

A Flourishing Church



In 1950,
the US government and the US navy,
commissioned the construction of the **SS United States:**
It was to be a magnificent ship.

The government chipped in 50 million
and the navy chipped in the remaining 28 million.

And that contribution from the Navy
meant that the ship was designed
so that it could be easily converted in times of war
to be a troop carrier for up to 15,000 troops,
or to be a hospital ship.

The SS United States was designed to be a war ship.
And so it was built according to Navy specifications.

It was highly compartmentalised and had separate engine rooms
to optimise survival in a time of war.

It was also built to minimise the possibility of fire.
The designers of the SS United States
used absolutely no wood in the ships'
framing, accessories, decorations or surfaces.
The only wood on the ship was the Steinway piano!

And this massive ship, 300m in length, was fast.
She could outpace any potential rivals.
On her maiden voyage,
the United States broke the Transatlantic speed record:
from New York City to Cornwall
in 3 days, 10 hours, 40 minutes,
at an average of 36 knots.

Now wouldn't it be good to have that sort of ship in your navy?
Imagine it's 1950
What an amazing vessel to have at your disposal.
What an incredible asset for the navy!

And yet... she was never used.
The navy never used her.
Not even once.
She was never used to transport troops,
let alone medical or food supplies.

Instead, the SS United States became a luxury liner, used for:
presidents like Truman and JFK,
royalty like the Duke and Duchess of Windsor
and celebrities like:
Marlon Brando, Marilyn Monroe,
Salvador Dali and Sean Connery.

SS UNITED STATES

2,800 passengers
who could enjoy the:
- 695 staterooms
- 4 dining salons
- 3 bars
- 2 theatres
- 5 acres of open deck
- 19 elevators
- heated pool
- air conditioning

Instead of housing 15,000 troops,
she housed under 2000 passengers
who could enjoy the:
695 staterooms,
4 dining salons,
3 bars,
2 theatres,
5 acres of open deck,
19 elevators
a heated pool,
and the comfort of the world's first
fully air conditioned passenger ship.

Built to be a troop carrier,
she was used as a luxury liner.

**Friends,
the story of SS United States,
matches the story of the Western Church.**



The church was designed by Jesus
to be a troop carrier,
to take the Gospel to those under attack & needing deliverance.

The church was designed by Jesus
to be a hospital ship,
to take the Gospel to those who are sick and needing a saviour.

The church was designed
to be able to quickly attend any emergency,
whenever the Captain commands.

But the Western church all too often looks:
more like luxury cruise liner,
than a troop carrier or a hospital ship.

SS UNITED STATES

2000 members
who can enjoy the:
= 695 square metres
= 4 meeting rooms
= 3 coffee machines
= 2 big screen TVs
= 5 acres of courtyard
= 19 ministers
= heated baptismal font
= air conditioned building

WESTERN CHURCH

2000 members
who can enjoy the:
= 695 sq m church complex
= 4 meeting rooms
= 3 coffee machines
= 2 big screen TVs
= 5 acres of courtyard
= 19 ministers
= heated baptismal font
= air conditioned building

We tend to think that a flourishing church looks like the SS United States:

2000 members who can enjoy the:
695 square metre church complex,
4 meeting rooms,
3 coffee machines,
2 big screen TV's,
5 acres of courtyard,
19 ministers,
a heated baptismal font,
and the comfort of a fully air conditioned building!

For us, a flourishing church means:
lots of people, lots of programs, and lots of pastors,
who can meet our needs.

And when we don't have all the outwards signs of flourishing,
when we don't have the facilities and finances that others do,
we are often jealous of others who do.

On a very deep level, we believe a flourishing church
looks like a luxury cruise liner.

Author John Piper writes,

"It seems to be woven into the very fabric of our consumer culture that we move toward comfort, that we move toward security, towards ease, towards safety, away from stress, away from trouble, away from danger and it ought to be exactly the opposite."



WHAT IS A FLOURISHING CHURCH?

**Today we are going to look
at what a truly flourishing church looks like.
And for that we need to turn to the pages of the New Testament.**

There aren't many flourishing churches in New Testament
to choose from.

The church in Corinth
was strong on spiritual gifts but weak on love.

