

Dear Friends,

Exodus 14: 1-12

The people of Israel have been oppressed as slaves for four hundred years. That's four hundred years of waiting for liberation, of yearning and longing to be free. Generation after generation have been born, have lived and have died without their hopes being realised. But now, at last, Moses has heard God's call and has led them out of slavery. Behind this story, there is the big story, the story that is happening all the time, the story that is happening today. The story of the struggle between good and evil.

On this occasion Pharaoh represents evil. Pharaoh brings destruction. He creates fear. That's evil. God rather than bringing destruction brings life; rather than creating fear, creates love. That's good.

Pharaoh's evil is powerful. It is seen in his chariots. They may not seem that fierce to us but they were the weapons of mass destruction of their day. They could be moved quickly from place to place. They transported heavily armed soldiers who brought death. These chariots seemed to be invincible. They did not appear to have a weakness. Moses and his people were vulnerable and defenceless in the face of these heavy, fast, powerful machines. They had nowhere to hide. They could not run fast enough to get away. There was nothing with which they could protect themselves.

But now, at last, Moses is leading the people away from the chariots, away from Pharaoh, out of slavery. Their journey has taken them to the sea. That's what's in front of them. They cannot go forward. And then they look behind and there with horror they realise that Pharaoh has changed his mind. He has sent his terrifying chariots and his armed soldiers to bring Moses and his people back so that they can carry on their crushing labour as slaves. Because evil is never easily overcome. You may win a small victory, but it rises again and sometimes when it does it seems even more powerful.

And there's another story behind this story as well. It's not only the story of good and evil. It also might be your story. The story about how hard it is for you to make those little changes in your life that you know would be good for you and for those around you. Maybe you make the change. You get free from the unhealthy attitude or way of behaving that has been controlling you. But something in you pulls you back. Or maybe it's other people who don't want you to change, who want you to return to being how you were. Pharaoh rises again and tries to claim you for the little slavery that wants you in its grasp.

The people look ahead and there's the sea. They look behind and there are chariots. They cry out with great fear. And that's what Pharaoh wants. He wants people to be afraid. If they are afraid then he's got them. He's broken their spirit. He's crushed them. That's what he wants.

But what does God want? Does God have a mouthpiece through whom to speak to the people? God has promised to be with Moses, but what does that mean when there is no way forward or back, when it looks as though everything has come to a dead end?

God bless you,

Tony