This past January, I was driving south on I-25 between Cheyenne and Fort Collins. It was a typical day for that time of year: winds gusting between 40-60 mph, buffeting my little car wildly. My hands gripped the steering wheel to keep me safely between the lines as I passed through the wind-break made by a tractor trailer, preparing myself for the next punch of wind as I broke free from its temporary shelter.

You’ve had that experience, haven’t you?

I hit an open stretch where it was just me on the highway: eastern plains laid out to my left and Rocky Mountain foothills slowing rising in the west… gorgeous.

In the openness, my eyes easily caught a hawk just off the side of the road. What kept my attention was that it seemed to be floating in place. Not riding the air like when you see them soaring high up:
- it was as if a mobile were strung from the sky,
  hanging in perfect stillness for a few moments;
  or like a tetherball left to settle long after recess is over.

Still. And then it started flapping. Strong, amazing wings powerfully propelling it forward into the wind—except not! It remained in the same spot; I knew because it was suspended directly over a speed limit sign, so I could really see its lack of forward movement.

And after some fierce seconds of wings doing their utmost, there it remained, still again—above the sign...just hovering...resting in place.

I was in awe: how amazing (I thought) are both the wind and this creature that can capture its flows.

At first I wondered if it could be at all perturbed at its predicament:
- no progress toward a more placid destination
  or some mousey morsel on the ground.

I continued down the road contemplating its possible frustration for a little while... when just a few miles later, I came upon yet another hawk doing the exact same hover---beat-hover---beat dance, suspended over yet another perspective-enhancing highway sign.

And I laughed.
And had this sense that the hawk was laughing with me:
“Hey, look at me! I’m flapping but not moving. Watch me flap without flying!”
(Yes, I sometimes give animals voices in my head).

There I was, alone in the car, laughing out loud like a crazy lady, as I imagined a bird teasing me. It was an awe moment.

A holy moment.
Mountains. Sky.
The wind, the highway, the hawk, and me.
Inspiration.
Have you had moments like that?
Moments that no camera could fully capture?
That no words can really recreate?

I felt the need to somehow express my great appreciation for this stunning landscape in which we live.
But lacking any concrete ideas, I instead drove straight to Barnes & Noble and bought a copy of James Michener’s *Centennial*. If I couldn’t do anything else, at least I’d read about Colorado’s land.

When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place. And suddenly there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind...Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared, and a tongue hovered over each of them.

And they were filled:
filled with the Holy Spirit, with awe, with inspiration.
They were talking crazy! People thought they were drunk.

...Do you see how something like this could happen?
In ordinary, everyday circumstances...the Spirit sparks!

And when it sparks,
it can either catch hold
or dwindle and fade.

As you know, the disciples were moved.
They responded to their inspiration.
They didn’t sit and savor it for too long—they shared it.

Because one of the things I’ve come to realize about inspiration:
it’s quick...and like a good gust of wind, it doesn’t stay too long.

But the disciples captured it!
They rode the waves of their insight right then,
when the city was full of pilgrims for the holy day:
Parthians and Medes and Elamites and all those
wonderful foreigners whose nationalities we stumble over.
The disciples took advantage of the
combination of circumstance and motivation.
How exciting when the components come together that way!

But let’s back up a little.
What were they hoping to accomplish with this drunken display of speaking out?
What were they wanting to tell the world with their newfound tongues?

Jesus had called these disciples out of their ordinary lives and showed them a different way to live.
No, they didn’t have stability in the economic and familial senses,
but they did learn justice for the impoverished and the imprisoned;
they had learned compassion for the ill and neglected;
they had learned new ways of seeing women and children and Samaritans and Romans and all people they had originally viewed as “other.”
The disciples—in choosing to follow Jesus rather than culture—
had themselves become agents of change in their culture.

And then Jesus (their inspiration) was arrested, tried, and executed.
Devastating.
Until they saw him again, spoke with him, ate with him—great!
But now he’s gone again. “Ascended into heaven.” Now what?

Well, now they were gathered in one place, and they experienced a moment of awe, inspiration—a remembrance of the hope and meaning that Jesus had instilled in their once-ordinary lives—the Holy Spirit struck!
They remembered that they could still be agents of change, bringing Good News to this world Jesus loved.

Maybe for the disciples this moment started as seemingly insignificant (like a silly bird floating beside a highway on a drive home).
But the disciples stayed with their moment. Captured it.
They responded to that feeling with action:
they went out and talked to the people...
and that’s how this whole Christian movement found momentum.

