



# TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*on the Branford Green*

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

*Blown by the Spirit Wind*  
*By The Rev. Sharon Gracen*  
*May 24, 2015*

"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." For anyone who has had such an experience of the Spirit Wind, you know that nothing is ever the same. I had my own in 1992 - the violent wind was the Indiana tornado variety. On the Sunday before Thanksgiving - not exactly tornado season, a twister skipped through the neighborhood in which our church, St. Alban's Episcopal, sat. It wasn't just the sound; it was also the fury, fury that destroyed houses but mercifully took no life except I think, mine. The moment I knew that I was experiencing the presence of the Spirit came the day after. I had driven through the torn up neighborhood to survey the damage to St. Alban's, particularly the brand new stained glass windows we had just put in. The brick A-frame church had escaped but not her neighbors. I was the last one to leave that morning and was just locking up when a volunteer fireman, who was also a member of the parish, came running up and said, "if you lock up the church, there are no working bathrooms in the neighborhood." In the elegant guise of providing bathroom facilities to disaster relief workers, I knew that something big was happening. How I knew that it was the Spirit, was the shimmer like electricity that ran up my arms and down my back. Life has not been the same since. Life was not the same for the apostles either. They were forced out of their hiding and into unsettling ministry that would carry them throughout the Middle East and into unexpected adventure and sometimes danger.

The arrival of the Spirit Wind always means some sort of new life. From the very beginning of creation, the Spirit Wind was God's instrument as it moved over the face of the waters getting things ready for light and then life. It was the original "something new" beginning.

In talking about the arrival of this Spirit Wind, Peter quotes the Prophet Joel, "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh..." and then he describes how people will be changed. The 2nd chapter of the Book of Joel describes this great day when God's plan will be fulfilled. The enemies that have laid waste to the land will be turned back and the land will once again produce abundantly. The people will be satisfied and never again put to shame. And right before that happens, the Spirit Wind will be poured out on the people, opening their eyes and ears to know what is coming. That's what Peter says has just happened.

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The Spirit Wind takes many forms but it always means the same thing. It is an expression of love from God. Sometimes it may be asking us to do something new for ourselves, to enter into new life. Other times, it may be blowing us toward action on behalf of others. Because the Spirit is God's language of love, that means that it is there all of the time, our job is to pay attention. The Apostle Paul lists the evidence or fruits of the Spirit. Those things that will be present when the spirit moves in our lives. They are love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. When any of these things shows itself we can have confidence that it is God's voice, whispering or shouting if that what you need.

The world of American religion received word this week that a great and gracious lady, Phyllis Tickle, has been diagnosed with stage four lung cancer. Phyllis has written and spoken for years about what God is doing in and through the Church. She does so with linguistic elegance tinged with Tennessee realism and humor. She has had several careers in teaching, publishing, writing, mothering and now she says that dying is her next career. When Phyllis walks into a room or gets up on a stage, you feel like the Spirit has just blown through and rearranged everything. Suddenly you see things more clearly, things that were right in front of you suddenly come into focus. She's a mobile Pentecost unit. She's my friend and soon I'll miss her. I will also never have a day that I'm not grateful for some bit of knowledge or example of what makes life holy. That's the fruit of Spirit.

Here's the Pentecost caveat - the Spirit Wind also blows vulnerability into our lives. Right off the bat, the love that it brings makes us vulnerable. It brings other risks too. Rachel Held Evans is another writer, a young voice in Christianity. Her latest book is called *Searching for Sunday*. and it chronicles her journey away from the Evangelical tradition that raised and nurtured her. At some point she found herself mired in questions, doubts and outrage at what she was experiencing. Too many things that were not in line with the fruits of the Spirit. The separation was painful and drawn out. At one point she and her husband and a small group of others started a new church - blown together by the Spirit Wind. They called it The Refuge and they did wonderful, loving caring things. In many ways they functioned like a 12 step program with its honesty and confession. People allowed their broken places to be seen and they found unexpected healing in the safety of a group of people with nothing in common but being on a journey of faith. They had an invitation rather than a creed. It ended with this..."We are old, young, poor, rich, conservative, liberal, single, married, gay, straight, evangelicals, progressives, overeducated, undereducated, certain, doubting, hurting, thriving. Yet Christ's love binds our difference together in unity. At the Refuge, everyone is safe but no one is comfortable."

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That's how you know that the Spirit Wind is blowing through your life - you are safe but not comfortable. I remember that feeling. Whenever we get comfortable, particularly in our religion, we are probably blocking out the call of the spirit. The Spirit Wind does not allow us to stay in one place, to stop learning, to stop growing. It always calls us to the uncomfortable place of newness, where we might be unsure or a little lost. But trust the Spirit Wind...it will never blow you to some place you don't belong. I know...look where I ended up.

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