The church in Galatia,
was strong on law but weak on grace.

The church in Colossae,
was strong on spirituality but weak on the divinity of Christ.

But there is one church that ticks all the boxes.
A church that truly flourished.

It's the church in Thessalonica.

We read about Paul's first visit to Thessalonica in the book of Acts.
Please turn to Acts 17:1-10

THESSALONICA

Acts 17:1-4

After Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah," he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.

When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah," he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.

THESSALONICA

Acts 17:5-7

But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus."

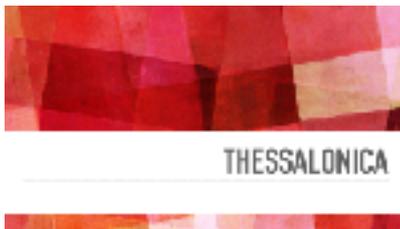
But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus."

THESSALONICA

Acts 17:10-16

When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go. As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea.

When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go. As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea.



Now Paul and Silas and Timothy weren't in Thessalonica for long.

They attended the Synagogue on the Sabbath just 3 times.

They then the fledging church met in someone's home,
perhaps the home of Jason.

We read in Philippians 4:16 that the Philippians sent 2 gifts to Paul
while he was in Thessalonica,
so it's likely he was there for a couple of months.

And yet in
such a small period of time,
God shows up in power,
the church is established,
and begins to flourish.

When Paul has to leave the church in haste,
he sends Timothy to check up on them,
and then he pens a letter to encourage them.

The Apostle Paul writes his first letter to the Thessalonians,
and he is full of encouragement and praise.

Let's take it from chapter 1, verses 1-3.

THE BIRTH OF A CHURCH

1 Thessalonians 1: 1-3
Paul, Silas and Timothy,
To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 1:1-3

Paul, Silas and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul says,

- "It's not hard to pray for you."*
- "Your faith. Your love. Your hope."*
- "It's not dead and lifeless."*
- "It's full of vibrancy, energy and life."*
- "Your faith produces work."*
- "Your love leads to labour."*
- "Your hope inspires endurance."*

You can just imagine the Apostle Paul on his knees,
thanking and praising God
for this fledgling church.

The Apostle Paul then outlines in the rest of chapter 1,
why he is so confident that their Church is flourishing.

He outlines 5 aspects of why he thinks it's flourishing.

Let's see together what makes this church flourish.

The first sign of a flourishing church is Holy Spirit conviction.



1. HOLY SPIRIT CONVICTION

1 Thessalonians 1:5

For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.

(1) Holy Spirit conviction

1 Thessalonians 1:5

For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.

When Paul turns up in Thessalonica

and speaks the word of God to them

they sense, they know that:

it isn't just words.

it isn't just a fairy tale.

it isn't just a set of new religious ideas.

Many itinerant preachers wandered the ancient world,

spruiking their ideas,

but this preacher is different.

When Paul brings the gospel to the Thessalonians,

it comes with power.

It comes with Holy Spirit, convicting power.

Paul's message is not just clever rhetoric.

It's not just fine sounding arguments.

It's not just human philosophy.

The Thessalonians don't receive the message
as if it were just a human word,
but as the very word of God.

When they hear the message of the Gospel,
there is a deep heartfelt conviction in their spirit.
They know deep, deep, deep down in their heart and their spirit
that what they are hearing is true
that Jesus died on the cross in love,
that Jesus rose from the dead in power,
and that Jesus is coming again in glory.

The church is established because of Holy Spirit conviction.
The first sign of a flourishing church is Holy Spirit conviction.

If the Holy Spirit doesn't do any convicting,
then there is no church at all
No one can say "Jesus is Lord"
without the prompting of the Spirit.
No one can be "born again"
without the breath of the Spirit.

The church isn't a human construct.
It's not a man-made institution.

It's the result of the Holy Spirit coming upon men and women,
and bringing them to a point where they cry to Jesus
to save them and to forgive them.

The first sign of a flourishing church is Holy Spirit conviction.

The second sign of a flourishing church is deep repentance.



2. DEEP REPENTANCE

1 Thessalonians 1:9b
They tell how you turned to God from idols
to serve the living and true God.

1 Thessalonians 1:9b

They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.

When Paul brings the gospel to Thessalonica,
and the Spirit convicts the people of the Lordship of Jesus,
their lives change.

And this is not in some superficial sense.
Their lives take a 180 degree turn.

Instead of idol worship,
Instead of seeking to appease the pantheon of gods,
they come to worship the one true God.

This would not have been easy in the city of Thessalonica.
Thessalonica was a port city with all the vices.
Idol worship was everywhere.
And associated with idol worship was sexual promiscuity.

When the Thessalonians heard the Gospel
the power of God converted them.

Their conversion means:
a deep repentance, a massive life change.

You can't be converted and have no life change.

Conversion always means

a change of allegiance.

a change of priorities.

a change of lifestyle.

It means worshipping Jesus and Jesus alone.

It means a deep repentance.

And that's happens for the Thessalonians.

They repented, They turned.

Away from idols.

Towards the true and living God.

John Stott wrote:

"people must have a personal encounter with Jesus Christ in which the spell of the idol is broken and the superior power of the living and true God is demonstrated."

The second sign of a flourishing church is deep repentance.

The third sign of a flourishing church is unshakeable joy.



UNSHAKEABLE JOY

1 Thessalonians 1:6-7

You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

1 Thessalonians 1:6-7

You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

The Holy Spirit doesn't only convict the Thessalonians of their sin and their need for Jesus, and lead them to repentance, the Spirit also gives them an unshakable joy.

A joy in all circumstances: in all the highs and lows of life.

And there were plenty of lows.

There was plenty of persecution.

After Paul and Silas and Timothy get kicked out of Thessalonica, and travel on to Berea about 70 km away, some of their opponents follow them all the way, and start agitating and stirring up the crowds there too, such that they have to leave there as well.

If you think that it's hard to live as a Christian today, then take a another look at what it was like back then.

The Apostle Paul says in **2 Corinthians 11:24-26**

“Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers.”

So how did this opposition and suffering affect Paul?

Did it rob him of his joy?

Not for a moment!

And the Christians in Thessalonica imitate him.

So how did opposition and suffering affect the Thessalonians?

Did it rob them of their joy?

Not for a moment!

Paul says that they

“welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with joy.”

No opposition, no persecution would rob them of their joy.

Martin Luther King Jr. wrote in his [Letter from the Birmingham Jail](#):

“There was a time when the church was very powerful. It was during that period that the early Christians rejoiced when they were deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was the thermostat that transformed the mores of society.”

He could easily have been speaking of the church in Thessalonica. The same Holy Spirit that did a deep convicting work in them, is now giving them deep joy - an unshakable joy.

The third sign of a flourishing church is unshakeable joy.

The fourth sign of a flourishing church is contagious faith.



4. CONTAGIOUS FAITH

1 Thessalonians 1:8-9a

The Lord's message rang from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia - your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us.

1 Thessalonians 1:8-9a

The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia - your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us.

Having heard the Lord's message, the message of the Gospel,
from the Apostle Paul,
they cannot help but speak about it to others.

Paul says,

"Your faith in God, your testimony is being told everywhere."

I don't need to talk about it!

Everyone already knows!

You've done me out of a job!

Everyone knows your story!

It's hit the front page of the Thessalonian Mercury!"

Their newfound trust in Jesus

is not something they can keep to themselves.

They've come to believe
in Jesus Christ as Lord.

They've come to believe
that God sent Jesus to be the Saviour of the world.

They've come to believe
that through Jesus they can live with God in glory forever.

They've come to believe the Gospel.

How could they not share the news
that people can be saved from God's wrath?

How could they not share the news
that people can enjoy eternal life with God?

Paul says,
"The Lord's message rang out."

The perfect tense of this word "*rang out*"
stresses the continued impact of their testimony.

The gospel is ringing out,
and echoing all around the country,
because of their contagious faith.

The fourth sign of a flourishing church is contagious faith.

The fifth & last sign of a flourishing church is an expectant hope.



5. EXPECTANT HOPE

1 Thessalonians 1:9b-10

They tell how you turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead - Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

1 Thessalonians 1:9b-10

They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead - Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

The believers are filled with a new hope.

Their lives are now focussed

on looking forward to the return of Jesus.

