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Date: May 19 2013
Sermon Title: In-Spirit-ization
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Scriptures: From Acts 2

Acts 2:1-4

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Acts 2:17-21

*"In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.
Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.
And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.
The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.
Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."*

Acts 2:38-41

Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.' And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

"In-Spirit-ization." Perhaps it is silly to lead with a made-up word, but it actually better represents what "inspiration" really is. Inspiration means to "put the 'spirit' in"; it just seems more obvious with my word: "in-spirit-ization." The process of the Spirit getting into things. In Christian language, it refers to God's Spirit, "the Holy Spirit," entering into people. People get "filled with the Spirit" and proceed to do things they otherwise might not do. It can be physical things like speaking in tongues or healing or teaching. It can be personal things, like being gentle, peaceful, self-controlled.

The physical things we called the "gifts of the Spirit," things that God enables you to do to help build up the church. The personal things are "fruits of the Spirit," changes in your behavior, your way of being, your personality and character. In both cases you are a better person because God's Spirit is in you. In ... spirit ... ization.

Most of us take medicines of one sort or another. We swallow them. They go into us. We take them in. And we expect results, changes. If you leave them on the shelf or in the bottle, nothing will happen. You take an allergy pill, you expect to stop sneezing. You take a vitamin, you expect to feel better, healthier.

That's the idea of the Holy Spirit. God is outside of you, on the shelf, so to speak, waiting to be used, waiting to be swallowed whole, to be taken in. In the Book of Revelation (3:20), Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice, and opens the door, I will come in." "I will come in. I will 'in-spirit' you."

Inspiration happens when we invite God in. Forget the semantics. I don't care if you call it the Holy Spirit, the Holy Ghost, Christ's Spirit, God's Spirit. It's all the same. With inspiration, you are inviting God's existence, the very nature of God to infuse you.

Any of you who have ever stood close to me know that I love cologne, perfume. I could live at Sephora. On our recent trip to Europe. I was in airports five times with time to spare, and I spent it all in the duty-free shops, spraying myself. And I don't mean spraying those little strips of paper. I mean spraying me. I go from bottle to bottle, counter to counter, mix and match. What I am enjoying is the essence of all kinds of flowers. I end up smelling like a forest and a garden mixed together, as if the whole New York Botanical Garden had fallen on me.

We are invited to have the same experience of God, to be infused with God, immersed in God, to such a degree that we become the aroma of God.

Alida tells a lovely story of preaching at her grandmother's funeral and suddenly smelling her grandmother's perfume. Even when her grandmother was no longer there, an essence of her was still there. That's the promise of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised his Disciples, "Even when I am no longer here, my spirit, my essence will be here."

When I was writing my last book of poetry, *Fieldstones of Faith*, I knew I wanted to write one about the Holy Spirit, and I took off from the idea of the Holy Spirit as the "perfume of God," God's essence.

The Holy Spirit (John 14:15-27)

A whiff
of divine perfume
a holy essence
in the world's living room
a lingering something
a reminding
remembering
comforting
present
presence
prescience
here, there and everywhere
the mystery of God

who is
and was
and is forevermore
and is
for
ever
more and more and more.

Today is Pentecost, the birthday of the Christian Church. Let me summarize the whole story quickly. Jesus was crucified, resurrected, hung around for 40 days to convince people he was alive, and then he went back to heaven after telling his followers to take his story to the whole world. Ten days later, Pentecost, the Holy Spirit enters their room, enters them, the Disciples. They are filled with God's Spirit. They are in-spirited, inspired. The result? They are changed. They are emboldened. They are enabled and equipped. This group of followers had been cowardly, weak, doubtful, illiterate, disorganized. Fearful, skeptical, oblivious, nervous, unsteady. And suddenly they were bold, dynamic, literate, convincing, impressive, courageous, effective.

Christianity exploded in one day! The Bible tells us 3,000 people believed the Disciples, believed in Jesus and got baptized. Three thousand in one day! Whenever I teach or preach this story, I really try to get people to imagine what this day meant, logistically, practically, programmatically, pastorally.

When the Disciples got out of bed that Pentecost morning, they had 120 believers. About what's here right now. Easy to handle. By later that day, they had 3,120. We have three really big church events at our church. We get over 1,000 people on Christmas Eve, almost 1,000 on Easter, and we had 500 here last Sunday for Mother's Day and Confirmation. Not bad. Crowded. Hectic. Fun. But after an hour or so, everyone goes home, the place is quiet again. We relax for a bit. But NOT in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago on Pentecost. Three thousand people got baptized, joined the Disciples ... and stayed. And stayed, and stayed and stayed!

Imagine the Dogwood Festival, except nobody ever goes home. People still want breakfast, lunch, dinner. The Porta Potties need cleaning. The Blossom Café has to reorder. The SPF Hamburger/Hotdog Grill never closes. Kate's Korner is 24/7. Everybody just wants to stay here with us, listening, enjoying, eating, sleeping, worshipping, praying ... and learning.

