



**Call to Worship** - Acts 2:21 "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

**Hymn - STF398 - There's a spirit in the air**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YsvUXGnPck4>

There's a spirit in the air,  
telling Christians everywhere:  
'Praise the love that Christ revealed,  
living, working in our world!'

When a stranger's not alone,  
where the homeless find a home,  
praise the love that Christ revealed,  
living, working, in our world.

Lose your shyness, find your tongue,  
tell the world what God has done:  
God in Christ has come to stay.  
Live tomorrow's life today!

May the Spirit fill our praise,  
guide our thoughts and change our ways.  
God in Christ has come to stay.  
Live tomorrow's life today!

When believers break the bread,  
when a hungry child is fed,  
praise the love that Christ revealed,  
living, working, in our world.

There's a Spirit in the air,  
calling people everywhere:  
Praise the love that Christ revealed,  
living, working, in our world.

Still the Spirit gives us light,  
seeing wrong and setting right:  
God in Christ has come to stay.  
Live tomorrow's life today!

Brian Wren (born 1936)  
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**Prayer** : Creator God, Risen Lord Jesus, Empowering Holy Spirit, On this day when we remember the birth of the Church, We worship you.

We know that the Church is ageless, Constantly renewed just as you are the same always, Ever old and ever new, But we need the trigger to make us pause And to be grateful for what we are and have.

We are baffled when we try to understand, Gifts given at Pentecost, Gifts given and used in us, An ageless body with so many faces; We praise you for the joy of being Church.

Endless One, Be here with us today, Help us as we pray, praise and think; Take what we offer with our Thanksgiving And may it be acceptable.

Faithful One, We are not especially good as followers, Diligence and doubt wax and wane; We do not set out to be like that, It happens, just as sin happened at Eden.

Saving One, Just as you gave us Jesus in love to remake Adam, So may we, in joy, as the body of renewed Eve, Say 'no' to temptation and resist the serpent's bite Because your Spirit is in us.

Thank you, Ten thousand times ten thousand and forever, Thank you for forgiveness and grace Through which we become All you would have us be.

**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.

## Introduction to theme – The Spirit of Provocation

When I think of provocation I think of being overcome by frustration or a sense of wrong until I boil over, and sometimes say the wrong thing.

Today we are thinking about how the Spirit provokes us in different ways to get us to do or to say the right thing. The Psalmist reflects that everything derives from God whom we praise. God has offered the opportunity and way to be saved. God has offered a free-flowing river of satisfaction in him.

Long before Pentecost the same Spirit was given through Moses but not everyone saw it is a never-ebbing sea but as a river to be dammed. Moses did not agree.

### Responsive Reading - Psalm 104:24-35

O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great. There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

These all look to you to give them their food in due season; when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.

When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground. May the glory of the Lord endure for ever; may the Lord rejoice in his works—who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke.

I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being. May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the Lord.

Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord!

### Hymn - STF477 - Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wk7nPfuAiLg>

*Teach me to dance to the beat of Your heart,  
teach me to move in the power of Your Spirit,  
teach me to walk in the light of Your presence,  
teach me to dance to the beat of Your heart.  
Teach me to love with your heart of compassion,  
teach me to trust in the word of Your promise,  
teach me to hope in the day of Your coming,  
teach me to dance to the beat of Your heart.*

You wrote the rhythm of life,  
Created heaven and earth,  
In You is joy without measure.

So, like a child in Your sight,  
I dance to see Your delight,  
For I was made for Your pleasure,  
Pleasure. *Chorus.*

Let all my movements express  
A heart that loves to say 'yes',  
A will that leaps to obey You.  
Let all my energy blaze  
To see the joy in Your face;  
Let my whole being praise You,  
Praise You. *Chorus.*

Graham Kendrick and Steve Thompson © 1993 Make Way Music, PO Box 263, Croydon, Surrey, CR9 5AP, UK.

**Reading - Numbers 11:24-30** : So, Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord; and he gathered seventy elders of the people, and placed them all around the tent. Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again. Two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, 'Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.' And Joshua; son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, 'My lord Moses, stop them!' But Moses said to him, 'Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!' And Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

**Reading - John 7:37-39** : On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

**Hymn - STF391 - O breath of life come sweeping through us**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M3bsgoPjcg4>

O breath of life, come sweeping  
through us,  
revive your church with life and  
power;  
O breath of life, come, cleanse,  
renew us,  
and fit your church to meet this  
hour.

O wind of God, come, bend us,  
break us,  
till humbly we confess our need;  
then in your tenderness remake  
us,  
revive, restore; for this we plead.

O breath of love, come, breathe  
within us,  
renewing thought and will and  
heart;  
come, love of Christ, afresh to win  
us,  
revive your church in every part

*Elizabeth A P Head (1850 - 1936)*

**Sermon - Better than Silence (Numbers 11:29)**

But Moses said to him, 'Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!'

