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Teaching: Carlon Tschetter
Series: People in Step with the Spirit
Message: The Spirit Filled Church

Transcribed Message
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Acts 2:41-47

We have seen a lot of these church signs. You see a lot of the signs that are put up on various churches whether electronic or otherwise. Sometimes they are humorous. Sometimes you laugh. Sometimes you cry. Sometimes you cringe. I'm not sure where this first one fits. It says, "Tweet others as you would like to be tweeted". That might be cringe worthy. How about this one? "God says, 'Don't make me come down there'". Another one: "Honk if you love Jesus. Text while driving if you want to meet Him". This one would've been a little more appropriate a few weeks back. "Whoever's praying for snow, please stop". I don't know who put this one up but obviously the pastor didn't. "Now is a good time to visit. Our pastor is on vacation". You could do a lot with that one. I'm not sure that it would be of any help to us this morning to think along those lines. But how about if you went by a church and you saw a sign that said "A Spirit filled church".

A Spirit filled church. We could think about what that even means. What does that even mean? How would we know if we went there? What would we be looking for? What would we expect to see or experience or to realize if we went to a church that had a sign saying a Spirit filled church? Well, I know where we can find the answer at least in part. We can go to Acts chapter 2, so let's do that.

In Acts chapter 2, we get to look inside the church of Jerusalem. As we go into the church of Jerusalem, we get to see what is not a perfect church because perfect churches don't exist this side of glory. But we do get to see a church that I think falls within the definition of being a Spirit filled church. So here's what we're going to do this morning. We're going to finish our series on people who are walking in step with the Spirit. We finally get to come to the wrapping up of this wonderful series on the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit. As we do that this morning, we want to see when the Spirit is present in a church it's obvious. It's obvious because Jesus is exalted. It's

obvious because the gospel gets lifted up constantly and it is central and is the focal point. It is obvious because people are seeing their lives changed.

So a very quick review. A number of things that we looked at over these many months together. The first one is that the Holy Spirit is God. The Holy Spirit is God. The Holy Spirit is not any less than the God the Father or any less than God the Son. We are Trinitarian in our faith. We believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit, secondly, is a person. The Holy Spirit isn't a force. The Holy Spirit isn't a power. The Holy Spirit isn't an it. The Holy Spirit is God and the Holy Spirit is a person. We relate to the Holy Spirit as we relate to any other person. That's the way that the Bible presents this relationship.

Thirdly, the Holy Spirit's number one desire is to glorify Christ. It is to exalt Christ and to point us to Christ. You don't have to take my word for that because in John 16:14 that's exactly what Jesus said. He said when the Spirit comes, He is going to glorify Me, to point people to Me. That's the main desire of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is essential to living the Christian life. In fact, not only do we say the Holy Spirit is essential to living the Christian life, we say that it is impossible to live the Christian life apart from the Holy Spirit. Everything else that we would do, we would be attempting to do in our flesh. Our memory verse says it is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and life. It is the Spirit who gives life. It is the Spirit who enables us. It is the Spirit who we saw has given us the Word of God. It is the Spirit who filled Jesus every day of His life and on and on we go in terms of the ministry of the Holy Spirit to us.

So let's center in this morning on what does a Holy Spirit church look like? How do we know when the church is filled with the Spirit? What will we find in that kind of a setting? Again this is an abbreviated list for sure. We're going to look at three broad categories and some things within that. Let's start off by looking at Acts 2 and seeing first of all a Spirit filled church has a shared identity. A Spirit filled church has a shared identity.