That's what happened on Pentecost. Nobody went home. They hung around. They wanted to know more about Jesus. They wanted what the Disciples had, to be filled with God's Spirit. They wanted to be ... inspired. They didn't

have that terminology. They didn't talk that way. They didn't have any doctrine or theology. There was no Apostles' Creed, no New Testament. Face it, there was no church. No Christianity. No denomination. They were just people, gathered around an idea.

As you know, I am a great lover of Prague in the Czech Republic, and whenever I go there, we go to Wenceslas Square, and people talk to us about that day in 1989, the "Velvet Revolution," when thousands and thousands of people gathered around an idea: freedom. And 40 years of communism ended in one day. You may remember Tiananmen Square in China or Tahir Square in Cairo at the beginning. Just people, gathered around an idea, filled with hope. Remember in Tiananmen Square, someone constructed a Styrofoam Statue of Liberty. They were "in-spired" by the Statue of Liberty. That emblem of America, that symbol of New York City, that beacon of hope that welcomed generations of seekers and teachers and hoppers and dreamers – that was their inspiration.

That's how things were that Pentecost Day in Jerusalem when Christianity was born. That was our birthday, when a lovely idea came alive. Nobody knew where it was headed. People just looked at the "Spirit-filled" Disciples and sort of collectively said, "I want whatever they've got — that joy, that faith — I want some!"

What's your inspiration? What inspires you? What is it that when you experience it, when you take it in, makes you feel God and be better, after? That's a very "personal" question, by which I mean that your answer can be entirely different from my answer, and that's fine. "Different strokes for different folks." "Whatever floats your boat." For me, the Berkshires do it. And cello music. And when I get cello music in the Berkshires, yes, that's a touch of heaven. I'm not exaggerating. You put me at a cello concert in the Berkshires, and I'll have the same powerful sense of God at work that all those people had on Pentecost.

Rivers inspire me. I hate to say it to a church full of Fairfield County, Long Island Sound, Penfield Beach ocean lovers, but rivers do it for me. The sound. The look. The location. You ocean lovers would probably say the same about your ocean, and that's the point. If my river lifts my spirit and fills me with a sense of God's presence, and your ocean does the same for you, good for both of us. We're both Spirit-filled and lifted up.

Books do it for me. Art does it for me. That's why I don't expect to work much this summer. The Clark Institute up in Williamstown, Mass., yes, in the Berkshires, has just been given eight paintings by George Innes, so they are having a major Innes exhibit all summer.

This works well for our marriage too. Alida has plans for the parsonage, and it always works better if I'm away. So she's already saying, "David, how about you go up to the Berkshires ... work on your book, see those great paintings, attend a cello concert, look at a river ... by yourself? In fact, I've made the reservation already, and here's a little spending money! See you in September!" So I think I'll just mosey on up there each week. Monday through Friday, take one of those little canvas chairs and sit in front of the Innes paintings.

You see, Innes was a landscape painter from New Jersey, actually, who purposefully used his landscape painting to bring the landscape and God into each other's embrace. Innes was a devout Christian, part of a little group called "Swedenborgians," and his paintings are meant to inspire, to put God's spirit in the viewer, in me ... and it does. Believe me, there's nothing overtly religious in any of his paintings. There's no crucifixion, no Nativity, no Virgin Mary, no Jesus, no Biblical imagery, no cross. Just Spirit. Just grass and trees and ponds and snow and an occasional farm house in the background. All filled with Spirit. There for the taking. And I take it.

I'm not saying you have to take it! I'm not saying you have to feel God in an Innes painting. I'm just saying it works for me. So I'm encouraging you to think carefully about what works for you, and then do more of it. Make that your summer goal.

Let me close by returning to us. It's our birthday, the birthday of Christ's church. Christ's church is closing in on 2,000 years old. This church is closing in on 300. Alida is nearing 25 years as your pastor; I'm nearing 20. So what are we here for after all these years? Our job, at its most basic, is to inspire, to lift you up, to give you a sense of God's presence in your life.

I used to have a man in my New York City church, a Madison Avenue advertising executive, an original "Mad Man," like the TV show. And he used to say to me, "David, there are a lot of people in my life who get paid a lot of money to make my life miserable all week long. So when I come to church, I don't need you to make me feel more miserable! I need to feel better when I leave than I did when I came in." In other words, "Inspire me."

That conversation changed my life, my ministry, my preaching. I used to be good at beating people up. I could correct and harangue and browbeat and guilt trip Sunday after Sunday. Heck, I came of age in the '60s and '70s — the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights era — so I was a master at exposing everyone's "bad." But my "Mad Men" friend needed to feel God's "good."

That's "in-spirit-ization."

The Bible tells us "God is Good." (Matthew 19:17) Inspiration is putting God in you. That should feel good. That's our job.