

GOD WITH US

DAY 16 STRENGTH IN JOY

Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” (Nehemiah 8:10)

Who is the shortest person in the Bible? You might think it was Knee-High Miah (Nehemiah). But it was really Peter - he was short enough to fall asleep on his watch (Matthew 26:40). Can I get a rim shot please? Seriously though, Nehemiah is one of those often overlooked Old Testament guys with a funny name who accomplished some great things. Back when the Israelites were captives of the Persian Empire, Nehemiah was the king’s cupbearer who asked for and received permission to return to and rebuild Jerusalem, the Jewish capital and home of the temple. The fact that both had been destroyed was a source of great shame to the Jews. And even though others had returned many years earlier to rebuild the temple, the people in Jerusalem were not doing well.

Nehemiah’s first task was to rebuild the city walls and gates so the citizens could defend themselves from marauders and enemies. But he also restored justice and led the people back to following God. When Nehemiah had the Law - the Scriptures - read and explained to the people, they wept and were sorry for the ways they had neglected God. But Nehemiah called it a holy day for celebration. “Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength,” he said (Nehemiah 8:10).

What a great truth! There is strength in the joy that God with Us provides. It lifts our hearts and bolsters our courage. It brings healing to the heart and strengthens the hands for action, as Nehemiah understood. It often rises in unlikely circumstances when fear, worry, doubt, or pain threatens. That was true in the Nehemiah’s day. It was true at the time of Jesus’ birth. And it remains true for us today.

What Bible verses fill you with joy and strength? How can you meditate on them during this Advent season?