Coincidentally, I had a couple of conversations recently which I reacted very differently from the way I would have reacted when I was a lot younger. Both people were provocatively challenging in their comments which I realised were expressions of awkwardness in expressing questions and doubts.

One was about personal spirituality dressed up as being a Christian without being part of the Church while the other was about personal uncertainty disguised as antagonism to commitment. A young version of me may very likely have suffered rising hackles and delivered a haranguing rebuke about 'knowing better'. The grown up me sees, instead, shyness, uncertainty and some reluctance to accept the full breadth of God's promises that may hide a sense of unworthiness too.

We cannot be sure about motivation, of course.

The reading for Pentecost from the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles is long and describes what happened on that extraordinary day when, we say, the Church was born. I used a single verse from it for our call to worship: Acts 2:21, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

In Numbers we read about an incident of misunderstanding between Moses and Joshua over the proper place for prophetic utterance. In a humble reply, Moses gently chides Joshua and takes a line that many years later Jesus will take: anyone not against us is for us.

My recent challengers are good friends. Each is sympathetic to the Church. Both are well versed in its ways. Neither deserved an attack in response and, indeed, I realised on reflection that their mode of questioning was so much preferable to the debilitating silence of disinterest. Ambivalence does not lead to discussion, but frustrations, however expressed, open the door.

Have you asked yourself, simply, 'What am I saved from, and what am I saved for?' Those are the questions which, if we cannot answer them, lead people to ambivalence, so in the noise of debate they need to be tackled. The Feast of Tabernacles remembers God's provision of water and food in the desert journeyings of his people from slavery in Egypt to freedom in Canaan. Water of life as the Gospel passage reminded us of is what Jesus offered.

We are saved from sin, judgement, and separation from God. Separation from God is inherent in the deep loneliness we suffer, and being saved from it means being enabled to move beyond guilt, power, and final judgement—away from helplessness and lostness. On the other side of the coin, we are saved for a relationship with God, a new life transformed from what we have been, the prospect of eternal life and future hope, and belonging to God's people, the Church.

No wonder people who are shy, who have questions, and who find it hard to accept that the past is never too dark for the light of Christ to brighten, sometimes put things badly as they explore their thoughts and feelings.

How much better is that, however, than silence?

In his leadership role, Moses carried an enormous burden. By empowering seventy leaders with the Spirit to prophesy, God showed that sharing the workload is his way, and that the Spirit inspires leaders as a divine gift and confirmation of calling, not to establish status.

Joshua worried that two people were displaying the wrong gift in the wrong place but Moses made clear that anything was better than silence...if only everyone could prophesy, how good would that be?

The Psalmist praised the God of creation of the big things (Leviathan) and the empty spaces (the oceans). He reflected that God's power is to give or to withhold life but he chooses to give it so we say Praise God.

Sometimes we may not really understand the magnitude of the God we praise but so what; how much better is it than silence to continually worship God who made all things and to witness to who he is and what he has done.

Openness to God and wanting to engage, even when things seem wrong to us, as for Joshua, or we are shy and awkward as is so often the case is better than silence.

Jesus said that he was the water of life. Thirsty people should move towards him and then, if in admitting their thirst there is faith that the drink will satisfy it, go for it. There are so many people milling about and displaying obvious signs of real thirst that two things are needed.

We are in an environment where advertisers promise to satisfy any need and cure every want. People have been hoodwinked and disillusioned by that. Where they are engaging, we can continue to point the way to Jesus and pray that the Spirit will help them develop the faith to drink. Any engagement is better than silence; every conversation is another chance to penetrate the shyness and awkwardness of those wanting to seek out a way forward and find meaning and purpose, to put something where they feel they have nothing.

Moses anointed people; Eldad and Medad may not have responded as expected, but they responded, and that, said Moses, was better than silence.

Today, on the birthday of the Church, we do well to remember that many of us started from a dark place or went through periods of antagonism and anger with life generally and with God. Some of us may be in that place today. That's better than silence – the story of the Church is one of identifying hope in turmoil and coming through questioning to real faith.

Better, indeed, than silence.  
Happy birthday, Church of God.  
Keep talking, people of God.  
Amen.

#### **Hymn - STF393 - She sits like a bird, brooding on the waters**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPb5gO8ASvM>

She sits like a bird, brooding on the waters,  
hovering on the chaos of the world's first day;  
she sighs and she sings, mothering creation,  
waiting to give birth to all the Word will say.

She dances in fire, startling her spectators,  
waking tongues of ecstasy where dumbness reigned;  
She weans and inspires all whose hearts are open,  
nor can she be captured, silenced or restrained.

She wings over earth, resting where she wishes,  
lighting close at hand or soaring through the skies;  
she nests in the womb, welcoming each wonder,  
nourishing potential hidden to our eyes.

