

Dean's Letter, 27 August 2017

Dear Cathedral family

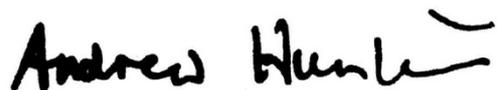
At a recent meeting of the Cathedral Parish Council, some time was spent discussing our annual stewardship month and Patronal Festival. For a number of reasons, it has been decided to move our stewardship month to October, with Patronal Festival now being planned for Sunday 29th October (the day after St George's Fair). September has the school and university short holidays, and our annual Confirmation service on September 10th. All these tend to interrupt our focus on our theme of Stewardship. So PCC has decided to move it all to October. We are planning a mini-series of sermons, including an address by the churchwardens on Cathedral finances. And our Patronal Festival Sunday will be an opportunity for people to give thanks, to share testimonies, and to come up to the front during an "open mic" session.

I had a good visit to Komga, last Sunday, celebrating and preaching at St Paul's, and preaching at St Cyprian's. Both are small congregations, with people who are deeply committed to Christ and to the life of the church; but are facing issues of growth, financial sustainability, and the future. I reflected on the story of the Canaanite woman who asks Jesus to heal her daughter (Matthew 15:21-28). Jesus responds very coldly, and refuses to help her. "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." (v 26) – a very blunt parable which compares the Gentiles to dogs in contrast to Israel as God's children (v. 25-26). Imagine if his comment had gone out on facebook! But her response overwhelms Jesus: "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." (v 27). She defeats Jesus in debate, the only time this happens in the gospels. The church has taken the woman's words and adapted them – we use them in the Prayer of Humble Access before receiving Communion: "We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table."^[1] She has so robust a faith – she is so determined – that she is praised by Jesus: "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed

It is significant how this encounter changed not only the Canaanite woman, by healing her daughter, but also broadened and stretched Jesus' own understanding of his ministry! We see God's grace and love being extended. What is our vision for witness and ministry? How can we make the circle wider? Broaden our vision?

This encounter between Jesus and the Canaanite woman is a picture of the local church, you and me, as people and a community of hope. A place of encounter and meeting. The place where we encounter Jesus as saviour, healer, the one who sets us free from the power of evil, sin, darkness, death. These great cosmic events and narratives occur here amongst us. The local church is also the place of brokenness – we see our own failures, the failures of others, all too clearly. There is no place to hide. We know one another all too well. We grumble and struggle, we quarrel, we get angry, we give up... but it is this place, this place of worship, this sacred space, that is the place of God's grace.

My love to you all

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Hunt". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.