It all begins on an amazing day that is described for us in Acts chapter 2 and verse 41: "So those who received his word were baptized and there were added that

day about 3000 souls.” Here you have a day like no other day that has never broke upon the people of God at this time period. Here we have behind us the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the ascension of Christ, and so now we’re 50 days past the ascension. Hundreds of thousands of people came to Jerusalem annually to celebrate the Feast of Harvest. Hundreds of thousands of people have come to Jerusalem on this occasion. This is the day that is before us. This amazing day and what happens here is exactly what Jesus said would happen. Jesus had promised, He had prophesied that on that day coming the Holy Spirit was going to be sent and was going to come and fill God's people in a new and different way. That has been realized. Here is Peter. Peter, remember the apostle who denied Jesus three times. Here he is on the day that we call the day of Pentecost and he is filled with the Spirit. He is empowered by God and he delivers what must've been an incredibly powerful message because what happened is described for us in verse 37. The people are so convicted by the words of Peter and he explains to them the truth in a way that they had never heard before. As the Holy Spirit gave them understanding verse 37 says basically they wanted to know what should we do? How do we respond to this message? This truth that we have heard. How is it that that we can have a relationship with God? That's what they wanted to know. Of course Peter tells them that they need to repent. They need to believe. they need to see Jesus as the Messiah in a way that they had not before. So they believed.

Do you know what they did after they believed? They were baptized. They believed and they were baptized. They believed and they gave a public proclamation of this new faith that they had just received. So this band of 12 that Jesus had chosen that we know as the apostles grew to 120 that went out when Jesus sent them out. Then it grew even larger to 500 to whom Jesus appeared to after His resurrection. And now on one day, this amazing day, this day of Pentecost, 3000 more people believe and are added to the number. What were they added to? What were they joining? Well it was a new beginning, wasn't it? It was a new beginning. Pentecost marked the beginning of the church. Jesus said in Matthew 16 I will build my church. He was looking forward to this amazing day. e was looking forward to Acts 2. He was looking forward to the coming of the Holy Spirit. On this amazing day Jesus said I will build my church.

The word church there is *ekklesia*. It means called out ones. I'm going to build the called out ones. We're called out from the world. We're called out to Christ. It is those that are in view here. It's not just an individual choice. It is not just the individual decision. It's not just connecting yourself to some voluntary club. It is a commitment that you're making and you're brought into a whole new identity. All of a sudden everything in your life begins to take on a different perspective. As they believed they were baptized in Jesus's name because now they have a new identity. They're a part of a new beginning. The body of Christ is being formed.

Then thirdly, this new identity is related to people who have received the good news. They've received the gospel. So when you are in a Spirit filled church, as we said at the beginning, you're going to know because the gospel, the good news is everywhere. It's being talked about constantly. It's the centerpiece. It is the focal point. Who Jesus is, what He has done, and what we need to do in response to that. So here is a congregation of people who have come to faith in Christ.

Remember that encounter in John chapter 3 with Jesus and Nicodemus? Nicodemus is a religious leader. He is a rabbi. Ask anybody on the streets of Jerusalem who knows anything about anything going on in the religious circumstances of Jerusalem, and they would probably have known about Nicodemus. If you had asked them if this guy was going to heaven, I can assure you they would've almost all have said yes, he's a good man. You remember what Jesus said to him? Nicodemus, being a good man is not good enough. You have to have the very righteousness of Christ in your life. In fact, Nicodemus, you have to be born again. That led to a wonderful conversation about what that meant. It was the same thing that John said in John 1:12 – but as many as received Him, to them He gave the right, the power, the authority to become children of God, even to those who believe on His name. 2 Corinthians 5:17 if any person is in Christ. Don't go through that too quickly. If any person is in Christ. They have believed in Christ. They have received Christ. They have trusted Christ. They have understood and believed the gospel. That's what gives you a new identity. Getting a new identity isn't joining a church. It isn't even being baptized per se. It isn't living the best life that you can, although those things are all good. This new identity is intimately connected with and connected to the gospel.

We hear so much today about people needing to find themselves. I've not been on that journey thankfully. I was lost but then I got found by Jesus. People talk about the need to find themselves. You know the only way you find yourself truly is to find yourself in the gospel. The only way to truly find yourself is to find your identity in Christ, to find out why it is that God made you and what He has in mind for you and how much He loves you and His plan for your life. That's what gives you a new identity. So the first thing we see is not the end but it really is the beginning. This new identity marks how the church can be a Spirit filled church.

