

United Parish@Home

Sunday Services



July 2026

**The United Parish of Chinnor, Sydenham,
Aston Rowant and Crowell**

The ministry team offer you these services, particularly if you find you are unable to attend church.

Our prayer is that these services will help you still feel connected to, and loved by, your church family.

Sunday 5th July page 3

Sunday 11th July page 11

Sunday 18th July page 15

Sunday 25th July page 19

Sunday 5th July 2026
Trinity 5

Opening Prayers

O Lord, open thou our lips and our mouth shall shew forth thy praise.
O God, make speed to save us. O Lord, make haste to help us.
Praise ye the Lord. The Lord's name be praised. Amen

Venite (*a prayer that calls us to worship, based on Psalm 95*)

O come, let us sing unto the Lord:
let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.
Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving:
and shew ourselves glad in him with psalms.
For the Lord is a great God: and a great King above all gods.
In his hand are all the corners of the earth: and the strength of the hills is his also.
The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands prepared the dry land.
O come, let us worship, and fall down: and kneel before the Lord our Maker.
For he is the Lord our God: and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.

Canticle Song of Solomon 2 vs 8-13

The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains,
skipping upon the hills.
⁹ My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall,
he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice.
¹⁰ My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.
¹¹ For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone;
¹² The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land;
¹³ The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

Gospel Reading Matthew 11 vs 16- 19, 25-30

[Jesus said] But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows,

¹⁷ And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.

¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil.

¹⁹ The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.

²⁵ At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.

²⁶ Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.

²⁷ All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.

²⁸ Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Reflection (by Jacky)

There is something wonderfully infectious about celebration.

Have you ever noticed that it is almost impossible to celebrate on your own? A wedding, a birthday, England winning the match... celebration draws people in. It invites us to join the dance.

Perhaps that is why the Song of Solomon reading is so often chosen at weddings. It is full of movement, delight and invitation.

"Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away."

Winter has passed. The flowers appear. The birds begin to sing. The vines blossom. The whole of creation seems to be saying, "Come outside. Life is beginning again."

It is a picture not simply of romance, but of life itself bursting into bloom. Love does not stand still. Love moves. Love calls. Love invites.

And then we turn to the Gospel, and at first it feels as though we have stepped into a completely different world.

Jesus talks about children sitting in the marketplace.

"We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn."

It sounds rather odd until we realise that Jesus is saying that God keeps inviting people, and they keep refusing to join in. John the Baptist came fasting, living simply in the wilderness, calling people to repentance. And they said he was too extreme.

Jesus came eating with friends, celebrating at weddings, sharing meals with tax collectors and sinners. And they said he was too worldly. John celebrated too little: Jesus celebrated too much. But really this wasn't really about John or Jesus. People had simply decided they were not going to respond, whatever God did. And maybe that is where the message for us is contained in these two readings. It is easy to think that we would recognise God immediately if only he made himself clearer. But would we?

The people who criticised John and Jesus were deeply religious people. They knew their Scriptures. They prayed. They expected the Messiah. Yet when God came among them, they found reasons not to listen.

Perhaps that danger has never gone away. Sometimes we become attached to the way we expect God to work. If God speaks through silence, we long for celebration. If God speaks through celebration, we long for silence. If God challenges us, we wish he would comfort us. If he comforts us, we wish he would challenge someone else.

God's invitation is always there, waiting for us to accept it. It is not an invitation to believe something different, but an invitation to become the best version of ourselves. It is an invitation to open our hearts to God's love and discover that we can become more patient, more generous, more forgiving and more courageous. As we respond to God's invitation, we become more fully the people God created us to be. This is why Jesus said "'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'" (John 10:10). God's eternal invitation once accepted, leads us to a fuller, richer, more loving way of living.

The transformation of our hearts is reflected in the sense of movement that runs through both of today's readings. The Song of Solomon says, *"Arise... come away."* Jesus says, *"Come to me... take my yoke upon you... learn from me."*

Faith is never static. It is always movement. Movement away from fear. Movement towards trust. Movement away from isolation.

Movement into relationship. Movement away from carrying everything alone. Movement towards the One who says, *"I will give you rest."*

Perhaps that is where the wedding imagery becomes so important.