Don’t you want that?
In those times when an Aha! gusts into you—when awe overwhelms you or injustice calls out to you—
don’t you want to have a way to respond? to act on it?
Sometimes we just get stuck (and maybe like me you end up buying a book to read about this thing that’s gripped your spirit rather than acting on it).

The Acts of the Apostles is the name of the biblical book this reading comes from. Acts: the actions taken that have enabled Jesus’ way of life to be passed along...

What acts have you been inspired to in your life?
I imagine you’ve had times of great wonder and inspiration that have built a longing in you.
And sometimes—because you couldn’t act soon enough or because enough like-minded passionate people weren’t around you—because there wasn’t enough kindling, maybe your spark didn’t ignite.

But I think of those times when the various pieces were all in the right place at the right time—like the disciples all being in Jerusalem still when the crowds arrived and could be reached and inspired, too.

I think of abolitionist churches in the north who felt called to act against slavery but didn’t know exactly what they could do because they were so far from the South.
Then one day in 1839 the schooner Amistad sailed into Long Island Sound.
Enslaved Africans had broken their chains and seized control of the ship, demanding they return to Sierra Leone. Instead they found themselves imprisoned in Connecticut while the ship’s owners sued for return of their “property.”
Desire to act and the right moment converged in tangible work: inspired people provided food, housing, acted as lawyers, and connected with real people in real need.

I think about the delegates to our UCC’s 1973 General Synod; people who’d traveled to St. Louis from all over the U.S. for our biennial national church conference to sit on committees and vote on issues of governance; people who’s desire was to serve the church.
In the middle of the meeting, labor organizer Cesar Chavez contacted members of the UCC to tell them that “farm owners had unleashed a campaign of violence and beatings against strikers.” So the church suspended the business of the meeting and chartered a plane to fly delegates to Coachella Valley to show support.¹ The right time and circumstances allowed the Spirit to move with more power for good because those delegates were a community gathered and inspired.

The spark of the Spirit happens in crazy, ordinary moments: a ship sailing off-course, a regular church meeting. But we need the kindling. We need the gathering of people sometimes to be sure we follow through, to make powerful, life-changing action a possibility.

*And isn’t that what church is meant to be?* …the church as born on that Pentecost in Jerusalem with some ragged disciples all of a sudden feeling the wind and getting drunk on what was possible.

> The church is here to be that catalyst— a group of people who is inspired to action on behalf of God’s shalom.

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We don’t need an *Amistad* or farm-worker’s crisis; we have hawks on the wind to inspire us! There are needs right here in our community.

When the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency raided some homes in Cheyenne 2 years ago, the Spirit inspired people to act.

> When a family came through Fort Collins last winter and needed emergency shelter during an ice storm, the Spirit inspired people to act.

And maybe we don’t always know about the emergent crises around us, but there are ongoing ones: One Congregation One Family is trying to start up again to get a homeless family into their own home: but we need a mentoring team to step forward, to be ones who support real people right here in Fort Collins.

> Perhaps it’ll be one of those families served by Faith Family Hospitality, which can also use volunteers making meals and caring for those spending weeks sleeping on cots in churches around town.

> Not sparked by those? That’s okay!

There are still needs for flood relief efforts—everything from helping clear debris and rebuild in Lyons to yesterday at the Ranch stuffing sandbags for the inundation in Greeley.

> Or if the Spirit is driving you to improve the lives of children, the Global Ministries team is working to support the Lango Kindergarten in Wosha, Ethiopia—go to the dinner they’re hosting this week.

> Don’t wait when you feel that spark! It may not last.

We are not lacking in opportunities to ride the winds of the Holy Spirit and build the kingdom of God right here in Colorado.

> From plains to mountains; from hawks to humans.

Engage.
When tongues of fire hover over you
or gusts of wind blow through you;
  when your wonder is stoked by beauty or
  your passion fueled by injustice,
    don’t let the moment fade.
    Bring it here. Seek out others in this place called church;
      this is your Jerusalem crowd!
Sure: we might start out by calling you drunk,
but if you persist in sharing the Spirit as you’ve been inspired,
chances are someone else will catch it from you
and take action at your side.

That is what this Holy Spirit thing is about.
That is what church is about.

Feel the wind. Feed the flame.
    Build the kin-dom of God.

Amen.

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\(^{1}\) quote taken from UCC Firsts page: http://www.ucc.org/god-is-still-speaking/firsts/ucc-firsts.html