Secondly, it is a church that has a shared activity. So a Spirit filled church has a shared activity. There are two things in particular here. You look at verse 42 and you notice that they have a love for the Word. They have a love for the Word. They have a love for Bible doctrine. Look what it says: "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship and to the breaking of bread and the prayers." The first thing you want to notice about verse 42 is the very opening words. They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching. That word "devoted to" means to be occupied with. It means to give priority to in your life. It speaks of the intensity and it speaks of the continual nature of it. Just listen to those words. They devoted themselves to. It just sounds intense. They were devoted to it. They were devoted to it intensely and they were devoted to it continuously. It was the Word of God that had captured their hearts and occupied their mind.

I shared a couple weeks ago at the children's and student ministry volunteer dinner that on Wednesday night our men's group is reading and studying about the Puritans. Contrary to popular opinion, the Puritans were not a group of people who were concerned that there was somebody somewhere in the world smiling and having fun and they were going to try and squash it. That is a caricature that is absolutely totally off the mark. If I were to describe myself today, I would love to be known as a Puritan. If you understand who the Puritans really were, you'd want to be a Puritan. That's our heritage as the people of God. In our reading, the last three chapters have been the best chapters of any study back to back to back of anything I've done in a long, long time. And it had to do with biblical preaching. It had to do with church and worship. It had to do with the Bible and how the Puritans viewed all of these things. With regard to

Biblical preaching, their preachers would preach for two hours and when it looked like they were starting to wrap things up, people would yell out don't stop, don't stop. I've had people yell stop, but I've never had people yell don't stop. They said don't stop two hours into it. They had an insatiable desire for the Word of God it. In that chapter of our study book, one of the reasons I like it so much in the chapter on the Bible it actually had a picture of the Puritan with the Word and underneath do you know what it said? People of the Book. People of the Book. Where did that come from? That's right out of Acts chapter 2 verse 42. They devoted themselves.

This is the great tragedy that we speak of often of our time, isn't it? The illiteracy of the Word of God on the part of the people of God. That was not the Puritans. They were devoted to the Word. In this case, it says they were particularly focused on apostolic preaching, which is to say the apostles were bringing into clarity who Jesus is, what He did, and what it is that they needed to do in light of what He had done. So apostolic preaching is what the apostles were doing. They knew Jesus. They had been with Jesus. They saw the things that He did. They had seen the resurrected Christ. That's what an apostle was. When you get to Acts 1 and they had to replace Judas, they were looking for men who knew Jesus, who had been with Jesus, who had seen the resurrected Christ. Having had that experience, they were impacted forever. They're going all through this region into Jerusalem and they're preaching this apostolic message.

You know what that looks like. They were just helping people to see that in the Old Testament it's all about anticipation. The whole Old testament is anticipating the coming of Christ. The Gospels, which of course had not yet been written, were going to be about the manifestation. He's here. He's among us. The book of Acts turned out to be the proclamation. The epistles are the development of this apostolic preaching. They're explaining what this stuff means to the people of God. The book of revelation is the consummation.

Their credentials were the same credentials of Christ in the sense that they did signs and wonders and miracles. That's the impact that the lives of these men had as they pointed people constantly to the Word of God. Look over at chapter 4 and verse 31. "And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was

shaken and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.” Verse 33 “And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.” They were testifying to the fact that Jesus had been raised from the dead. So you had this great love for God's Word. They were preaching it. They were teaching it. They were reading it. They were studying it. But you know what? Most important of all, they were believing it and they were living it. They were believing it and they were living it.

Then secondly, there was a love for Biblical worship. You have this new identity. Out of that new identity flow these activities that are a part of being the people of God. The first one was a love for God's Word and Bible doctrine. The second one is a love for Biblical worship. Now what are you thinking when I say a love for Biblical worship? We could probably have hundreds of ideas of what that even means. We all have a different idea of what Biblical worship is. all I mean by that when I say they had a love for Biblical worship is they had a worship that was God-centered and God-focused. It was God-centered and God-focused on the transcendent God of heaven.