Every wedding begins with an invitation. Guests receive it weeks beforehand. On the day itself they still have a choice. They can ignore it. They can invent an excuse. They can stay at home. Or they can come.

Christian faith is, in many ways, simply learning to keep saying yes to God's invitation. Not just once, but every day. Yes, I will trust you, my Lord and My God. Yes, I will forgive myself and others. Yes, I will love myself my neighbour and all Creation. Yes, I will step into whatever new season you are opening before me.

There is something else that is absolutely imperative for us to take notice of in today's gospel. Jesus tells us that wisdom is proved right by her deeds. We spend a great deal of time trying to decide who is right, whose opinions we should follow, what style of faith is best, whose politics will serve the greater good. Jesus is showing us how to begin discerning the onslaught of information and conflicting narratives we are subjected to. Jesus says, "look at the fruit".

Does it produce kindness?

Does it produce humility?

Does it produce mercy?

Does it help people lighten their burdens?

These are the signs of Christ-like love at work.

The Gospel ends with some of the most beautiful words in all of Scripture.

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

Jesus doesn't say, "Come to me when you've sorted your life out."

He doesn't say, "Come to me when you've got enough faith."

He doesn't say, "Come to me when you've stopped making mistakes."

He simply says, *"Come to me."* The same God who, in the Song of Solomon, says, *"Arise, my love... and come away,"* And is the God who, in Jesus Christ, says, *"Come to me."*

Celebration is the atmosphere in which we receive this invitation.

Movement towards God is how we accept the invitation.

Transformation is the purpose of the invitation

Rest is the destination.

This is God's invitation to every one of us.

An invitation into life.
An invitation into love.
An invitation into joy.
An invitation into rest.

The only question that remains is whether you will accept it, and join the dance, because, in the marketplace, Jesus still is playing the pipes for you.

Prayers *(in the tradition of the Book of Common Prayer)*

The Lord be with you. And with thy spirit.

Lord, have mercy upon us.

Christ, have mercy upon us.

Lord, have mercy upon us.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;

Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive them that trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation; But deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, The power, and the glory, For ever and ever. Amen

O Lord, shew thy mercy upon us. And grant us thy salvation.

O Lord, save the King And mercifully hear us when we call upon thee.

Endue thy ministers with righteousness. And make thy chosen people joyful.

O Lord, save thy people. And bless thine inheritance.

Give peace in our time, O Lord.

Because there is none other that fighteth for us, but only thou, O God.

O God, make clean our hearts within us. And take not thy Holy Spirit from us.

Amen

The Collect of the Day

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified: hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people, that in their vocation and ministry they may serve you in holiness and truth to the glory of your name; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Collect for Peace

O God, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom; defend us thy humble servants in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in thy defence, may not fear the power of any adversaries; through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect for Grace

O Lord, our heavenly Father, Almighty and everlasting God, who hast safely brought us to the beginning of this day; Defend us in the same with thy mighty power; and grant that this day we fall into no sin, neither run into any kind of danger; but that all our doings may be ordered by thy governance, to do always that is righteous in thy sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

A prayer for the King and Parliament

Almighty God, fountain of all Goodness, we humbly beseech thee to bless our sovereign lord thy servant Charles III, this parliament and all who set authority under her; that they may order all things in wisdom, righteousness and peace to the honour of thy holy name and the good of thy Church and people.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

A prayer for the Royal Family

Almighty God, fountain of all Goodness, we humbly beseech thee to bless our sovereign King Charles, and all the Royal Family; Endue them with the Holy Spirit; enrich them with thy heavenly grace; prosper them with all happiness; and bring them to thine everlasting kingdom; Through Jesus Christ our Lord **Amen.**

A Prayer for the clergy and people

Almighty and everlasting God, who alone workest great marvels: send down upon our Bishops, Priests and Deacons, and all Congregations committed to their charge, the healthful Spirit of thy grace; and that they may truly please thee, pour upon them the continual dew of thy blessing.

