

## Dean's Letter, 13 September 2020

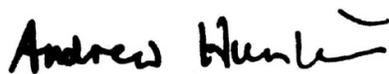
Dear Cathedral family, Brothers and Sisters in Christ

I wrote last week about how hard it can be to face someone who has wronged you or insulted you. Our Old Testament reading for today, Genesis 50:15-21, is a remarkable account of forgiveness and reconciliation. It is the story of Joseph and his brothers, in Egypt, following the death of their father Jacob. Having sold their brother Joseph into slavery all those years ago, the brothers are understandably anxious, now that their father has died, that Joseph will take his revenge. They construct this elaborate plot to say that it was Jacob's dying wish for Joseph to forgive them and not to harm them. But, remarkably, it seems that Joseph doesn't need the word of their father to change his heart. He forgives them. He sets them free from the burden of shame and guilt and fear that they had been carrying all these years.

Reconciliation within a family is not easy. Sometimes our hardest and most difficult relationships are with those closest to us. Can anyone say that they have never had a family row or fall-out? The hurts and scars of past quarrels live on in our lives. Even more so, perhaps, do historic hurts and conflicts shape our interactions as a community. Our history of racism and racial conflict makes us so vulnerable to insults, particularly if prejudice and perceived racism are part of the mix. The outrage over the Clicks hair advert shows this. I have not yet heard a clear explanation from Clicks as to how or why they thought to portray black hair as damaged, and blond (white) hair as healthy. However, the acts of vandalism and aggressive protests by the EFF in response to the advert are unacceptable. We won't solve issues by abusing or humiliating someone who has done wrong, by vandalising stores and intimidating people. It seems that this is selective outrage to divert attention from other, bigger, issues. The whole country yet again boils with rage and hatred, and the cracks and divisions deepen. We all need to hear one another's pain and stand in the shoes of those who are hurting. Today's Gospel reading (Matthew 18:21-35) places the need to forgive at the heart of our relationships with one another.

Last Sunday's Gospel reading (Matthew 18:15-20) gave us a way to restore relationships that have been broken, not by avoiding the issue or walking away from the problem, but by confronting the one who has done wrong. It doesn't guarantee repentance or restoration, but at least it makes it possible. It's important to note that the process begins as a "one on one", i.e. in private, then in the presence of two or three witnesses, and only afterwards, if those two attempts do not bring the desired outcome, is the matter laid before the church (the community). It is not a public lynching or an attack on social media. We need to address issues of common concern in order to build a new ethic of morality, honesty and integrity in our country. Let's walk the road to peace, justice and reconciliation together.

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.