We understand the eminence of God. The eminence of God is the fact that He is here with us. He's present. He is omnipresent. That's the eminence of God. When you read the book of Acts, it's clear that they were caught up with the transcendence of God, the glory of God, the otherness of God. Fundamentally and foundationally, they were focused on God. My friends, the truth of the matter is this. We worship what we value most. We worship what we value most. Some of you value your mate, your spouse. Some of you value your children more than anything else in the world. Maybe your grandchildren. Well, grandchildren are exempt. Some of you value your home and your possessions more than anything else. When you find that to be true in your life, the Bible calls that idolatry and the Bible calls that worship of something other than God. Here these people are showing us the pathway.

Here we are in this postmodern culture. Again we're so focused on ourselves. This whole social media thing is basically our world turning itself inward constantly for self-affirmation on every level imaginable. And why? Because we've lost our understanding of the transcendence of God. We've lost our understanding of the very nature of God. That we could be preoccupied with ourselves? Seriously? How we feel.

What we like. But Luke in Acts 2 makes it clear that the church was focused on God. They were breaking bread. They were praying. They were praising God. And listen to what John Stott said: "Every worship service should be a joyful celebration of the mighty acts of God through Jesus Christ. It is right in public worship to be dignified. It is unforgivable to be dull." Francis Chan had somebody come up to him after a service years ago who said, Pastor, I really didn't like the worship today. Chan had a great response and he said, that's okay. It wasn't for you. and that really should be our hearts. It's so easy to make it about us when it's supposed to be about God. That's what I love about the words that we sing. So often they take us to the transcendence of God. This grace in which I stand. It's going to hold me till the end. Never failing. What is that? That's the transcendent nature of God at work in our lives, pushing back against all the thinking of the world that wants us to be occupied with self and so many other things. So we have a shared identity. We have shared activities.

Let's look at this last one. A shared community. A shared community. Now when I said "last", you were supposed to shout out, don't stop. A shared community verse 44 back in Acts 2. Look at verse 44: "And all who believed were together and all had things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with gladness and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

Three things. First, within the shared community, there's a lot of people loving each other. There's a lot of people loving each other. All you have to do is go back to the teaching of Jesus and in the Upper Room John 13, 14, 15, 16, 17. Two major themes come out of that. The theme of the Holy Spirit and the coming of the Spirit and the theme of loving each other. I think Jesus would rightly say to us this morning if you read through the whole of the Upper Room discourse and you get the idea that God the Spirit is coming to indwell you, to fill you, to control you, to glorify Christ through you, an indication of that is you're going to be loving each other well. I think He would say you've got it. This is what the Bible calls *koinonia*. It's fellowship. It's participating together. It is life in community. It's partnership. One of the ways that our shared love for

God flows out of our life is in keeping the first and greatest commandment and the second that is like unto it. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, your mind, with all your strength, and love your neighbor as you already love yourself. That's the essence of the greatest commands. So they bear with each other. We read that in Acts 2. They bear each other's burdens. They're sacrificially giving to meet needs in each other's lives. They're gladly fellowshiping in the Temple and in their homes. They're gathering and breaking bread and having fellowship together.

I'm pretty confident in a Spirit filled church where people are loving each other, there is also gentle confrontation when that is necessary. In a Spirit filled church, it's always safe to confess your sin. It is always safe to say I have failed. Help me in this area. But sin is never safe. It should always be safe for us to acknowledge our failings, but sin can never be safe. It can never be un-confronted. It can never go unnoticed in a Spirit filled church.

Secondly, there's a lot of people serving each other. There's a lot of serving each other. To worship God is to obey His Word. To obey His Word is to serve each other. We spent a number of weeks in this series looking at spiritual gifts. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:7 that the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. That is why you've been gifted in the way that you have. Not to take your talent and bury it, but to take your talent and cultivate it, to use it, to share it, to serve others. That's what's happening in the Spirit filled church. That is one of the clear demonstrations of a Spirit filled church that needs are being met. People are stepping into these gaps and they're serving. We've got an army of volunteers who are ready to go, willing and able to use the gifts that God has given them to use, and doing so not out of a sense of obligation, not because I have to. I'm not being drawn into this but doing it with a sense of joy.