Grant this, O Lord, for the honour of our advocate and mediator, Jesus Christ **Amen.**

A prayer of St. Chrysostom

Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications into thee; and dost promise, that when two or three are gathered together in thy Name thou wilt grant their requests: Fulfil now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants, as may be most expedient for them; granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come to life everlasting. **Amen**

Final prayer

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore. **Amen.**

Hymn

God is working his purpose out,
as year succeeds to year:
God is working his purpose out,
and the time is drawing near:
nearer and nearer draws the time,
the time that shall surely be,
when the earth shall be filled
with the glory of God,
as the waters cover the sea.

From utmost east to utmost west,
wherever foot has trod,
by the mouth of many messengers
rings out the voice of God:
Listen to me you continents,
you islands look to me,
that the earth may be filled
with the glory of God,
as the waters cover the sea.

We shall march in the strength of God,
with the banner of Christ unfurled,
that the light of the glorious gospel of truth
may shine throughout the world;
we shall fight with sorrow and sin
to set their captives free,
that the earth may be filled
with the glory of God,
as the waters cover the sea.

All we can do is nothing worth
unless God blesses the deed;
vainly we hope for the harvest-tide
till God gives life to the seed:
nearer and nearer draws the time,
the time that shall surely be,
when the earth shall be filled
with the glory of God,

Sunday 12th July
6th Sunday after Trinity

An Opening Prayer

Father God, you knew us and loved us before we were born; you have known us and loved us every moment of our lives, forgive us for failing you and forgetting you, and help us to know and love you better. Amen.

Psalm 119 vs 105-112

The psalmist prays that he will be guided by God's concerns and walk in God's way, as he goes about his life according to God's Word.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light to my path.

I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to observe thy righteous ordinances.

I am sorely afflicted; give me life, O Lord, according to thy word.

Accept my offerings of praise, O Lord, and teach me thy ordinances.

I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget thy law.

The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I don't stray from thy precepts.

Thy testimonies are my heritage for ever, yea, they are the joy of my heart.

I incline my heart to perform thy statutes for ever, to the end.

The Gospel Reading – St. Matthew 13 vs1-9, 18-23.

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. And great crowds gathered about him so that he got into a boat and sat there; and the whole crowd stood on the beach.

And he told them many things in parables, saying. "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them.

Other seed fell on the rocky ground, where they had not much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root they, withered away.

Other seeds fell among thorns and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seed fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty, He who has ears, let him hear.”

Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arrives on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is he who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the delight in riches chokes the word and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on the good soil, this is he who hears the word and understands it; he indeed bears fruit and yields in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty and in another thirty.

A Reflection – (by Joan)

Jewish people often consult the Talmud, one of their holy books, which was written by early Jewish leaders, who after studying the Torah (the Law) worked out rules to help people understand and keep the commandments. The Talmud includes advice to teachers.

It suggests a class should never have more than 25 pupils and says a teacher should never threaten a child – but either punish or forgive them. It also suggests that within every class there are four categories of pupil. The first is compared with a sponge -absorbing and retaining everything. The second is like a funnel – hearing everything but it all goes in one ear and out the other.

The third is like a sifter – remembering the trivial but forgetting the significant (remembering the funny story related but not why it was told) The fourth is like a sieve – they sift out the incidental but remember the important.

I wonder what kind of pupil are you?

Jesus often taught in parables – simple stories with complex meanings.

Thinking of the parable of the sower, I guess we are all different kinds of soil at different times. There are times when we hear all the words spoken but our minds are elsewhere so we are not really listening. At other times we really do intend to do something but somehow it gets crowded out or forgotten, or we do follow our resolution for a while but it becomes too much of an effort and we give up. We can be encouraged by the times we have listened, thought about it and acted on it. What is important is how we hear and the response we make.

Take time to Pray

God of our past
reconcile our brokenness.

God of our future
renew our faith.

God of the present moment
reach out and touch us
and through us
the lives of all we meet
on our daily journey.

May we be made whole
through the holiness of God the Father
the humanity of Christ the Son
and the healing power of the Holy Spirit. Amen

A Hymn to sing or say as a prayer.

Father of heaven, whose love profound
a ransom for our souls hath found.
Before thy throne we sinners bend
to us thy pard'ning love extend.

Almighty Son, incarnate Word,
our Prophet, Priest, Redeemer, Lord
before thy throne we sinners bend
to us thy saving grace extend.

