

Third Sunday of Advent

December 14, 2008

Lessons: Psalm 126; Isaiah 61:1-4,8-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT

One of the things that we have tried to be faithful in each year has been “outreach”, giving money to worthy causes that touch the lives of those in need. And we have recently had some conversations regarding where we should be focusing our attention this year. This is a good thing to do, and for a few moments I want us to have some creative fun with this concept.

So let’s imagine for a moment that one of our favorite causes is having a fund raising event. This is going to be a big event which will raise a lot of funds for this very worthwhile organization. So we spend some time discussing it, and we decide to participate in the event as a church. And as it turns out, several of our friends and other organizations here in town are also going to participate. It is going to be very big event and it is going to be exciting to participate along side so many people that we know.

Now here is where our imagination is going to be tested just a bit, well, perhaps it is going to be tested a lot, because the event that we are going to participate in is a 10 kilometer run. We are each, yes everyone of us, going to participate in a 10 kilometer run to raise money for a very worthwhile organization. Now don’t laugh, because we are going to do this together, and we are going to have fun. Don’t laugh. I know, perhaps we should have done this a couple of years ago, but we are going to do it now, and we are going to do the best we can. We are going to be the best 10K runners we can be, because none of us sitting here likes to do anything poorly, even something as silly as to run a 10K.

So what do we have to do to finish this event with our heads held high, knowing that we have done the best that we could, and that we have maximized our potential, both as individuals and as a church?

Well, as much as we may hate to admit it, we may have to go out and get some exercise. We will probably want to get enough exercise to be certain that we can finish the race. And of course we may want to get enough exercise so that we can finish in a respectable amount of time. If some of our good friends are participating we probably do not want to finish last, not this group. We will want to be proud of the race we have run.

Now, in addition to getting in some exercise, some running, is there anything else that we should focus on that can help us run the course, and run it well? Listen to these words from the world-famous running coach from Adams State, Coach Joe Vigil. Coach Joe has written:

“...all athletes must develop a good running technique. It is not a coincidence that all great runners (including world record holders from the 800 meters to the marathon) look good when they run...It becomes extremely important to eliminate all unnecessary body movements such as improper head motion, shoulder movement, flying arms, and improper leg lift.”

According to Coach Joe Vigil, our form as we run can make a big difference in our results. And in his book, *Galloway's Book on Running*, Jeff Galloway, who ran several distances and was on the United States Olympic team, described form work this way:

“There is no single prescription for efficient running, for we are all put together differently. These points on form are general principles of body mechanics that can be applied to all runners...Good form is something all runners—regardless of ability or experience—can work on...good form will make anyone's running smoother and more enjoyable.”

Galloway then describes what he considers to be very important elements of form. He listed: Erect Posture, Relaxed Body, Moving Forward, Arms and Armswing, Hips, Legs, Ankle Efficiency, Stride Length. And Breathing.

Arthur Lydiar, the coach of New Zealand Olympic champions believed that form work helped **good** runners become **great**.

Our form, as we run our race is very important, and can make a very big impact on our results. Our form can help us run our race more easily and more effectively, and it can also have an important impact on those who watch us run. But, you may ask, what does all of this really have to do with us? What do running and form have to do with those of us here this morning?

In both the Old and the New Testaments, there are many instances where our lives are compared to a race. We at St. Francis have often used the term “journey” to refer to our spiritual lives, but we could very easily think in terms of running our race, the race that represents our lives.

St. Paul used this concept on several occasions. In 2 Timothy, as Paul was nearing the end of his life, he wrote to Timothy saying: *“...The time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”* In Galatians 5:7 Paul wrote: *“You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?”* And in 1 Corinthians 9:24 he wrote: *“...Run in such a way to get the prize.”*

The author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote (12:1): *“...Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”*

As individual Christians, and as St. Francis Episcopal Church, we have decided that we, along with St. Paul and many, many others, are going to run, and we have selected the races that we are going to participate in. We have elected to run one race, an exciting race, that we heard about from Jesus. We are going to run the race where we feed the

hungry, give drink to the thirsty and provide housing, comfort and companionship where they are needed.

And we are also going to run in a race that we were introduced to by St. Francis. It is the “Instruments of Peace Run” that is held, not once a year, but every day, wherever we may be. This is a very important race, and it can impact many, many, lives.

This morning we were introduced to two other races that we may want to seriously consider. Isaiah told us about the “Bring good news to the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners ” race, and John the Baptist and St. John told us about the “Focus people’s attention on Jesus” race. Two races that we should give some serious consideration to running. And we could also very easily select some other great races from the book that we are studying for Advent.

But let me go back for a moment. What about our form? As we participate in these very important races, as we try to be the best we can be, to do the best we can do and to finish our races well, what will on-lookers say about our form. What impact will our form have on our results?

Both Coach Vigil and Jeff Galloway gave us some pointers on form to consider when we are running our 10K. But what about our spiritual races? What kind of form will help us there? Well fortunately, St. Paul, who so often used the term “race” to describe our lives of faith, also gave us some great suggestions on form in his First Letter to the Thessalonians. Think about these words from St. Paul, and ask yourself if they describe **your** form as you run your race as a Christian. Along with other instructions, Paul said: *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances...”*

When people observe us and how we live our lives, do they see “joy”? When someone really considers our lives, do they have the sense that we pray...a lot? Or as Coach St. Paul told us: “without ceasing”? And how many people who are familiar with us would say that in all things, good and bad, that we really do give “thanks”?

As individuals and as a church, we are all involved in running some very important races. Races that can have a major impact on many, many lives, including our own. As we continue to press on toward the finish line, let’s remember our form. Let’s become very aware of our form and frequently ask ourselves if our form reflects joy, are we remembering to pray throughout the day... and the night; and in all of the experiences of our lives, are we saying “thanks”? Not in just the good times, but even in the bad...perhaps especially in the bad.

The races that we are running are very, very important. Let’s keep a close watch on our “form”. And then, *“...Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”*

AMEN