

Wednesday

God led them to a city where they could settle (Psalm 107) 22 April 2020- Stephan de Beer

In an occupied building in Cape Town, Bevil Lucas reminded us of the first challenge Jesus had when he appeared on earth: there was no room in the inn. He had no shelter, no housing, no refuge, no place to be born. The homeless infant God.

How is it possible to sing the words of Psalm 107 at a time like this: *"Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever"*.

Yet, this God came to earth in the form of a homeless infant. This God, far from glory and splendour, deeply understands human misery, with no place to lay his head.

Psalm 107 to me is a song of wanderers in the desert, pilgrims on the streets, unemployed women and men seeking for shelter, prisoners looking for freedom, strangers searching for home, children looking for comfort. Verses 4 to 5 could very well be a description of the streets of Tshwane:

"Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle. ⁵ They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away."

From Diepsloot to Manenberg people are hungry and desperation grows. During Covid-19, piece jobs are gone and day jobs non-existent. Even those who had jobs now face unemployment. Hunger knocks at every door.

"⁶ Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. ⁷ He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle."

The work that you do right now is to join hands with God to deliver some from their distress. Your work is to be God's assistants in straightening the way to a place where people could settle. Straightening the way is a tall order. When you feel tired, bruised, even ready to give up, hear these words of your fellow travellers:

"⁸ Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for humankind, ⁹ for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things."

Some of you in these days might have been confronted with human darkness in ways you have not known before. You might have been a witness to the imprisonment of individuals, institutions and those who hunger after power and wealth.

"Some sat in darkness, in utter darkness, prisoners suffering in iron chains, ¹¹ because they rebelled against God's commands and despised the plans of the Most High... ¹³ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. ¹⁴ He brought them out of darkness, the utter darkness, and broke away their chains".

The Risen One knows of utter darkness, and breaking chains of death. It is the same Lord who *"¹⁶... breaks down gates of bronze and cuts through bars of iron"*, all to straighten a way to a city where they could settle. This Lord will go to lengths, with you and your community, because the collective desire of your hearts is known to God.

Whereas our President's plea to stay at home, sounds offensive of those without a home, the possibility that he might say "lockdown" is over, might be daunting for those who now found a temporary home.

In the coming days and weeks, this should be your and my prayer and work – to ask God how we can best collaborate to make this promise true:

"³⁵He turned the desert into pools of water and the parched ground into flowing springs; ³⁶there he brought the hungry to live, and they founded a city where they could settle. ³⁷They sowed fields and planted vineyards that yielded a fruitful harvest".

In the deserts of our despair, we have to discern the emergence of flowing springs from nowhere. In the landscapes of homelessness and abandonment, we have to claim the empty spaces and broken buildings for those to settle in. In the creative imaginaries of those among you, we have to hold the hope, and sow the fields, and trust the Lord, for a new day might just be coming.

Prayer:

Lord God, show us how best to straighten the way for people to settle in this city

Give us eyes of faith to see the springs that flow from desert lands, and ways for thirst and flowing springs to meet

Give us courage to sow the fields – for jobs and housing and health and families, to flourish, in Jesus name.

Amen