I’VE GOT TO TELL EVERYONE IN THE LAND.
REJOICE, REJOICE!

WE WILL ROCK YOU
Let the college football bowl games begin! I admit we’re not all football fans. But for the moment I respectfully ask you to indulge me and imagine that you got a golden ticket to your “favorite” bowl game.

You’re inside waiting for the game to start. You can feel expectation in the air. Suddenly everyone around you rises up and begins screaming at the top of their lungs. And then it happens – over the loudspeakers comes a familiar beat.

*Stomp stomp clap. Stomp stomp clap.* Your feet and hands join in, united as one with the other 80,000 fans. *Stomp stomp clap. Stomp stomp clap.* Everybody sings: “We Will We Will Rock You!”

As the music stops you begin to wonder if you’ll be capable of stomping, clapping, and cheering for the entire game. Well thankfully this was but an image, for there no college bowl games today.

UNITED IN FAITH WE REJOICE!
Today, on this third Sunday of Advent, we sing praise, lift our hands, and stomp our feet for the joy that comes from what the Lord has done for us, and what the Lord will do for us.

I say **Rejoice! Rejoice!** We have a God who is, was, and ever shall be active in our lives.

GOD IS WITH US
Isaiah knew this. Our psalm today was in fact a song of praise for God’s presence in his life. Isaiah hadn’t forgotten about the exodus, God’s great gift of deliverance, and wanted to be sure the people of Judah hadn’t
forgotten either. So he reminds them in his song. They aren’t lost or forsaken. They have a future that’s rooted firmly in the past.

“Sing praise to the Lord for his glorious achievement” Isaiah proclaims. “Shout with exultation, for great in your midst is the Holy One!”

TO LIVE IN A UNION OF PURE SELF-GIFT
Our God created us to live in union with him, for his is a love which binds us and all the people of the world together in a relationship of pure self-giving.

SO MAKE WAY FOR THE COMING LAMB OF GOD
John the Baptist knew this. Like Isaiah, he testifies to God’s presence and urges the crowds to rid themselves of the possessions, pleasures, and power that are keeping them from getting closer to God. John knows that time is running out for the people to repent, to have a change of heart and mind. They need to make way for a joyful full of gladness, woven with suffering, and born in the hope of glorification. They need to make way for the coming Lamb of God!

ACCEPT THERE WILL BE SUFFERING
Sadly on Friday, we were unwilling witnesses to the depth of suffering we must endure while we wait. An entire kindergarten class, teachers, and staff - 26 of God’s beautiful creations - lost in yet another grisly and terrifying school shooting. We can be certain that the sort of person who would shoot innocent children has lost the capacity for human empathy—that God-given quality that allows us to identify and understand someone else’s feelings.

NEVER SURRENDER
It is in times like these we often find ourselves doubting the presence of God in our lives and even the reality of God himself. And for that very reason it is in times like these that we need to reach out with even more fervor to the wisdom and truth of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We must choose to live, not to hide, not to back down.
When the Roman citizen Paul writes his letter to the Philippians, he is quite aware of these terrible times, for Rome’s emperor was none other than the depraved Nero Claudius Caesar.

Nero thirst for possessions, pleasures, and power consumed him. Murdering his way to the throne, he lived a life of debauchery, extravagance, and violence. He turned Christians against Christians. He burned Christians alive to serve as evening lights in the gardens of his palace. Like Friday’s shooter, Nero was responsible for killing his own mother.

GLORY AWAITS US
I cannot imagine the pain which sought to divide and tear apart Paul’s soul. Yet, strengthened by life in Christ, Paul confidently tells the Philippians “The Lord is near... have no anxiety at all.” He likewise writes the Romans proclaiming that their sufferings are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed. What an awesome glory awaits us!

I say again Rejoice! Rejoice!

Let’s prepare ourselves this Advent season for the coming of our savior Jesus and seek that very same joy which will lead him to endure the crucifixion.

SING JOYFULLY!
I’d like to close today by returning to the words of the Zephaniah and the image of our college bowl game.

The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior;
he will rejoice over you with gladness,
and renew you in his love,
he will sing joyfully because of you, as one sings at festivals.”

Did you catch that? He - the Lord our God - will be singing joyfully because of you.
GOD IS IN THE STANDS
You see it’s God in the stands cheering us on, rooting for us no matter the odds against us, the mistakes we’ve made, or the suffering we’ve endured. Our God is with us, leading all the angels and saints in a continuous wave of pure love, pumping us up with unending joy and gladness, and making more noise than all the stadium crowds combined the world over. If only we would stop, listen, and live in unity with every girl, boy, woman, and man.

We have a relationship like no other with our God. We have a God that is not only present in our life, but brings us to life. His love for us animates our very being.

KEEP THOSE ARMS UP!
So let’s use this season of Advent to strengthen our voices, souls, and our arms and legs… after all we’ve got keep singing God’s praise, stomping our feet, and holding our hands in the air for these 9 days remaining before Christmas!

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2 The Book of Isaiah (12: 5a, 6)
3 Letter to the Philippians (4: 5b, 6)
4 Letter to the Romans (8: 18)
5 The Book of Zephaniah (3: 17, 18a)

I am also grateful indebted for the inspiring lyrics and music of Audio Adrenaline’s “Rejoice” (from the album “Lift”) and other Christian songs focused on the joy and gladness found in the glory that awaits all Christians.

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