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Trinity Musings #29: from Rev Brian Goodings trinityminister@bmts
Serving Trinity United Church: Collingwood

Someone once called the congregations of mainline churches like ours, the “Frozen Chosen”. During most worship services we sit politely trying not to fall asleep or check our watches and we rarely, if ever, move or sway to the music. It’s just not our style.

Ministers like me, take all or most of the parts of the service and the congregants silently sit through the worst and the best of what we offer.

It can be horrible, but keeping decorum is everything. After I’ve done my worst preaching people still don’t say much if anything to me. It’s like pretending not to notice a fart...everyone just hopes it will fade quickly and we can move on.

I do remember a very different man who used to come to a small church I served in the Ottawa valley. He lived outside most of the time and often slept in the ditch by the church.

During the service and especially the sermon, he would ask questions, out loud. Sometimes they were really good ones. He could quote chapter and verse of the Bible too and was nobody’s fool. He kept me on my toes and sometimes my carefully prepared sermon had to be shelved so we could debate. I learned a lot from his point of view in the world.

The congregation hated it and tried to keep him from coming. I loved his company and appreciated his challenges because it felt honest.

Sometimes, Canadians can be toxically polite. For instance, we hate the meal at a restaurant but tell the server it was fine and then even leave them a tip. Afterwards, we go online or at least tell others not to go there because the food was awful. Eventually the restaurant closes but never knows why people stopped coming.

The art of being honest (not brutally-honest) is really an art that seems to have been lost. Holding differences of opinion and having really good and elegant debates without attacking the person is much rarer now than it once was.

The current practices of almost all politicians are reprehensible. Anger, mudslinging and character defamation, not honest and respectable debate has become the norm.

Remember listening to the soaring and moving debates between John Diefenbaker and Lester B Pearson (aka Mike) about the new Canadian Flag? They were some of the finest debaters I can remember.

Listening to Pierre Elliot Trudeau (like him or not) debating others was like watching someone debone a chicken. And who can forget Stephen Lewis or Dalton Camp?

Airing differences of opinion used to be the start of good conversations not the end of discussion. After the politicians in earlier times had a good rousing debate, they went for a beer together.

Which finally, dear reader, brings me to the purpose and intent of the 29 Musings I've been sending out since the start of Covid.

I know the opinions expressed are not necessarily yours, and that mine are certainly not THE opinion of Trinity U.C. I've been delightfully engaged in email debates over differences in our opinions about lilacs, vaccinations, guns, cormorants, phone Apps, lawyers, my lack of reverence, my use of non-ministerial language and my unkindness and for some, "over-the-top" negative bias towards Donald Trump.

I don't mind the mail and I always appreciate your take on what I think or have said. The thing I want to emphasize above everything else is that the Musings are intended to provoke thought, not just provoke or shut down conversation.

We have been trained from a young age to sit silently in church; to be polite in society; and not feel we can voice disagreements. The worst outcome of any of these Musings would be that people, who are not in agreement with a particular point, remain silent and angry without communicating with me. Silence can be toxic. Relationships, restaurants and churches can all be damaged this way.

Please feel free to express your own thoughts...my email is at the top. I'll even have a virtual beer with you but, for the record, I'll NEVER support Trump.

I will however, support you and I do appreciate your honest opinion and when I think yer wrong...I'll let you know! You do the same.