



Rejoice and Share – Gaudete Sunday

Advent III || December 15, 2024 || 9:30 am St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Hanover, MA 02336 || Zephaniah 3:14-20; Canticle 9; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18 || The Rev'd Amy Whitcomb Slemmer, Esq.

It is Gaudete Sunday! Latin scholars will know immediately that Gaudete translates to mean REJOICE! We are invited to take a brief time out from our previously ponderous approach to Advent – to our anxiously awaiting the birth of Jesus, to move into the JOYFUL exuberant anticipatory waiting that is likely best modeled by our very young people who can't wait until Santa arrives! That is the sort of joy and delight that we are highlighting on this rejoicing Sunday.

We light a different color candle today – it is the Rose Candle and we say some new prayers and luckily, each of our scripture passages for this morning point to joy! Our reading from the letter to the Philippians urges us to “Rejoice in the Lord; Rejoice always. The Lord is near, Let your gentleness be known to everyone”

Zephaniah shouts for joy: “Sing aloud, O daughter Zion: shout, O Israel – Rejoice and exult with all your heart”. So says our friend the prophet Isaiah who says that we must rejoice and sing the praises of the Lord – again because God is near.

And if those readings didn't jump out at you as having the same theme and guidance, and you are here on this VERY brisk Sunday morning not feeling much like rejoicing, or unsure of what in your life, right this moment, might lead you to rejoice - I have a few ideas to offer.

First - we are here together – REJOICE! You made it to church, or you are watching on line. Perhaps you set an alarm, perhaps you had to put aside other pressing responsibilities – and YOU MADE IT HERE, this morning! You now have a slightly expanded latin vocabulary – Gaudete translates to REJOICE – and we have THIS time set aside to ponder what those ancient scriptural truths mean for us. We are spreading good news and love through our infectious approach to this holiday – we are REJOICING that God is near. We are REJOICING that we are known and loved. We are REJOICING that we have friends, family or neighbors with whom to share our disappointments or heart breaks. We are REJOICING!

Some of you may have seen my Peanuts Cover Sheet that says – What if We Just Gave Thanks for EVERYTHING today?!? Or in today’s parlance – “What if we just Rejoice in EVERYTHING today?” I hope that doesn’t sound pedestrian or naive or even as being impossible, because I have given this approach a go, and it is challenging AND doable!

It is also counter to our inclinations – to give thanks, even for the hard stuff. Can you imagine giving thanks for being late, or for disappointing a friend or for not following through or for dropping the ball on a family commitment or REALLY angering a loved one?

I don’t think God wants us to rejoice in those shortcomings, but rather – in true ADVENT fashion – to acknowledge where we fell short and to turn WITH GRATITUDE toward rectifying the situation.

Was someone expecting your arrival and you were late? Apologize and take some concrete action that will prevent you from being late next time.

Did you totally forget to run that errand that you were asked to complete? Your gratitude isn’t for blowing it, but rather for the opportunity to sincerely apologize, and make amends again – putting a system in place for yourself so that you don’t repeat the error or let the friend down.

Are you deeply grieving and missing a loved one? Gaudete Sunday isn’t about ignoring that pain, but rather we get to give thanks for the love and relationship that has transitioned from this world and flesh, into the next. Today we REJOICE in the promise of one day being reunited and for the love and strength of a fundamental and long-lasting relationship that is part of who we are right now.

Gaudete Sunday is the day we step aside from the worries or difficulties that can weigh us down in this Advent Season. So many of us can drag through this season – especially those of us who are impacted by the dwindling light of December. Perhaps it feels like it is too hard or too much to try to make it to church on a day other than Sunday to sit in this sanctuary and dwell in its peace. (as you’ve been invited to do in the Call, and in the announcements in today’s bulletin) Rather than ruing the fading light – sunrise is now after 7 am and it is setting close to 4:30 pm. Rather than being weighed down by the scarcity of daylight, Gaudete Sunday suggests that we give thanks for the light there is – we rejoice in the fact that another sunrise is promised, another of God’s remarkable morning paintings made with light.

And what of John the Baptist’s most famous appearance, as we read this morning. He isn’t prescribing rejoicing specifically, but has laid out a formula for action steps that can make you feel gratitude and helps spread love in the world. Most remarkably, John doles out specific advice for specific people when he is asked “what shall we do?”. He doesn’t say – go and be

good to the whole crowd. He doesn't just say – REPENT – he tailors specific advice to the individuals who ask. To the tax collectors, he admonishes them to collect no more than they are owed. To the soldiers he implores them not to extort or lie and to be happy with their wages. Generally, he advises those gathered who have extra clothing and extra food to share those things so that everyone will have enough.

John's point is that lying, or constantly complaining, or hoarding more than is needed become barriers to experiencing the presence of God. Those behaviors supplant the comfort and joy that God brings. John's preaching, as we are told, created great expectations for the arrival and life-changing ministry of Jesus. John wants his listeners to be ready, and his wisdom extends to us.

If we were to ask the same question of John on this Rose Sunday, this Gaudete Sunday this day when we are going to make our best effort to rejoice – what might John advise each of us? Well, it would be an individual prescription based on our life's circumstances, but I'm positive there would be similarities.

What shall we do? How about we greet each other as great news – as though we are greeting Jesus? What if we were kind and offered a bit of cash to the cold gas-station attendant who kindly fills our car's gas tank? We smiled and listened to the grocery clerk's very long story about his holiday plans or wayward child or just simply listened to the next person who definitely needs our time and attention.

In this very busy season, it is a gift to offer a generous ear, and to take a deep breath while realizing that a story someone is offering may take time to navigate. What if we were grateful that we were the person with whom the tale was shared? Or as we listen or watch the news and are distracted by some of the stories of need this holiday season, we rejoiced in the relationship that St. Andrew's has with Rehoboth House and Rosie's Place and Wellspring who have offered love and listening for their clients on our behalf all year long.

This week, we are invited to REJOICE! To set aside our exhaustion from whatever holiday preparations are underway, or whatever company or travel is expected and to REJOICE in our ability to host, in our relations even if they are challenging, in our ability to travel – even if we aren't quite sure we want to go.

Rejoice – the Lord is near! That is extraordinarily good news, and it is news we are called upon to share with others, so that they too may enter into this expectant season with a sense of belonging and joy. Amen+