

## Dean's Letter, 17 September 2017

Dear Cathedral family

To forgive someone when they have wronged us is one of the hardest things that we need to do. Yet without forgiveness and mercy and grace, our world, our lives, our families, would be a desolate and brutal space. No-one is perfect. Everyone, including you and me, makes mistakes, gets it wrong at times, makes a poor call, does something irresponsible. We are all in need of mercy at times. And, hard as it is, we all need to show mercy to others.

But of course the wrong we do to one another, or that is done to us, is not always merely a "mistake". We can be very cruel, brutal, violent, selfish, mean, greedy, unpleasant, blind. The history of the Eastern Cape is one of conflict and bloodshed. Our country has a frighteningly high level of abuse and violence against the vulnerable and weak, women and children. Rape is a dreadful reality for many. For many of us, our personal histories, stories, bear the scars of our national history. We are wounded people, fragile, angry, hurting, fearful. We are suspicious, quick to judge and condemn, because we have been so wronged, so hurt, so badly treated.

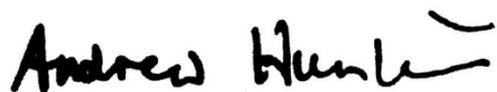
And when we believe that we are in the right, that justice and right – and God – is on our side, we can be crusaders in what we believe, in what we stand for. And in our righteousness, we can be utterly without mercy towards those we see as less worthy than we are, those who have sinned against us. We live in a "call out" culture – especially on social media, people are very quick to attack, judge and condemn. There is no mercy!

Today's Gospel reading (Matthew 18:21-35) is a parable about forgiveness and mercy. Jesus tells the story of the unforgiving servant, who is forgiven his huge debt – ten thousand talents was a huge amount of money, almost beyond imagining – but who then refuses to release a fellow servant from a debt of a hundred denarii – about three months wages, still a great deal of money, but a fraction of the ten thousand talents. This harsh and unforgiving action comes to the attention of the master, who is astonished and angry. He sends for the servant and says to him, "You scoundrel! I cancelled the whole of your debt when you appealed to me; ought you not to have shown mercy to your fellow servant just as I showed mercy to you?" And he throws him into the place of torture until he pays off the debt in full.

The parable concludes with the solemn warning and instruction that we are to "forgive your brother [or sister] from your hearts."

Are we able to do this? Do we need to do this? Yes, with the grace of God. Yes, because the alternative is a life of anger and bitterness. Yes, because we set others free. Yes, because we set ourselves free.

My love to you all

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