They know that Jesus hasn't only died on the cross for their sins...

They know that Jesus hasn't only risen from the dead...

They know that Jesus will return.

For them, Jesus is not only risen, and reigning...

He is the returning king.

And so they live in expectation

that they will see Jesus coming on the clouds.

Jesus is coming again,

and he is coming to judge the world.

His judgment, his wrath is coming.

upon all the sin, all the evil, all the unrighteousness

that we see in our world.

Jesus is coming to judge.

But for all who know Jesus, there is nothing to fear.
The Thessalonians know that Jesus
will rescue them from the coming wrath.
They have this expectant hope in Jesus' return.

This firm expectation of Jesus return floods the whole letter.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-2

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 5:23

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ever since the Spirit has come upon them,
they know that death is not the end,
but the start of a new life with Jesus when he returns.

The fifth & last sign of a flourishing church is an expectant hope.

The Apostle Paul says,

“I know that your church is flourishing because of:
your Holy Spirit conviction,
your deep repentance,
your unshakeable joy,
your contagious faith,
and your expectant hope.”

THE VOICE OF THE MARIANA
MERCURY

Interviews with church leaders reveal that former alcoholics are now serving communion, former tax evaders are now counting the church offertory, notorious ex-criminals are now part of the food distribution ministry and people set to retire have been given new work to do. It is reported that meals suddenly appear on the doorsteps of families at the end of their tether, visitors appear in hospitals and hold hands and pray for the sick and encouragement cards keep turning up in the mail. No-one quite knows why they are so happy!

**If a reporter from the Thessalonian Mercury
and done a story about this church,
this is a snippet of they might have said.**

“Interviews with church leaders reveal that former alcoholics are now serving communion, former tax evaders are now counting the church offertory, notorious ex-criminals are now part of the food distribution ministry and people set to retire have been given new work to do. It is reported that meals suddenly appear on the doorsteps of families at the end of their tether, visitors appear in hospitals and hold hands and pray for the sick and encouragement cards keep turning up in the mail. No-one quite knows why they are so happy!”

So friends, how is your faith and your faith community going? To what extent is your faith and your faith community flourishing?



FOR REFLECTION

Have you experienced Holy Spirit conviction?
Have you experienced deep repentance?
Is your joy unshakable?
Is your faith contagious?

1. Have you experienced Holy Spirit conviction?

Has the Holy Spirit come in power in your life?

Do you know Jesus' love for yourself?

Do you know that your sins are forgiven?

2. Have you experienced deep repentance?

Has your lifestyle radically changed because of your faith in Jesus?

Have you rid your life of idols?

Have you turned to serve the living God?

3. Is your joy unshakable?

Does knowing Jesus put a smile on your face?

Does the message of the Gospel move your heart?

Do you have joy in Jesus despite the opposition you may face?

4. Is your faith contagious?

Do you look for opportunities to share Jesus with others?

Are you bold in sharing your faith?

5. Do you have an expectant hope?

Are you looking forward eagerly to Jesus' return?

Do you have the assurance of heaven?

God wants your faith and your faith community to flourish.

He wants you to be able to say:

yes to Holy Spirit conviction,
yes to deep repentance,
yes to unshakeable joy,
yes to contagious faith,
& yes to expectant hope.

**There is something so beautiful about
a flourishing faith,
a flourishing church.**

One person who has
the kind of overflowing flourishing faith
that we see in Thessalonians
is a woman I'll call Jenny.



She works amongst Syrian Refugees in Turkey.

**I want to read to you 3 short stories from her newsletters,
and I pray that they will inspire you
to seek God for a flourishing faith.**

Story 1.

**Today we decided to visit Nira,
a Syrian lady who had recently requested the Jesus Film.**

When we arrived,
we met her mother who had suffered a stroke that week
and was in a lot of pain.

After drinking the customary tea,
we asked if we could pray for her.

"Why not" she responded.

We prayed in Jesus' name and all her symptoms were healed!

We were overjoyed! So was she!!!

She was on her feet bending up and down,
showing her daughter what she couldn't do before.

She then told us that when we prayed,
she had seen a vision of Jesus
standing before her with arms stretched toward her.

My friend said,
"Jesus is calling you to Him. Do you want to go to Him?"

