

LENT 2024

JOURNEY to FREEDOM

ASH WEDNESDAY 14TH FEBRUARY

READ: Exodus 1:1-14

'Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph...'

Exodus 1:8

Some years ago I helped lead a trek through the Sinai desert, following in the footsteps of Moses and sleeping under the stars. I have never been so freezing cold in all my life! Each morning as we huddled around the campfire, drinking strong tea and eating bread baked freshly under the embers of the fire, we read together from the book of Exodus and reflected on the perilous journey of the Israelites from slavery to freedom.

Often in human history the rise of a new ruler or tyrant has spelt danger for a minority group within a country. The dramatic change from privileged position to persecuted minority is a story that many communities have experienced over the years. Once invited as honoured guests of the Pharaoh, Jacob's descendants find themselves over time resented and feared (see vv9-10), becoming an easy scapegoat for the ills of society.

Joseph's family had been invited to Egypt after Joseph's meteoric rise from being a wrongly-convicted prisoner in an Egyptian jail to being prime minister of the whole land at a time of famine and national crisis. With the benefit of hindsight, one could ask whether the way Joseph exercised his authority on behalf of Pharaoh had sown the seeds of future discontent—while his family enjoyed protected status, the Egyptians were forced to become slaves in their own land in order to buy food, as we can read in Genesis 47.20-21.

As we begin the Book of Exodus we shall see how God hears the cries of His people as they suffer ill-treatment. We shall be reminded how much human suffering—and plagues in the natural world—come about because of human stubbornness and disregard for the Creator. And we shall see how—not for the first or last time in Scripture—God's amazing rescue plan begins with the birth of a vulnerable little baby...

Let us pray: *Lord, we pray for those parts of our world today where fear and mistrust lead to minorities being oppressed. Lord, help us to hear their cries for help, and give us hearts to speak out in Your name. Amen.*

The Venerable Mark Ireland, Archdeacon of Blackburn