**2023 Windrush 75th Anniversary Celebrations**

England, Chichester Diocese, St. John the Evangelist, Preston, Brighton

**Let us pray .** . . *God of our weary years, God of our silent tears, thou who has brought us thus far on the way; thou who hast by thy might led us into the light, keep us forever in the path we pray.* **Amen.**

Text:

*8Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. 9He said to his people, ‘Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we.* Exodus 1:8-9

These words came against the background of the story of Joseph, the Hebrew boy, who God gave the gift of interpreting dreams. While in prison in Egypt, he was called to interpret the dream of the King, Pharoah. Out of gratitude for the interpretation of the dream and consequence prediction that there would be seven years of plenty, and seven years of famine Joseph was released from prison and made second in command throughout all Egypt. By strategically planning for the years of famine Jospeh saved a nation from starvation; and peoples from other regions who came seeking food supplies.

Egypt rose in economic power as the nations around journeyed there to purchase food supplies. Jospeh reunited with his estranged family; Pharoah invited them to Egypt where they occupied the land of Goshen. Many years had passed and coming to power was a Pharoah, a king, who knew nothing of the contribution of Joseph and by extension his family, to the stability, growth, and development of Egypt.

**The first thing implied in the text is there was a loss of memory.** The past, history, is important. It does not matter what history, it is important to the progress, welfare, and social stability of a people. There are those who would want us to forget the atrocities of the past, of slavery, colonialism, and wars. In my own country Jamaica, there are those who would want us to forget the atrocities of slavery and colonialism, but that would be a grave mistake. The Jews will not let the world forget the horrors of the holocaust. This country, like my own, commemorates annually the memory of those who gave their lives in the two world wars; and in this country, there are still symbols of the destruction caused by bombs dropped on Britain. Coventry Cathedral is a living memory of that past. Memory is important. For people with no memory, no sense of their history, is bound to repeat the mistakes of the past.

It is no mistake that the Israelites of the Old Testament were continually called, especially in the writings of the book of Deuteronomy ‘to remember.’ They were to remember that they were once slaves in Egypt. This memory of their past was not only to inspire them to a greater commitment to Yahweh but also that they would not meet out the same atrocities they experienced to others and other nations. The story of their experience in Egypt and the Exodus is ritualized in the annual Passover meal.

Marcus Garvey, Jamaica’s first National Hero reminds us that,

 *A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin, and culture is like a tree without roots.*

The other thing is without memory there can be no true healing of past hurts. Wounds heal over time. There was a time when peoples were suspicious of the Germans and the Japanese because of their activities during the wars. While some people may still find it difficult to let go of the pain; as nations we have made great strides in international relations.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was first established in South Africa after the dismantling of the Apartheid system was important if black people and white people, the oppressed and oppressor, were going to walk together and build a new society for all people. The oppressed and the oppressor both need liberation and healing. There has to be an acknowledgement of wrong, consciously, or unconsciously done and we must come to terms with that past if we are to move forward together into a bright future under God. There needs to be repentance and forgiveness that lead to reconciliation. As the title of one of the late Bishop Tutu’s books put it, ‘There is no future without Reconciliation.’

I commend the organizers of this celebration because the memory must be kept alive, ugly as some it maybe, so that our children will never go back there and repeat the atrocities, the abuse, the acts of racism, and victimization of the past.

In our celebrations we must not only remember the atrocities but the contributions of those who were victims of unjust treatment, which I know is part of the effort in this commemoration. Many who came to this country between 1948 and 1971, like my own parents came as British citizens with British passports in hand, to contribute to the rebuilding of Britain and to improve their lot. Many have made Britain their home, have married and raised families who are contributing to the welfare of this nation.

Thank God for the growing awareness and acknowledgement that there are people of colour who are born British and know nowhere else. We must remember the many people of colour and of other lands who have made significant contributions to the development of this country, in the areas of government, education, health care, science, sports, music, the arts, religion and much more. We must remember their struggles and achievements.

History is often written from the side of the victor, the powerful, the strong. Egypt’s story of what happen on that fateful day when the Israelites got their freedom would be different from Israel’s narrative. We in the Caribbean know this too well. Many grew up reading our history from a British perspective which rarely acknowledged the contributions of Caribbean people to their own freedom and future.

I would not want to leave the impression that all is well in the Caribbean, you all know better, but like you we are working on it. Those on the underside of history must write their own story too. The importance of the Windrush celebrations is that you are rewriting history and giving voice to those who had no voice.

In commemorating the Windrush generation, we must acknowledge that both Britain and the Caribbean have benefitted from their efforts in this country. Many have made significant contributions to the development of their homelands directly and indirectly. Some have returned home contributing their skills and knowledge to the development of the Caribbean. Others, through their efforts here have opened doors of opportunity for many in the Caribbean in the area of trade and educational pursuits. Remittances sent back home have made a difference to the lives of many families and the Caribbean economy. The integration of Caribbean culture, food, music, and language has been mutually beneficial drawing many to vacation on the shares of the Caribbean. People of the Windrush generation have made significant contributions to both Britain and the Caribbean, we celebrate them and say thanks to them.

**Conclusion.**

This 75th Anniversary Celebration of the arrival of the first group of Caribbean people to this land and the acknowledgment of their contribution calls us to recommit ourselves to building a society and church that accepts all people and acknowledges their gifts and their contribution to nation building. We must become committed to building a nation that truly respects and gives equal opportunity to all people.

Let us keep the memory alive and give thanks to God for bringing us this far. **Amen.**