

The joy of the Lord is your strength

Doom and gloom can settle on us like a heavy fog blown in from the sea. For some of us it is quite claustrophobic. We find ourselves robbed of our normal views and the sight of community. Hemmed in on every side we long for the open skies and distant prospects.

A sense of gloom settled on the inhabitants of Jerusalem when they discovered how far they had drifted from the word of God. They began to weep. But their leader, Nehemiah, said to them:

'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)

Habakkuk describes the response of his own heart in a time of natural devastation:

*Though the fig-tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the sheepfold
and no cattle in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Saviour.* (Hab3:17,18)

In some way that lies beyond our understanding, 'the joy of the Lord' seems to lift the heavy fog and allows the sun's light to shine through and bring warmth to our whole being. We regain perspective and understanding. Our spirits are lifted.

In these days of isolation and social distancing it is so easy for the gloom to settle. Allowing a divine joy to enter our minds and hearts is a decision that we can play a part in. Paul wrote to the Philippians:

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. (Phil4:8)

This is surely the time for us to set our minds on the good; on all God has done for us; on our family, our friends, our church; on the promise of Spring; on the faithfulness of health workers; on our own health and of those we love. Let us practise the wonderful art of being thankful.

Paul encourages us:

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice!