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Alexandria, VA 22310  
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Numbers 11:24–30  
Acts 2:1–21

## **SPIRIT FILLED**

Imagine you are still looking for a church home—a place to worship. You might list your priorities and for each one of us, there would be slight variations. They would be a little different than our neighbors' priorities. But no matter what, they would all likely bear a strange resemblance if we look beneath the words. You see, we are all hungry today for the same types of spiritual food. We may share it in a different fashion, but we are looking for beauty and excellence. We are looking for joy and laughter, prayer and peace, healing and wholeness, freedom and justice. We are searching for the gift to learn how to be generous and to learn how to receive, how to be mission people and how to share with one another. We want, all of us, the same types of experience because we are all hungry to connect with God.

And God pulls us to God's self in such a way that eventually we learn connecting with God requires that we connect to one another. I'm not sure when I became fully aware of the difference between a sail boat being pushed through the water and pulled through the water. By all appearances it seems that the wind forces the sailboat along from behind, but in reality you can only become a proficient sailor when you understand that you're being pulled by the wind. The same is true for airplanes. And the same is true for Pentecost Sunday. When we celebrate that God is pulling us in this journey of living, it makes our responses—the slight variations we each have on moving the tiller to or fro or trimming the sail a different way—have meaning, but any good sailor knows that the secret is the wind, the way that it crosses—caresses, if you will—our very souls.

When Jesus sent his disciples to Jerusalem, he pulled at them to be filled with the same spirit that multiplied loaves and fishes that fed the hungry and healed the sick, that opened the hearts and minds to the windfall of God's grace. Have you ever heard that expression before? "A windfall?" I think Presbyterians kind of have an aversion to windfalls. They seem to indicate that we might have forgotten to do something in an orderly fashion, or someone else might have, and that's why we are recipients of good fortune—windfall. We would rather earn it, save it, and invest it than get it for nothing. Wouldn't we? Come on. Be honest!

You know where the term came from? Evidently in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, William the Conqueror became the King of England. And one of the first laws he enacted was to make it illegal for peasants to cut down any of his trees or any of his cronies' trees. It seems that powerful King William was fearful that the peasants were cutting down too many trees for firewood or to repair their homes. So the new king decreed that they could only use trees that were blown down in a storm. So back when someone came across a tree that had fallen down because of the wind they began to refer to this as a

windfall. Now the only problem with these windfalls is that you have to be willing to stop what you were doing long enough to take advantage of them.

Grace is like discovering a windfall. It is amazing and surprising like the benefits of a windfall. And grace accomplishes some familiar tasks in our lives if we stop long enough to be filled with God's spirit.

I'm going to take a chance on being misquoted or misunderstood, a chance of going back, not to something I learned in seminary, but to something I learned from the tradition of putting a glass in a pitcher of milk to explain being filled with the Holy Spirit. I circled this word on my notes—put question marks around it. I have prayed about it and wondered, "Can I really say this?" So here goes.

Being filled by God's spirit *always* means love and laughter, erupting in abundance. It *always* means overcoming fear and scarcity. It *always* means melting away prejudice. It *always* means outsiders are becoming insiders ... that freedom is the norm rather than oppression (strict demands which enslave our spirits, bind our hearts so that we can no longer embrace one another). When we are filled by God's spirit, we are *always* more concerned with the law of love than the letter of the law, which the law of love completely encompasses. Being filled with the spirit is clearly important. If you look back at the book of Acts, in the first 13 chapters of our church history, being filled with the spirit occurs over 40 times. Evidently the more something is repeated in the Testament, the more important it is. Have I ever mentioned how many times Jesus talked about stewardship? (But that's another sermon, right? Just for a second there, you were really scared.)

We can experience the spirit—the empowering spirit—if we are willing to see it like a third birth. Just as God is the source of our life in the beginning, and just as God so made the world that we were born anew in Jesus Christ, the spirit of God will take the befuddled and tired discipleship and surprise it with new life as if it's been born a third time—surprise us with community and order in ecclesia. In the United Church, we used to so love referring to Bush Hill United Presbyterian. The Holy Spirit *always, always, always* brings about unity, not division.

Now it may act differently in each of us, but it will never allow us to intellectualize our faith in such a way that it's OK for us to be hurtful to one another. And no matter how safe or predictable we attempt to make being filled with the spirit, it will not allow us to claim the parts of our past to limit us or to control us to the point where we can't enjoy life as God intended. Rebirthing us, filling us, this spirit *always* pulls us into the needs of community—the needs of one another over our individual needs. Isn't that what we are going to be doing this very day in just a few hours? Isn't that what we are going to be doing tomorrow night and Tuesday afternoon? When we celebrate the resurrection, the witness to Jesus Christ overcoming death, aren't we celebrating the re-birthing God has given Elizabeth Thompson and Syl Shannon; and maybe, just maybe, we will be surprised to discover God is waiting to fill us, to renew us, to re-birth us into this body of Jesus Christ. Amen.