For she is the Spirit, one with God in essence,  
gifted by the Saviour in eternal love;  
she is the key opening the scriptures,  
enemy of apathy and heavenly dove.

## **Dedication of Offering**

Lord God, today as we remember your gifts, given generously and in love, we pray that you will bless the work done using all the resources of time, talents and treasure that we give freely and in love, for Jesus Christ's sake, Amen.

## **Prayers of Intercession**

Heavenly Father, as we think about the thoughts we have shared, we ask that you will speak to us and help us in our growth in faith to step forward to admit to thirsting and drink of the water of life that you so generously offer us.

We think again about all the conversations we have with people who use different fronts of antagonism, disdain or rejection to hide shyness or awkwardness in being open about their questions of faith, or about their existence at all. We pray for all those who are searching for something in the loneliness and confusion of living. Where it is appropriate, give us the right responses so we can engage with them and show them your love that is tender, unquestioning and supportive.

God of all life and not just some lives, help us to find our true place in the family life and work of your church; the body comprised of people like us.

Praying that Churches will be welcoming

Dear Lord, we come to you in prayer, seeking your guidance to help us to continue to make our churches places of welcome and acceptance.

We know so many people of all ages are lonely and long to belong.

We want to build church families of all ages, who worship together with joy.

We need always to put prayer at the heart of all our planning and action.

Help us to sing a new song that tells of your love, by always listening and learning to become receptive to new ideas that translate into loving action in our neighbourhoods. Amen.

Eileen Simmons, Anna Chaplain and local preacher, Leigh on Sea © The Methodist Church

God of peace and justice, we are deeply aware of the many conflicts in the world today. As we try to understand their causes, we often find that clear, rational explanations are difficult to identify. Help us to recognise that these global conflicts reflect our own struggles to communicate with one another in a thoughtful and understanding way.

We pray for the big situations but we remember that there are others as well which are easily overlooked and are thankful that they too are never off the radar of our all-seeing God.

We pray for the Russia – Ukraine war, its severe loss of life and the wider impact on energy, food and security together with the risk of contagion affecting other powers including Europe, America, Iran and China.

We also pray for the Israel – Gaza – Iran conflict, for the resulting humanitarian crisis and displacement of people as well as the same global effects on energy supply and risk of international contagion as with Ukraine.

May we not forget the humanitarian crisis arising from the war in Sudan, the regional insecurity in parts of Africa, and the civil war in Myanmar following a coup in 2021, which has destabilised a significant part of South-East Asia.

Please add any other particular areas on your mind...

We commend to God our political situation in the UK, with the turmoil in central and local government that seems to worsen continually, all the while detracting from the problems facing education and healthcare providers grappling with inadequate funding and without clarity for the future.

Lord, through the guidance of your Spirit may we identify and empower the right leaders for today who will see their proper place in the life of society where tolerance and respect are the way of people, together with commitment to each other and to a selfless future.

And as we pray for the sick and the people in any trouble among us, we also pray for the big issues of the day.

Please name or visualise the people you know have special need of prayer as you worship...

Let us pray for all who suffer from chronic diseases like heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and respiratory disease, especially where they are worsened by poor diet, smoking, or lack of exercise.

Pause...

We pray for quick identification of new or emerging infectious diseases and the ever-present risk of future pandemics.

Pause...

We commend to God the worldwide mental health crisis, with developing issues like depression, anxiety, or substance use disorders. Where these are added to by climate change, health inequality, or conflict and displacement, we pray for forgiveness for any part our way of life plays in worsening what is happening.

Pause...

Please bring to God any particular local concerns you have or anyone known to you or your church family who has died...

Great God, as we pray, we ask that we may know the warmth of your love and the power of your presence as you speak to us and that you hear us.

This we ask for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

### Hymn - STF566 - Take my life and let it be

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3gWwGDGgVA>

Take my life, and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to thee;  
Take my moments and my days,  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my voice, and let me sing  
Always, only, for my King;  
Take my lips, and let them be  
Filled with messages from thee.

Take my will, and make it thine;  
It shall be no longer mine;  
Take my heart—it is thine own;  
It shall be thy royal throne.

Take my hands, and let them move  
At the impulse of thy love;  
Take my feet, and let them be  
Swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my silver and my gold,  
Not a mite would I withhold;  
Take my intellect, and use  
Every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour  
At thy feet its treasure-store;  
Take myself, and I will be  
Ever, only, all for thee.

*Frances R Havergal (1836–1879)*

**Dismissal** : Be the beginning, O God, of all our good, the wellspring of all our love and the source of all our freedom. Let your grace work in us, your will be done through us and your protection be over us. Amen.

Mary Ward (1585-1645)© The Methodist Church

**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.