

# Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

## Mystic, Connecticut

Sermon from May 23, 2010

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**“WINDED”**

Scriptures:

Acts 2:1-21



English language experts observe, and sometimes bemoan, our strong tendency to make nouns into verbs. It's called verbalizing nouns and we've been doing it for decades. And one of the oldest examples of it is the word "room". Rather than say, "I share a room with him," we have shortened it to "I room with him," turning the noun "room" into the verb "room." Very recent verbalization can be found abounding in our cyberspace circles. "Google", the name for a search engine on the Internet, a noun, has become a very popular verb meaning to search for something on the Internet. If you're looking for information, you "google" it. If you're trying to find out something about a person you don't really know, you "google" him. We are all advised to "google" ourselves to see what information may exist out there about us of which we may not be aware.

The other noun turned verb which is in very common usage now – and we've talked about this one before – is friend. Thanks to the popularity of the online social medium Facebook, when we add or delete friends from our access list, we say we "friend" them or "unfriend" them. And this one was recently overhead in the supermarket line: "Can you watch my carriage? I need to ATM".

I bring this up this morning because during my contemplation earlier this week of the first part of the second chapter of Acts, which we just heard, I found myself surprised by my falling easily into the verbalization of the noun "wind". We read in Acts 2:2: "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." I think it can be said that the apostles in the upper room were winded by the Holy Spirit. And a working definition of the verb "to wind" may be this. To wind is to visit a mortal in a sudden or startling way, accompanied by the sound of rushing wind, limited to the Holy Spirit. So, to be winded is to be visited by the Holy Spirit in a sudden or startling way, accompanied by the sound of rushing wind. Using it in a sentence: Praise God, I've been winded! Blessings be upon you – you've been winded!

Now, here's the hang-up. We already have a word "winded". It's an adjective meaning out of breath. You run up the stairs, you may get winded. We see athletes interviewed after intense competitions on TV and we can see their chests heaving, trying to take in air, they're winded. You smoke cigarettes, or you're out of shape, or you're sick and you get winded. Not enough wind.

In fact, that wind, our precious breath, is essential to our lives. We usually don't pay much attention to it unless we're short of it. And in some arenas, the *way* we use our breath is central to the activity in which we're engaged. In labor and about to deliver a baby? We're coached on breathing through the pain of contractions. Stressed or upset or hurried? We're advised to take long deep breaths and let them out slowly to calm ourselves down. Singers breathe in a special way from the diaphragm and practice holding notes so they don't run out of breath. Reed and wind instrument musicians need to know how to breathe correctly to produce sound. We can have the wind knocked out of us by a sudden blow to the body. We need that breath. We can't live without it.

And for something so important, it's amazing that we can't see it. On cold mornings outside, even adults will exclaim, "I can see my breath!" The trees move and bend, the leaves gently flutter, but we can't see the wind anymore than we can see our breath. It moves in and out of us and around us and when it's cold, it seems to blow right through us.

Breathe on me, breath of God. We frequently refer to the Holy Spirit as the breath of God. Our tradition interprets that rush of wind on Pentecost as the breath of God. We associate the Holy Spirit not only with tongues of fire and descending doves, but with the rush of wind. Some who report intense religious experiences often say it was accompanied by a sound of wind.

It would be awkward, I think, to say the apostles had been "fired" or "doved", but winded somehow sounds appropriate. The apostles were winded. I've decided that a way to clarify and separate the holy "winded" from the "winded" meaning out of breath is to capitalize the former. So if you've been Winded by the Holy Spirit, you capitalize it. That Winded begins with a capital W. The lower case winded means you're out of breath, you've temporarily lost your breath. And this is why I think that may work well.

We've all been Winded by the Holy Spirit. You may not remember or you may not have noticed. If you were baptized as an infant, when that water hit your forehead (and I've seen this happen), you caught your little breath in surprise and then drew in the breath of God. You were Winded by the Holy Spirit when you looked up the church aisle and saw your bride on your wedding day and caught your breath at the sight of her and then drew in the breath of God. The first time you saw your children, you caught your breath in wonder and then drew in the breath of God. The same goes for the intense beauty of sunsets and the mountain vistas and the views of the sea – we catch our breath at the wonder of God's creation and then we draw in the ever-present, surrounding breath of God.

The Holy Spirit Winded us all the times we were afraid and lost our own breath to the sudden news of an accident or a death, when our breathing was stifled by problems of every kind throughout our lives – financial, interpersonal, directional. The Holy Spirit Winded all of us on 9/11/01 and on November 22, 1963 and on December 7, 1941 when the wind was knocked right out of us in shock and we desperately needed the breath of God around us to take in in order to cope and to go on.

The Holy Spirit Winds us always – when we need it and when we’re not even aware of it – because, unlike the way we get winded, *losing* our breath, the breath of God never runs out, never comes up short, never gets knocked out. And every time we breathe it in, which is, indeed, with every breath we take, we find it impossible to hold it in there. We have to exhale, too, because, just like the apostles, we are called to exhale that love of God always and everywhere. As one of you shared with me recently, we need to smell the roses and blow out the candles. Breathe in the breath of God and blow out the love of God.

We will be Winded by the Holy Spirit even after our breathing stops. The rush of the wind of the Holy Spirit will whisk us away to eternity, will carry us on an unseen Godly breeze to the Source of that Breath where, like the miracle on Pentecost, we will need no special language, no understanding of verbs and nouns, where our searching of every kind will be over. In the meantime, while we’re all still breathing, may you always be Winded with a capital W. Amen.