

Dean's Letter, 21 June 2020

Dear Cathedral family, Brothers and Sisters in Christ

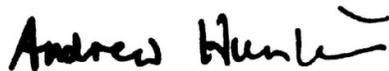
Today, June 21st, is the winter solstice: the longest night and the shortest day. From now, our days will gradually get longer as we move gradually towards summer and the light - just as we are creeping towards health and freedom from the covid sickness. But the darkness seems to continually reach out to drag us back into the swamp of despair. Four years ago, Rhodes University was convulsed with protests against rape and rape culture; at the moment our country is again reeling with daily reports of gender-based violence, assaults, rapes, murders of women and girls. Hashtags are not going to solve the problem: it is we as the men of our country who need a wholesale conversion and heart change, so that our communities, our homes and schools and universities and churches and work places and streets, can be safe spaces.

Angry debate about the place of historic statues and symbols continues in the wake of Black Lives Matter. My cousin, Martin Gainsborough, is a priest in the Church of England and a Canon of the Cathedral in Bristol, where, earlier this month, protesters threw a statue of Edward Colston, a former slave trader, into the river. There is rage and fury and pain and anguish all around us. Each day is a search and a struggle for survival, for meaning and hope in the midst of meaningless and despair. The future remains utterly unpredictable and uncertain.

It is with these and other matters on our hearts that we turn to the scriptures given to us. No easy promise of deliverance, no quick fix here. Instead, we have Abraham sending Hagar and Ishmael off into the wilderness; there is a cry for help in the psalm, which could be Hagar's cry – or ours; and then we are given those hard, challenging words from Jesus in the Gospel. "I come not to bring peace but a sword...whoever does not take up the cross is not worthy of me...whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven" (Matthew 10:34, 38, 33). One of the gifts and challenges of the lectionary is that we have to face and deal with these difficult words of Jesus; we can't bypass them in favour of something simpler, or more comforting. We have to embrace these words, allow them to upset us, and acknowledge how they disturb us.

The words of the Gospel were originally written for a Christian community facing persecution at the hands of others, because of their faith in Christ. And they can be applied to us now. Just as Jesus faced suffering and death, we, his followers, may well face the same; yet we shall know the care of the Father for us – even the hairs of our heads are numbered. We are not to fear death, only the death of our souls, which is of eternal consequence. To follow Jesus is not to enter a life of peace, but a life of conflict, division and hostility, even from those close to us. Yet "those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

My love to you all

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Andrew Hunt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small flourish at the end.