

Dear friends,

It was a wonderful privilege to be able to share in worship at St Chad's last Sunday morning and although we can worship God anywhere and everywhere, it is especially good to be able to do so when we meet together as God's people in church.

Hopefully we will be able to continue to worship together (albeit suitably socially distanced) and there won't be a second lockdown, however, it is going to be a while before things are fully back to how they were pre-Covid (and even then, there may be some aspects of our life together which may be forever changed but only time will tell and we will need to learn to adjust to these changes).

Although we haven't had the usual end of term rush to all the usual holiday destinations this year, now that the schools all officially on holiday, things seem even quieter than usual and we are looking forward to spending a few days away on the North Norfolk coast this week with a day in Cambridge on the way back (and hopefully some nice weather for a punt trip along the Cam).

Perhaps the one thing that people want the most at the moment is a bit of certainty in these most uncertain times and we find that certainty expressed in our reading from Paul's letter to the Romans (Romans chapter 8 verses 26-39).

If you are anything like me, prayer can sometimes be really difficult – what to pray for, who to pray for and how to pray. Sometimes there seem to be so many things that we know we need to pray for it is impossible to know where to start or it gets to the end of the day and we are just too tired. We can adopt the approach attributed, I believe to Christopher Robin "Dear God, same as last night, Amen" but as Paul assures us in verses 26 & 27 of Romans chapter 8 "In the same way, *the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God*"

This isn't another example of the 'let go and let God' approach to our faith but rather a wonderful reassurance that when we don't know what or who to pray for or how to express those needs in prayer, the Holy Spirit is there interceding for us. Like all things, the more we practice, the easier it gets, but when we struggle, when we get stuck, when we don't know which way to turn, we have the Holy Spirit, who, as we've discovered over the previous weeks, is God's free gift to his people, interceding on our behalf.

As Paul concludes this chapter and this whole great section of his letter though he seeks to remind his readers of the confidence that we have in God's love. We really sense something of Paul's passion coming through here. "*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified*".

Brothers and sisters, friends, we are gathered together as followers of Christ because God predestined us before the beginning of time. God has called us, God has justified us (made us right with him) and God will glorify us in heaven.

But Paul doesn't stop there – *"If God is for us"* he says, *"who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"*

God gave his only Son so that each of us should have life. Having paid such a price to make us his, God is not going to turn his back on us and just walk away and Paul goes to develop this theme as he brings the chapter to a close.

Who can bring any charge against those who God has chosen Paul asks? The answer is that it is God who justifies so who can condemn those who have been forgiven (justified) by God? Of course, there will be those who seek to condemn Christians here on earth, and if Christians have done wrong, they must face judgement in the sight of the law but it is God who is the ultimate judge and the one to whom we are all ultimately answerable and if we come before him in penitence and faith, we will be forgiven because Jesus has born the punishment due to each of us for our sins.

Then we come to that wonderful expression of confidence and certainty as Paul addresses the question *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?"* The answer is an emphatic NO! because as Paul puts it *"in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any power, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord"*

Paul is adamant that there is nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God and we could add to that list Covid-19 or any of the other woes of modern life. If God is for us, who can be against us? In a world that is as uncertain now as it was when Paul wrote those words, here is where confidence and certainty is to be found, in God's love for his people. I hope and pray that we all find these words a comfort in these uncertain and unsettled times.

Collect for the seventh Sunday after Trinity

Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: graft in our hearts the love of your name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of your great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever, Amen

In our personal prayers can I please encourage you to continue to pray for Veronica and the family, that she would soon be able to resume her ministry amongst us. Please give thanks for Alex and Mike for their assistance with services in the parishes and please pray that many would feel able to return to services in church, that many would come seeking God anew and would find a warm welcome in our midst and for those who are unable to join in worship in church for whatever reason, that they would find comfort and support. Please continue to pray for our Christian brothers and sisters around the world who are being persecuted because of their faith

Please pray for all who are in distress. Please pray that those who are anxious or in distress would find peace and that all those who are ill, in pain or mourning would find comfort in the wonderful promises of God that we find in the closing verses of Romans chapter 8 and throughout Scripture.

Jeremy Hunns