciate, and to rejoice while still waiting. “Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4)

This was the Word of God, and it was preached to the people of God and the people of God responded, “Amen”.