Eternal Spirit, by whose breath,
the soul is raised from sin to death,
before thy throne, we sinners bend,
to us thy quick'ning power extend.

Thrice Holy! Father, Spirit, Son;
mysterious Godhead, Three in One,
before thy throne we sinners bend
grace, pardon, life to us extend.

A Blessing.

The Lord bless us and preserve us from all evil, and keep us in eternal life. Amen.

Sunday 19th July
7th Sunday after Trinity

Opening Prayer

O Lord, open our lips and our mouth shall proclaim your praise. The night has passed, and the day lies open before us; let us pray with one heart and mind.

(Hold a moment of silence)

As we rejoice in the gift of this new day, so may the light of your presence, O God, set our hearts on fire with love for you; now and for ever. Amen.

Collect for the 7th 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.

Psalms 139 vs 1-11

¹ You have searched me, LORD, and you know me. ² You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. ³ You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. ⁴ Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely. ⁵ You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. ⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. ¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me."

Reading 1 Jesus tells the parable of the weeds to the crowd

Matthew 13 vs 24-30

²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷ "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'

²⁸ “‘An enemy did this,’ he replied. “The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ ²⁹ “‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”

Reading 2 Jesus explains the parable to the disciples

Matthew 13 vs 36-43

³⁶ Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

³⁷ He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. ⁴⁰ “As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴² They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Reflection (by Brian)

Preaching to the crowds, Jesus uses the imagery of a farmer who sows good seed in his field only for an enemy to sow weeds among the wheat while everyone is asleep.

Some farming context is helpful here. The Greek word for weed is *Ziznion* and it refers to a specific weed called ‘darnel’ which in its early stages looks like wheat. Eating it causes nausea. Sowing it in another’s field was not just spiteful but considered a crime. Thus, this is a dangerous and reckless action, intended to hurt people and ruin the farmer. This underlines the type of evil Jesus is talking about.

The parable illustrates that good and evil exist together in the world, even in our times. The farmer's decision to allow both wheat and darnel to grow until the harvest signifies patience and the divine timing of judgment.

Later, when the crowds had gone home, and Jesus was in a private house, the disciples ask Him what the parable means.

Jesus then explains that He is speaking about judgment and separation: At the end of the age, the angels will separate the weeds from the wheat, emphasising that it is not humanity's role to judge or uproot evil prematurely, as this could harm the good. Although right and wrong co-exist in life there is to be no place for evil and wrong-doing in God's Kingdom. Hence the quandary at the heart of this parable: evil is amongst us but we need to let God deal with it, not ourselves because God has done something about it already through Jesus who won on the cross. Jesus will come again to take care of the problem of evil once and for all at the end of the age. Jesus ended His explanation on a positive note: 'the righteous will shine like the sun' and with a call for those with ears to hear, which surely includes us today.

Personal prayer

Lord, we pray for all who are seeking God, and for the nurturing in this parish. We pray for opportunities to share God's love and draw others to meet him.

We pray for all who are fighting against evil for goodness, truth and justice, both worldly and personally. We pray for our country and its leaders, that this nation may seek God.

Lord, we pray that wealth and comfort may not distract us from searching out the heart of God; that we may hear God's challenging and respond to him.

We bring before you Lord all whom we know that are sick at this time, may they know your healing touch. We pray for those who mourn, may they know your comfort.

Why not close these prayers by saying the Lord's prayer, perhaps lingering on the parts that talk about delivering us from evil.

Hymn Sing or say the hymn, Rejoice, the Lord is King:

1. Rejoice, the Lord is King: Your Lord and King adore!
Rejoice, give thanks and sing, And triumph evermore.
Lift up your heart, Lift up your voice! Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

2. Jesus, the Savior, reigns, The God of truth and love;
When He has purged our stains, He took his seat above;
Lift up your heart, Lift up your voice! Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

3. His kingdom cannot fail, He rules o'er earth and heav'n;
The keys of death and hell Are to our Jesus giv'n:
Lift up your heart, Lift up your voice! Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

4. Rejoice in glorious hope! Our Lord and judge shall come
And take His servants up To their eternal home:
Lift up your heart, Lift up your voice! Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

Closing Prayer & Blessing

Heavenly Father, we come to you with grateful hearts, filled with the truth and encouragement we have received today. Thank you for the gift of your Word, a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. As we step back into our daily lives, we feel the pull of distraction and the weight of our responsibilities. Please, Lord, do not let the seeds you have planted in our hearts today be choked out by the cares of this world.