She was very excited
and together we prayed accepting Jesus' invitation.

Now the best part... she turns to Nira and says,

"Nira, do you know what?

Twenty years ago your father read the Injil (New Testament)
and said that one day he wants to become a Christian!"

We then prayed for Nira

and she too received new hope in Jesus!

God prepared hearts long before we ever stepped into the picture!

Story 2.

Tamar became a believer about a year ago and is slowly growing in her faith.

When we saw her a couple of weeks ago she excitedly told us,
"My friend came to visit but she had a bad headache,
so I prayed for her! And she was healed!

I just said the words you say...

Thank you for my friend.

Thank you that you love her.

Please heal her in Jesus' name."

We were a bit dumbfounded.

And then she continued with more news,

"Do you remember my neighbour from Syria?

I told him three times over the phone (in Istanbul)
that he must go to church.

At first he said it was very wrong to go to church.

Then he said maybe.

Then he said yes.

When he went,

the pastor prayed for him and he saw a vision of Jesus!!

He, his wife, and all their children became believers!"

We were even more dumbfounded (we of little faith)

and she proceeded to show us

photos on fb of him and his pastor.

Wow!

This is my dream...

that Syrians will be the ones to share the news with others!!

God is so amazing!!!

Story 3.

Recently a Syrian man asked me,

*“When I came to faith at the beginning of the war,
I witnessed to 400 people in three months
(while distributing food)
but only two came to faith.”*

Now there are so many coming to faith.

“What was I doing wrong?”

I smiled a big smile.

He wasn't doing anything wrong at all.

He was simply sowing seeds that you have been praying for.

And now, five/six years later, we are seeing the fruit!

Jenny's conviction,

Jenny's love,

Jenny's joy,

Jenny's contagious faith in Jesus,

Jenny's hope,

are all signs of a flourishing faith.



COME HOLY SPIRIT!

**Friends,
if we want our churches to flourish,
then we need the Holy Spirit
to come amongst us and renew us.**

We need to open ourselves up to God,
and ask for him to work in our hearts.

If we want
an unshakeable joy,
a contagious faith,
an expectant hope,
then we need the Holy Spirit to convict, transform and renew.

Are you ready to ask the Lord to do that
for you and for your church?
Are you ready for God's Spirit to inspire and fill your church?

If that is what you want to see today,
If that is what you desire today,
then I invite you to listen to Christine
as she sings and plays a beautiful song for us.
And I'm going to invite you to make these words
a personal prayer to God.



Holy Spirit, living Breath of God,
Breathe new life into my willing soul.
Bring the presence of the risen Lord
To my weary heart and make me whole.
Cause Your Word to come alive in me;
Give me faith for what I cannot see;
Give me passion for Your purity.
Holy Spirit, breathe new life in me.

Holy Spirit, living Breath of God,
Breathe new life into my willing soul.
Bring the presence of the risen Lord
To renew my heart and make me whole.
Cause Your Word to come alive in me;
Give me faith for what I cannot see;
Give me passion for Your purity.
Holy Spirit, breathe new life in me.



Holy Spirit, come abide within;
May Your joy be seen in all I do—
Love enough to cover ev'ry sin
In each thought and deed and attitude,
Kindness to the greatest and the least,
Gentleness that sows the path of peace.
Turn my striving into works of grace.
Breath of God, show Christ in all I do.

Holy Spirit, come abide within;
May Your joy be seen in all I do—
Love enough to cover ev'ry sin
In each thought and deed and attitude,
Kindness to the greatest and the least,
Gentleness that sows the path of peace.
Turn my striving into works of grace.
Breath of God, show Christ in all I do.



Holy Spirit, from creation's birth,
Giving life to all that God has made,
Show Your power once again on earth;
Cause Your church to hunger for Your ways.
Let the fragrance of our prayers arise.
Lead us on the road of sacrifice
That in unity the face of Christ
Will be clear for all the world to see.

*Holy Spirit, from creation's birth,
Giving life to all that God has made,
Show Your power once again on earth;
Cause Your church to hunger for Your ways.
Let the fragrance of our prayers arise.
Lead us on the road of sacrifice
That in unity the face of Christ
Will be clear for all the world to see.*



PRAY