

Dean's Letter, 24 June 2018

Dear Cathedral family

This coming Thursday will be “all systems go” as the National Arts Festival kicks off again. Spiritfest is a wonderful part of the programme: celebrating the arts in the context of the Christian faith. The number of different churches involved in Spiritfest is increasing each year. While the Cathedral has historically been the main driver, others are now coming to the party and this is very much an ecumenical event and programme. Our very sincere thanks to Maggy Clarke and her team for all that awaits us!

Our sermon series on the lives of Samuel, Saul and David continues with the reading this morning from 1 Samuel 17, the epic encounter and battle between David and Goliath. It is a wonderful story of the bully and the abuser and the oppressor meeting his just deserts. Goliath is a symbol of power run amok. Overwhelming forces ranged against the weak. The unstoppable.

For those of us who watch wide-eyed at scenes of street fights – a mixture of James Bond and Jason Bourne, fists and knives, judo and karate – the story of David and Goliath is up there with the best. Except that it is over before it has begun! David, as we know, a young man, not a seasoned warrior; Goliath is considerably older, hardened by many battles, armoured and armed to the teeth. But for David, used to defending his father's sheep from attacks by lions or bears, Goliath is simply another enemy to stand against with the power of God. David is offered the full armoury of King Saul; he tries it on but can't move in it. Instead, he goes forth to meet Goliath clothed in his normal working clothes, carrying his shepherd's sling and bag, and his shepherd's staff. As he goes, he picks up five smooth stones from a wadi – a dry river bed. Armed only with what he knows and is used to, he goes to meet the enemy.

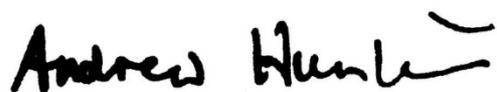
The outcome is swift and devastating. Goliath disdains him; he is just a boy, unarmed and unarmoured; Goliath feels insulted and irritated by this youngster coming to fight him. He prepares to kill David. But David runs towards Goliath, puts a stone into his sling, hurls it, hits Goliath on the forehead, and stuns him. Goliath falls to the ground, helpless. Using Goliath's own sword, David cuts off his enemy's head.

Who or what are the giants, the Goliaths, that we face? The giant, the fearsome destructive enemy of corruption and poor governance, is so prevalent in our land. But there is also the giant of fear and despair and apathy, the giant that says – whispers – “you can't make a difference. You won't win this battle. There is no point in fighting. Just give up now and it will all be easy. No more fighting.” The giant that pushes us down, that saps our courage and resolve, that is a giant that all of us must fight. This is a giant that we must face.

There are other giants also, that we face: worry and anxiety; the stress of exams (students, teachers, school children); struggling schools, land struggles; suspicion and distrust; growing economic and political instability, rising unemployment amongst our young people – a storm waiting to break.

What are our weapons? What are our five smooth stones? The five stones I suggest: courage, vision, hope, trust, steadfastness. Courage - to fight; vision - to see new possibilities; hope, not despair; trust – that God will use us as we take these steps; steadfastness - standing firm. The sling – the power and strength of God. Let us fight the giants with the strength of the Lord!

My love to you all

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Hunter". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.