

# Monday

**To practise an option for the poor – is to practise God’s politics, Psalm 146:6-9 - Stephan de Beer**

Yesterday, Klippies provides a profound reflection on Psalm 146, introducing us in such clear and simple terms to the politics of God. I thought of pausing there for a moment, before we move to another Psalm.

Today in South Africa, it is Freedom Day – the day on which we celebrate freedom from hundreds of years of colonialism, and almost 50 years of apartheid; freedom from discriminatory laws that disabled our humanity and separated sisters and brothers on the grounds of colour and race.

Why, though, are millions of South Africans still unfree? Being under lock-down once again exposed the fault lines in our society, as some of us can retreat into self-isolation in relative luxury, whilst for others, not the virus but the hunger, becomes a sentence of death.

The landless movement – Abahlali baseMjondolo – speaks of this as Un-freedom Day, as they mobilize landless people to opt them for themselves, to work for their own freedom, as they learnt nobody else would do so for them.

In Psalms 146, though, it is the Maker of heaven and earth, the Lord of the mountains and sea – and land – who practises an option for the poor: upholding the cause of the oppressed, setting prisoners free, lifting up those bowed down by the burdens of life, and restoring to health those bogged down by physical or mental pain. This is the Lord who watches over foreigners and sustains fatherless and motherless orphans.

Why then, if God opts for the poor and oppressed, is that not the central agenda of society too? Why are foreigners left hungry, though they are humans too? Why, if that is God’s politics, does the church seem to find it so hard to practise a similar option?

Could it be because institutions of power and wealth and prestige are victims of their own un-freedoms – captives of success and greed and elitist notions of knowledge not steeped in reality?

If we are not aligned to the politics of God, and the priorities of God, and the people God chooses to watch over and protect and uphold, when they are scorned, or excluded, or criminalized – then surely we cannot claim to be followers of God. If God’s agenda is not ours, then we play for the other side.

As we contemplate the un-freedoms faced by homeless, landless and precariously housed people today; and as we contemplate the politics of God, which is to set them free; we are called to face ourselves and our institutions afresh: have we yet fully embraced a life lived in solidarity with God and those God stands with?

Your choice to live your life in a temporary shelter during this time, is reflective of a desire to embrace God’s commitment fully. May this time solidify your commitment to embody an alternative lifestyle to what the reigning culture dictates. May you find rising up in you a boldness of resolve, and a clarity so simple, that you have no option to turn back again.

We too often spiritualize the freedom of Psalm 146. Indeed, God wants to set us free from spiritual, emotional and psychological captivity. God wants to help us live creative lives in spite of mental illness or anxiety. God also wants to set us free to live in decent housing, with access to health care and basic incomes to sustain us and our children.

To be aligned to God's politics that seeks to mediate freedom for all people, regardless of who they are, will mean relentlessly working to break the chains of oppression: spiritually, but also emotionally, economically and physically.

- It might mean participating in city task teams, to help shape policies and plans that place homeless people central.
- It might mean conscientizing our faith communities to rethink the use of our land and property, in the service of justice for those currently excluded.
- It might mean figuring out ways to practically support the ideas and skills sets of women and men living on the streets, for them to turn those ideas and skills into income.
- It might mean reclaiming empty buildings unutilized and restoring them into dwellings that are safe and affordable.
- It might mean embracing with love those deemed unlovable because they shoot themselves with needles, and sometimes gave up on life. The politics of God is steeped in a love so deep that it fails to ever give up on anyone.
- It might mean building new coalitions across many boundaries, complementing each other with our diverse gifts and competencies.
- It might mean investing in solutions to homelessness that will refuse charity and opt for justice: real and lasting alternatives to lives on the streets.

Sometimes we might do the above explicitly in God's name. Ivan Petrella suggest that there are times when we have to operate as "undercover agents" of God's liberation: practising God's priorities and facilitating God's freedoms as planners, policy-makers, activists, health workers, educators, and, sometimes, simply pain-in-the-butts. Why? Because we do not go away. We stay the course. We do not give up. Until justice is not done, and freedom not achieved, the journey carries on. We have to brace ourselves. And those who seek to make the path of freedom difficult for homeless people, also need to brace themselves. Because, until homelessness is not replaced with housing and jobs, homeless people will not go away. Those choosing to be in solidarity with homeless people will not go away.

Our collective freedom is entirely intertwined. We will only be free of homelessness, when homeless people are free.

*Prayer:*

For as long as it takes Lord, make us strong

To stay the course.

For as long as people have only the street as their home,

Let us not rest because we are not free

Help us know when we call on your name in the presence of our enemies

Help us discern when to work like yeast in the dough

Invisible agents of your love, and justice, and mercy

Building off-ramps to freedom

And alliances of hope

Not in our own strength, but because it is your work –

to uphold the cause of the oppressed,

to set the prisoner free,

to welcome the homeless wandered in a home.

Praise the Lord!

*Amen*