

Dear Friends,

Exodus 1:8-16

Bad things happen, but don't lose heart, keep trusting God, God is at work for the good. We heard this teaching through the story of Joseph. Then, bad things were happening with one family. The family became divided as Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, then their survival was threatened because of famine. All however ended well. We left them in Egypt living a good life.

We turn the page of the Bible and about five hundred years have passed. The descendants of that family are still in Egypt, but there is a new word to describe them. The word is "nation". They have become a nation. They have multiplied but their circumstances have also changed. They were living with privilege and prosperity, now they are living with poverty and oppression. Bad things are happening, not just to one family, but to a nation. And don't get too hung up on the names of the places. Don't go thinking that Israel is always good and Egypt is always bad, because that's obviously just not true. No, Egypt represents, on this occasion, wherever there is oppression, Israel represents, on this occasion, those who rise up and become free. So, this story is happening again where people affirm that "Black lives matter"; where someone breaks free from an abusive relationship; where someone accepts their addiction and finds help.

Pharaoh too represents whatever tyrant is bringing destruction. And don't go looking too hard for the spec in your neighbour's eye when there may be a plank in your own. Watch out for the times when you might be a bit of a tyrant. Watch out also for your own Inner Tyrant, that's the one who causes you the most damage; that's the one who puts you down and gets you to press your self-destruct button. Don't listen to your Inner Tyrant, listen instead to your Good Angel, that's the one who reminds you that you are loved and accepted by God just as you are, the one who helps you to find and be your best self. And please, never think that when I say "you", that I don't mean "me" as well. I share things with you that I first say to me.

So, to the story. The Israelites have multiplied, grown strong and filled the land. Pharaoh is frightened of them. Scratch the surface of any tyrant and that's what you will find, fear. Pharaoh is frightened that when there's a war, the Israelites will side with the enemy and eventually escape from the land. He therefore forces them to do crushing labour, work that pulverises, breaks them to pieces. His aim is to smash their spirit, make them completely lose heart, so that they dare not defy him or show any resistance. It doesn't work. It has the opposite effect. Pharaoh commands oppression to stop the Israelites multiplying, but they just end up multiplying all the more.

Pharaoh tries again. Now he's getting more desperate. He gives instructions to the midwives who help the Israelite women to give birth to their children. He demands that if the child born is a girl, she may live, but if the child is a boy he is to be killed at birth. The midwives know the value of life. They see the wonder, the sacredness

of it every day. Will they be able to go against all of that by murdering a baby? They know that those who defy tyrants do not usually last very long. Knowing that, will they dare to resist or will they give in and become part of the terror that is destroying their people?

God bless you,

Tony