



What to do when you keep losing

Because I nailed my colours to the Church of England at a relatively early age, I have a sympathy with any organisation that faces declining popularity, and so, whatever the rights and wrongs of it, my heart went out to the Labour Party this morning as the results came out indicating a heavy defeat.

Here's one thing I've learned. It's never the leader that's the problem.

Alright, maybe, just maybe, one in every twenty occasions, it's to do with the leader, but nineteen times out of twenty it's something else.

In this case, the roots of Labour identity go very deep and they've been slowly but steadily eradicated. The Labour party built itself from industrial trade unions, and they just don't exist any more. When was the last time you heard a Labour party spokesperson whose career progression was defined by a Trade Union? Even in my lifetime, that's what brought forth Dennis Skinner, John Prescott and Alan Johnson: but who now? I can think of Angela Rayner, but that's it. Instead, it's a host of former lawyers, financiers and party workers.

A bit like Anglicanism was hard wired into being English, for decades being Labour was hard wired into the character of most people brought up in Lancashire, Yorkshire and the North East. It was a Red Wall for a reason, and it funnelled up not just votes but also political leaders. But now that Labour tribe, a

uniting of workers and politicians, doesn't exist.

You can go into the reasons, but the most important thing to recognise is this: it just doesn't. And you could have Keir Starmer, Jeremy Corbyn, Tony Blair or the Archangel Gabriel as Leader, but it still doesn't, and you can't just change the world to make it so.

We often like sitting with the logic of the argument and think that that's the answer. In Church terms, if only we presented Jesus in this way, or that way, then it would all be alright and people would come to church. It is easy too to make some statements about the leadership. Academically minded people wish that bishops were more scholarly; parish minded people wish that bishops had more parish experience; evangelicals wish that bishops were more Biblical; liberals wish that bishops were better at connecting with the ordinary person... and so on. And any or all of those things might be true.

But sometimes, you're just caught in a wider cultural vortex, and you just aren't going to be able to turn around this super-tanker that's been drifting in a certain direction for longer than anyone probably realises.

If I were reading this as a Labour supporter, I suppose I would feel depressed. But what I'm learning from the Church is you just hang in there, do your best, and sometimes the wind changes. But know this: it probably wasn't you that got the wind to change.

May 7th, 2021 Thought for the Train is a short column by the Rev'd Robert Stanier, vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, in normal times for people to read on the train.