Then notice lastly, a lot of people looking outward. Look at verse 47. We'll just read it again. "...praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." This is a response to Acts 1:8 when Jesus said, you wait here. The Holy Spirit is going to come and you'll be witness. You'll be witnesses in Jerusalem and in all of Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth. Do you know what that looks like in the book of Acts? This outward look on the part of the people of God? Moving beyond the holy huddle of being in this place and

enjoying this fellowship, which we rightfully treasure and should but going out into the world with the hope that we have in Christ. Do you know what that looks like in Acts? It's no more beautifully depicted than in Acts 17:6 when the officials of the city are all upset because the Christians are doing what? These Christians, Luke records, are turning the world upside down. Since the world is already on the wrong side, the Christians are coming and they're actually turning it right side up. The leaders of this city, because of the impact of the gospel, are saying this in criticism, but it's really a praise. It's really an accolade. They think of it as a criticism and it really should be viewed as something that is positive or an accolade. These people are turning the world upside down.

So here are these believers. Listen. They're living in a polytheistic society. They're living in a gladiatorial type mentality and society. They're living in a society that is sexually immoral and perversion abounds all over the place. The family unit is being destroyed without any justification needed. Abortion and infanticide were regularly a part of the 1st century experience in which Jesus and the early church lived. Into that culture and into that world steps the Gospel and the people of God. And if that world sounds familiar, it should because that's 21st century America. We live in a self-consumed world. We live in a polytheistic, any god, anytime, anywhere goes. Just take your choice because it doesn't really matter. Increasingly almost a gladiatorial type mindset and outlook. Sexual perversion everywhere. The family home and unit under incredible assault. Abortion and infanticide cheered. That's not just the 1st century. That's 21st century.

But here's the question. This is the world that the church stepped into and Luke says the public officials' criticism of the church is these people are going everywhere and turning this world upside down. So I guess we need to stop and ask is the second part of this a reality. I think maybe at times it's not so much a reality because we're not focused as we should be on the transformational nature of the gospel. We are a people who are often forgetting and not mindful of this new identity that we have in Christ, of who we really are as the people of God. We're not sharing fully in this insatiable love for the Word of God and the worship of this transcendent God. We don't take it as seriously as we should the value and importance of community and life together.

AW Tozier said this: "If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95% of what we would do would go on. If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church in Acts, 95% of what they were doing would stop. Everybody would know the difference." When you are in a Spirit filled church, it's obvious because Jesus is the centerpiece. Jesus is the one who is exalted. It is the gospel that is constantly front and center, lifted up as the focal point. Lives are being changed.

So what do we take away? Two things. Let me ask a few questions. Do the things described in Acts describe us? Can we make the transference? Here's Acts 2 and here's the church. Does this look like Covenant Community Church today? Are we living in the light of our identity? Are we engaged in activities that promote growth in Christ? Are we sharing in community? Maybe even more importantly at this point is to ask this question: Do these things describe me? Do these things describe you? If we don't have them personally, if we don't have it individually, we're sure not going to have it corporately. The only way to experience these things is to know, understand, and believe the gospel.

That is what we get to celebrate. We get to celebrate people coming to know, understand, and believe the gospel. That gospel that says that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son Jesus that whoever believes in Him, whoever trusts in Him, whoever lets go of everything else and says I put my faith and trust in Christ alone, to that person God says He gives the gift. The gift, not the reward. The gift of eternal life. We would offer that to each this morning. The consideration of whether you have put your faith and trust in Christ as your Savior and believed in Him for this wonderful gift of eternal life.

Let's pray. Father God, thank You for this amazing look for these many weeks and months at the work and ministry gift of the Holy Spirit of God. Lord God, let us be forever changed by the truth of Your Word, by our absolute dependence on Your Holy Spirit. And Father God, we pray that the things of Acts would increasingly be the things of Covenant and that we would live out this identity of who we are in Christ. Father, that we would commit ourselves to activities that promote growth in grace. And Father, that we would be this amazing community of people who grow and will be changed together. We ask in Jesus's name, Amen.