

## Dean's Letter, 30 June 2019

Dear Cathedral family, brothers and sisters in Christ

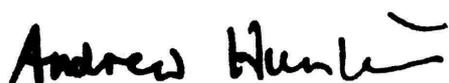
So once again the Festival is upon us! A very warm welcome to all our visitors; we are glad that you have come and delighted that you are with us today and this week. Makhandra (Grahamstown) has its challenges, and the signs are here for us all to see – we even have a local coffee shop in High Street called “The Pothole and Donkey”; but we are also part of a wonderful, committed group of people who are doing all we can to ensure that our town not only survives, but flourishes. The Festival is part of this bigger vision of this town, this creative city, being a good place to be. A particular offering from the Cathedral, together with a number of other churches in the town, is Spiritfest - See the web page <https://grahamstowncathedral.org/spiritfest/> - as a celebration of the arts in the context of the Christian faith. Included in the programme are a number of acts of worship, prayer and contemplation.

What draws people to the Festival, year after year? There are probably a number of reasons: good music; wonderful drama and dance; humour; insights; transcendence; to touch beauty and wonder; to explore the diversity and delight of creativity; a rich tapestry of word and song and delight, a sight for our eyes... all this and much more besides. An explosion of creativity: people giving of their best, sharing their skills and abilities with others. And hopefully we come away with something to think about (shaken and stirred, like James Bond's favourite cocktail), and a bit more hopeful and optimistic for the future. People have the ability to make the best out of difficult circumstances.

Our reading from 2 Kings is part of the grand narrative of one of the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, Elijah. He is at the end of his life and ministry. The scene that is painted for us rivals anything that Mel Gibson could produce: the river Jordan parts to allow Elijah and Elisha to walk through; there are words of solemn warning and growing anxiety; the tension builds; there is Elisha's request for “a double share” of the Holy Spirit; there are chariots of fire, a whirl-wind, and Elijah is taken up into heaven. Elisha takes Elijah's cloak, strikes the waters of the Jordan, and the waters part. The power of God that had rested on Elijah, has now been given to Elisha. It is a moment of transition and change – the start of a new era - in the life of the people of God.

Pope Francis is quoted as saying (in 2015) that “we are living in a change of era, not just an era of change” . It is a new era which is marked, some say, by the rise in religious fundamentalism, as well as a crisis of faith in a growing secular society: on the one hand, people are taking refuge in extreme, highly dogmatic and socially conservative forms of faith; and on the other hand, some reject all forms of belief and faith, claiming perhaps a vague “spirituality” rather than a defined set of religious beliefs and practices. It is in this complex context that we as Christians, who believe in what has been revealed to us, are called to worship, serve and witness. Spiritfest is one place where we reflect on the interface between all this.

My love to you all

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