The Grace

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

Sunday 26th July
8th Sunday after Trinity

Opening Prayers

O Lord, open our lips and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

The glory of the Lord has risen upon us. Let us rejoice and sing God's praise for ever. Amen.

The night has passed, and the day lies open before us;
let us pray with one heart and mind.

Silence is kept.

As we rejoice in the gift of this new day, so may the light of your presence, O God, set our hearts on fire with love for you; now and for ever. Amen.

Bible Reading Romans 8 vs 26-39

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷ And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

²⁸ We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³ Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written,

'For your sake we are being killed all day long;
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.'

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Reflection (by Jacky)

One of the reasons many people groan when the reading is from St Paul (as a listener or reader) is that he doesn't write in the way that we think. In our modern everyday life, we find a conclusion satisfying if it built up in a logical, linear progression. Paul, however, argues in spirals. He introduces an idea, circles back to it, develops it, adds another thought, then returns again. His arguments often spiral upwards rather than moving in a straight line.

That is certainly true of his letter to the Christians in Rome. Paul is writing to a church he has never visited. He hopes they will become partners in the next stage of his missionary work, but before asking for their support he wants them to understand the gospel that has captured his heart.

And by the time we reach chapter 8, Paul has built an extraordinary argument, here it is without the spirals:

Humanity is trapped by sin.

God has acted in Christ to set us free.

We now live by the Spirit rather than by fear.

We have become God's beloved children.

Even creation itself is longing for renewal.

Then, in verses 26 to 39, Paul reaches a crescendo:

He does not pretend life is easy. Christians suffer. They don't always know how to pray. Creation groans. We groan.

Yet, says Paul, we are not left to struggle on our own. Even when we cannot find the words, the Holy Spirit is praying within us, giving voice to the deepest longings of our hearts.

And then comes one of the most breathtaking statements of faith in the whole of Scripture:

"If God is for us, who can be against us?... Neither death, nor life... nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This is not brash optimism or blind triumphalism. Paul knows exactly what suffering feels like.

By the time he writes these words he has already endured beatings, imprisonment, rejection and hardship. He knows what it is to be afraid. He knows what it is to feel weak.

And yet he has become utterly convinced that, whatever life may bring, God's love is stronger than every force that threatens us. The final word over our lives is not fear, nor suffering, nor even death itself. The final word is the love of God revealed in Christ Jesus.

Perhaps that is why this passage has spoken to Christians for nearly two thousand years. Paul does not begin with certainty. He begins with groaning. He begins with weakness. He begins with people who simply do not know how to pray. Yet, astonishingly, he says that this is not where God abandons us. This is where the Holy Spirit meets us. When words fail us, the Spirit prays for us with sighs too deep for words. When our faith falters, God remains faithful. That is why Paul can finish with such breathtaking confidence. His certainty is not rooted in human strength but in God's unwavering love. Whatever we face, we do not face it alone. The Spirit intercedes for us, Christ walks beside us, and nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen

The Benedictus (*The Song of Zechariah*)

- 1 Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel,
who has come to his people and set them free.
- 2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour,
born of the house of his servant David.
- 3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old
to save us from our enemies, from the hands of all that hate us,
- 4 To show mercy to our ancestors,
and to remember his holy covenant.
- 5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham:
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
- 6 Free to worship him without fear, holy and righteous in his sight
all the days of our life.
- 7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
- 8 To give his people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of all their sins.
- 9 In the tender compassion of our God
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,

10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death,
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Luke 1.68-79

Prayers

Take some time to offer to God your own prayers.

The Collect for 8th Sunday after Trinity

Almighty Lord and everlasting God, we beseech you to direct, sanctify and govern both our hearts and bodies in the ways of your laws and the works of your commandments; that through your most mighty protection, both here and ever, we may be preserved in body and soul; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.
Amen.

The Conclusion

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

May God who made both heaven and earth bless me.
Amen.

Hymn

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his word –
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;
his mercy sure, from age to age the same –
his holy name: the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by;
proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure:
tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and for evermore!