



# TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*on the Branford Green*

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

## **Saints and Babies**

**By The Rev. Sharon Gracen**

**November 2, 2014**

When I was living in Paris, I had the opportunity to watch a country embrace the tradition of Halloween as we do here. There were jack o' lanterns and spooky displays in the stores and children went out trick or treating in super hero costumes, all of the things we expect. And then the next year it was gone. The French Catholic Church had decided that this was an inappropriate display, something akin to devil worship and they were not happy. I remember being surprised by a French man who happened to be at the American Cathedral one day commenting on how the carved pumpkin that someone had put near the office was an abomination - and that we were worshipping something evil. All I managed to respond with was raised eyebrows and a confused smile.

I think that the confusion really comes from the fact that, like many Christian feast days, All Hallows Eve is an important day on the pagan calendar. It is called Samheim and is believed to be the night when the veil between our world and the next is at its thinnest. The thinness of the veil means that it is possible for ghosts and goblins to come through and make mischief. So rather than annoy these ghostly entities, the tradition of giving treat to those out and about on All Hallows Eve was to placate any that might do naughty things. The idea of pumpkins carved into scary faces was to frighten away the spirits. And while people were being keeping an eye out for mischief making spirits, it was also the time because of the thinned veil, to connect with loved ones who were on the other side of the veil, to seek their wisdom and guidance. So it was a day that the Christian calendar chose as a day of remembrance of those who have gone on; those we love but see no longer.

Jan Richardson is a Methodist minister and artist who lost her husband last December. They had met on Halloween and so this time of year is especially poignant for her. She reflected on this time of year in her lovely poem. She offers it to us with these words; "May our love be more fierce than our grief, more enduring than our tears."

### **It Is Hard Being Wedded to the Dead**

It is hard  
being wedded  
to the dead;  
they make different claims,



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offer comforts  
that do not feel comfortable  
at the first.

They do not let you  
remain numb.  
Neither do they allow you  
to languish forever  
in your grief.

They will safeguard  
your sorrow  
but will not permit  
that it should become  
your new country,  
your home.

They knew you first  
in joy,  
in delight,  
and though they will be patient  
when you travel  
by other roads,  
it is here  
that they will wait  
for you,  
here they can best  
be found

where the river runs deep  
with gladness,  
the water over each stone  
singing your  
unforgotten name.

All Saints Day is not just about remembering. It is a way of connecting our generations. As we celebrate the saints who have left this life, we also celebrate new life through baptism. Claire becomes one with a mighty family, a family that includes all of those that we will name today and every Christian who has ever or will ever live.



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This great extended family is what she will learn about in the years to come, through all of the saints who have left us their stories. She will learn about Mary, terrified but willing to step into God's story as the mother of Jesus. Clair will probably be her some year in the Christmas pageant. For a moment, the veil between the millennia will become thin for a little girl at Trinity Church in Branford as she puts on the robe and the blue shawl and walks with an unlikely Joseph up the inn door. She will sit with quiet amazement as shepherds and wise men come to see her child. She'll learn about the other Mary, the apostle to the apostles who carried the first news of Jesus' resurrection and wonder what her role was in the early church.

She will learn about the saints like Francis who is well known for his love of all creatures and less well known for his passionate commitment to justice. And Joan of Arc who was brave and made men afraid. Kings and poets and writers of transcendent music, they are all her spiritual family. We will teach her to know and remember them, to hear their wisdom, to accept their gifts.

Just as she has inherited beauty from her parents and grandparents, she has the spiritual DNA of Nelson Mandela whose grace and vision taught to an entire nation how to forgive. She may read the books of Madeline L'Engle (an Episcopalian) and have her imagination set free because Saint Madeline gave hers to all children. Perhaps she will learn bravery from Jonathan Daniels, the Episcopal seminarian who gave his life so that black Americans from the south could vote in the 1960s. Everything gift of grace, courage, joy and love, that Claire will ever need is held in trust for her in the Communion of Saints, her new extended family.

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