

**St. Mark's, Niagara-on-the-Lake**  
**The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, year 'B' (proper 26)**  
**26 September 2021**  
**The Rev'd Leighton Lee**

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Benjamin Disraeli once turned to a colleague who was dithering about the choices which faced him. “Damn your principles!” he shouted. “Stick to your party.” It seems that to Disraeli the choice was obvious: the party line.

Well, I suspect all of us have had enough of politicians and parties—and probably because so few of them seem to have any principles at all, except that of being elected. But to be fair, it can't be easy following one's principles in a highly partisan atmosphere.

There was a headline in the *Globe and Mail* last week: *Erin O'Toole and the Conservative Party Brace for an Ugly War Over His Shift to the Left*. One group even went so far as to issue a press release: “The Conservatives would've done much better if O'Toole had not alienated the party's socially conservative base with his shameless support for abortion, LGBT ideology, oppressive lockdowns and liberty-destroying vaccine passports.” Damn your principles! Stick to your party.

Well, he—and the rest of them—had better not or we'll all be going to polls again soon. But I have hope that they'll all recognize that sticking to the party is no way to go. They're going to have to work together and rally around principles we can all agree on. And I'm bold enough to suggest there are more of them than they want to admit.

In our gospel this morning John comes to Jesus and says, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” Here's someone who understands the importance of party loyalty. Yet Jesus says to him, “Do not stop him ... Whoever is not against us is for us.”

In other words there isn't an “in” group and an “out” group. Jesus and his Gospel are for everyone, and to insist that those who embrace it must be folks just like us is to miss the point entirely—especially since the gospel was given to the imperfect, the rotten, the miserable, the misguided, the forsaken in the first place. And let's not fool ourselves: you and I are *also* part of that group of the imperfect, rotten, miserable, misguided, forsaken, and lost.

But leave that aside for a moment because Jesus also said, “Salt is good.” And it is. If you've ever asked yourself why the food at a restaurant tastes better than what you make yourself, the answer is: salt—plain and simple. Any chef will tell you that most home cooks are so nervous about over-salting their recipes that they err on the side

of caution. And it can be a shocking experience to learn just how much salt actually goes into the Bolognese sauce at your favourite Italian restaurant.

That's not to say that salt can be overused. It can be oppressive. It can be destructive. Sometimes those professional chefs are too liberal with their use of salt, thereby ruining that lovely plate of pasta. But salt can be destructive in other ways, too. According to legend, the Roman general Scipio plowed-over and sowed the city of Carthage with salt after defeating it in the Third Punic War, thereby ensuring that nothing would ever again grow in those lands.

Jesus said "Salt is good." But if salt is to be good, it must be used in careful and appropriate ways, always aware that it has the potential to become unwelcome, oppressive, and destructive.

One of the tragic Christian impulses is a very unprincipled version of the "if you can't beat them, join them" mentality. You've all, I assume, seen the kind of Christian worship found on television. It's glitzy and appealing—attractive in its own way. Sometimes people seem to think that the way to get our Anglican parishes growing is to model ourselves after these "mega churches." After all, they seem to have it all: big attendance, attractive programs, young families, and lots of money. Yet we mustn't assume that faithfulness is shown only in numbers. The church of Jesus Christ isn't called to be measured by the ways of the world—numbers, success and money. We are called to the sacred principle of seasoning the world with God's Word of life and enlightening it with divine love—which takes time and involves some risk since it requires us to be open to people who aren't in our tribe.

We're called to subtle and often subversive work, and in a world which is obsessed with conformity, results, and profit, it's also often seen as unnecessary work. Nevertheless, it's the work of the Kingdom, work which has time and eternity stamped upon it, which is forged one link at a time, is seasoned gently and with great care, and is enlightened, little by little and person-by-person by the God who, in Christ, offered abundance of life to all!

You and I are called to be salt—to be God's love especially to those who have been left behind and forgotten by the world: the confused, the lost, the despised, the hungry, the ill, and the dying. God calls each one of us to look out on the world and to see that there is grime that needs to be cleansed, that there is hurt that needs to be healed, that there is thirst that needs to be quenched, that there is sight that needs to be focused, that there is darkness that needs to be banished, that there is love that needs to be given, and that there is abundant life *yet* to be lived.

*These* are the principles which we're called to live by. In a world in which the operating principle is tribalism and factionalism, we need to recognize that Christianity isn't an affair of party politics and personal advancement. You and I don't have a corner on God, nor are we called to sit selfishly in the corner hoarding the gifts of the Kingdom. What we *do* have is a divine mandate to let ourselves be

vessels by which the love of God in Christ can season the world. When we live this way, we discover the deep meaning of the gospel and see that the things we have given our loyalty to betray us, and there is only One who never forsakes. We come to understand that there are some things that no unworthy thought can drag downward. We find we have unconquered hearts that no tribulation can wear out and no unworthy purpose tempt aside. And we find, most importantly, that our freedom was wrought by the blood of One who gave everything to us, One who now bids us find life by claiming his cross as our highest and most incorruptible inheritance. One who says, "Damn your party. Stick to your principles. Stick to me."