

Dean's Letter, 28 June 2020

Dear Cathedral family, Brothers and Sisters in Christ

Today, June 28th, would have been the first Sunday of the annual National Arts Festival. Like so much else, the Festival has taken on another, virtual, form. Obviously the loss here in Grahamstown is considerable: no Long Table and other pop-up restaurants, no eager visitors flooding our streets, no late night shows and music and energy and life, posters and excitement, laughter and talent on our doorsteps. And our economy is struggling – which means that many people are battling. Businesses are fragile and we all feel it when well-known and much loved places close. I continue to be so grateful to all who are supporting the ministry of the Cathedral during these times.

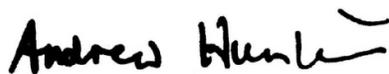
Our reading from Genesis 22, in which God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, is horrific. It is impossible to consider or contemplate such a thing. It gives a picture of a cruel, brutal god who is in such contrast to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who we encounter elsewhere in the scriptures. Yet there is much in this account to reflect about. One interpretation of this event is that it was a clear declaration from God that child sacrifice was not to be part of the worship life of Israel.

There are indications in the Old Testament that child sacrifice was practised by some, e.g., when the city of Jericho was rebuilt by King Hiel of Bethel, its foundations were laid “at the cost of Abiram his firstborn” and the gates were set up “at the cost of his youngest son Segub” (1 Kings 16:34). There are also references to the Canaanite god Moloch, who was associated with child sacrifice. Rabbinical tradition depicted Moloch as a bronze statue heated with fire into which the victims were thrown. Terrible things have happened in the name of worship and religion and faith. How could this be? How can faith and worship be so distorted? How is it that cruel deeds are done, and justified, in the name of some higher power, be it religion or some noble ideal?

It gets complicated. Perhaps you have heard people say, “the more costly our offering, the greater our love and devotion to God. We offer to God what we love the most, what we treasure the most.” This is seen as a test of our love, our faith. On one level, that is true – Abraham was commended by God for doing exactly that. A costly offering can also be seen as an act of fear to placate the wrath of a god. It is terrible theology and terrible religion, when people offer themselves up to a destroyer, or when people give their lives in the service of an evil power that in the end destroys all it touches. There is much food for thought here.

We offer to God our lives, that we may be made whole, forgiven, restored, transformed, become the people – the best – that God created us to be. We offer ourselves to the God of love that we may become people of love.

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.