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## *It's About the Wind*

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**A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam G. Candler**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**  
**Trinity Sunday**  
**John 3:1-17**

*"The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it;  
but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.  
So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8)*

It's about the wind. My life has always been about the wind.

In Coweta County, I grew up at the top of a large hill, totally exposed to the west. Every evening, I could watch the sun set over the broad pastures below and distant trees on the horizon. In the summertime, I saw huge clouds roll in with the wind, bringing storms week after week.

That wind cooled us in the summertime. In fact, my parents never had air conditioning in our home while we were growing up. For some odd reason, they installed air conditioning only later, after the four of us children had left home! So, until then, in the summer, the wind cooled us just fine.

In the winter, however, that wind was cold. Exposed to the elements, our house always froze in that winter wind, and then the car would not start either.

But I flew kites from that home on the hill. I made model rockets, from the Estes company. I launched those rockets at an angle into the west, so that the wind would then deposit them right back to where I had launched them. Back to home base.

It was when I was a teen-ager that I learned this passage from the Gospel of John, chapter three, where Jesus compares the journey of being born again, to the wind.

*"The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it;  
but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.  
So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

The instant I heard those words, I knew what he was talking about.

I was eager to be born of the spirit when I was in high school, because I wanted to be blowing in the wind, like so many others my age, singing and playing Bob Dylan, "Blowing in the Wind." That song was not teaching me anything; it was just declaring something poetically that I already knew was true.

I learned that both the Hebrew and the Greek words for wind are the same words for spirit. *Ruach* and *pneuma*. Wind and

spirit. We sang beautiful songs of the wind in those days:

"Wind, wind, blow on me,  
Wind, wind, set me free.  
Wind, wind, Jesus sent,  
The blessed Holy Spirit."

My favorite psalm became Psalm 104, a psalm in praise of creation. "Bless the Lord, O my soul," begins Psalm 104, and it continues, "you make the clouds your chariot, you ride on the wings of the wind, you make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers" (Psalm 104:3-4).

My life in Christ has been a life of being blown with the wind. I don't mean random meandering. But I mean listening for the wind in the trees, and in the hills, being willing to go where others might not want me to go. The wind of the Holy Spirit has blown me to some wonderful places.

It blew me out to California for school. I met the Holy Spirit lots of times out there. The wind blew me up to the Northeast, and I met the Holy Spirit there, too.

The wind has blown me home, too. The wind has blown me back to Georgia several times. From the northeast, the wind blew me to my first church, St. Jude's Church, in Smyrna. The wind blew me to South Carolina and then back to Cumming, Georgia. Lo and behold, the wind blew me to South Carolina a second time, and then the wind blew me to this church, the Cathedral of St. Philip, back home to Georgia again.

And here, I have stayed for quite a while"thirteen years. Here at the Cathedral of St. Philip, we have sailed with some very favorable winds together, and I thank you for those excursions, those missions, really. They have been excellent. We have also faced some ferocious storms, haven't we? But I thank God for those stormy times, too.

The wind of the Holy Spirit is not always gentle. It blows where it wills, and you cannot always tell where it is going. Sometimes, that wind has blown us toward new things that were ahead of their time; those things were difficult, but they were also refreshing.

It was the wind that prompted me this past year to offer my name as a candidate for bishop of Atlanta. I knew it would not be easy. Bishop's elections are highly charged, and they draw on perspectives and experiences that are difficult to analyze.

But I had to run, because I think God wanted me to offer a new kind of vision for the episcopate these days. The Christian Church needs bishops who like to preach and deliver the gospel to new places. The Church does not need more top-down hierarchy. The Church needs leaders who know how to "ride on the wings of the wind."

That wind has to be the Holy Spirit.

I am glad I ran for bishop. I hope the offering of myself, and whatever gifts I have, were good for the diocese, and for the general church discussion about our future. It was good for me, helping me to understand my role and my identity in this church.

I hope my running for bishop was good for you, too, this parish, the Cathedral of St. Philip. I was not elected, which is okay. A good person was elected. But I hope that my running has been an example to all of us, about what it means to take risks. We have done some great things here, but God would not have us stand still.

God always sends wind. It is our eternal challenge to catch that wind, to ride that wind. So, I hope that my running for bishop was an example of what it means to take a risk, to be willing to leave the safe harbor and venture out into the wind. I liked it!

Last year, on this very day, Trinity Sunday, I preached about relationship. I reviewed all the ways I have discussed the doctrine of Trinity here, but I ended up by talking about Trinity as "relationship." Because God lives in

relationship" "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" "we are meant to live in relationship, too. If we are made in the image of God, then we are meant to live in the same kind of Trinitarian loving relationship that God lives in.

But these relationships, in which we are meant to live, have to always be moving. They are like atoms. In an atom, with nucleus, protons, and electrons, those particles are always swirling about each other" "committed and drawn to each other, yes, but also swirling delightfully around each other and into time and space.

Our holy relationships are meant to be born of that wind, the holy wind, the Holy Spirit of God. I look forward to our next wind together. We are supposed to be born of the Spirit together!

You know, when it comes to literal sailing, I am not a very good sailor. It is very hard for me to sail against the wind. It forces me to tack one way, and then the other. Sometimes, I feel like I am losing wind.

But I do trust the wind. Because, even though the wind always takes me far away, the wind also brings me home again. The wind has taken me to some distant places, but the wind" "I mean, the Spirit" "the Spirit always blows me home again, too.

The answer is blowing in the wind. And the wind has always carried me home, the place of holy relationships.

I thank God that, today, I am home. Home with people I love. Home in a community I love. And, home, where I can be born again! Home, after all, is where you can be born again, over and over again.

So I am glad to be home today. Excited actually! I am glad, and hopeful, to be born again, with you.

Let's do it again! Let's be born again, from above, for the sake of the kingdom of God. It does not mean that things will always be easy. The wind might blow us away, for a time, again.

*"The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it;  
but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.  
So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

But the wind also blows us home. Yes, when it is of the Spirit, the wind blows us home again.

Thank you. I love the wind, and I love being home. I love you.

Amen.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler  
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