



“Resurrection Impact: Completely 1”

Seventh Sunday of Easter
5:30 pm Saturday, May 7, 2016
8:15 and 11:00 am Sunday, May 8, 2016
The Reverend John H. Brock
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21; John 17:20-26

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

I enjoy reading business news, and one of the things that interest me are mergers. There are corporate mergers happening all the time. Do you remember some of the recent ones that were attempted? 21st Century Fox made an \$80 billion offer for Time Warner, which didn't quite work out the way they wanted it to. Cigna Health Insurance's bid for the larger Anthem, which looks like it will finalize in 2017. And of course DISH Network's \$26 billion bid for Sprint Nextel, which was ultimately withdrawn.

Now, there are some that *have* worked out: Disney and Pixar, or Disney and Lucas Films. Both of those are pretty much an agreement to start printing money. Of course, from a few years back, there was Exxon and Mobil, a union of two, old 19th-century Rockefeller companies – their merger ended up creating the largest corporation in the world.

But mergers in general don't have a good success rate. If we start looking at mergers that failed, that list becomes long and depressing. In fact, one study set the failure rate for merging companies to survive at 83%. That's a failure rate of 83%. It's not easy bringing two corporations together.

It's not unlike a marriage. I do enough pre-marriage counseling, and I've been married long enough to know, that two people don't automatically get along with each other, just because they like each other. To have a good, strong relationship, it takes work, it takes effort; it doesn't magically “happen.”

The same is true with corporations. They have to work at it. They have to work at becoming something new.

I came across an interesting study in the *New York Times*.¹ They looked at divorce rates (this article came out about a year and a half ago, so in 2014). They compared divorce rates in the US. The long standing statistic of a 50% divorce rate still holds true. What was interesting to me was that the divorce rate in 2014 is actually below what the divorce rate was in 1960. If you got married in the 1990's, you stand a much better chance of remaining married throughout your lifetime than if you got married in the 1970's or 1980's.

The best marriages, the longest lasting marriages, just like the best mergers, are ones

where both parties work together. They are ones that realize the *whole is greater* than the sum of the two parts. Unfortunately, that is often *not* the case in business mergers, or marriages. It is difficult to achieve a successful union if the two individuals, or two former companies, continue to act as they were *before* the joining.

Mergers that work, marriages that last, are the ones where something *new* is created, where a new culture comes forth, ones where the values of both parties are brought together, and then adds to. When both partners (corporate or individuals) leave behind the things that divide them, and then concentrate on what will bring value to the new union, then success, (either a strong new company or a lasting marriage) is far more likely.

This kind of merger is something at which Jesus was very good. He took twelve very different individuals, brought them together, and got them to work together. And before he left them, some of his last words about them were asking for their continued unity, and to strengthen them into a cohesive whole.

This is what I think Jesus was getting at in our lesson tonight. Our Gospel reading takes place right after the Last supper. They've eaten, Jesus has blessed them & explained that he is about to be betrayed. Judas has left to get that started. And Jesus begins to pray for his disciples. In the course of this prayer, he asks that they might all be one.

I think Jesus is striving to get at here, is if we go back to that idea of mergers between companies. A good merger, a positive merger, a merger that will grow and be strong, is one where, instead of $1 + 1 = 2$, you get a situation where $1 + 1 = 3$. Something new, something different. In other words, a good merger seems to be one where the new company, the new entity, is stronger, is greater than the previous two. That's what Jesus is trying to get at with his disciples. He doesn't want them to be a group of individuals, each of them going off and doing their own thing. He wants them to be that cohesive whole, to be one in Christ.

What he doesn't want, what tends to happen in mergers that don't work out or marriages that don't last, is where one is more dominate than the other. That's when one of the previous dominates the other, suppresses the other, almost to the point where that other totally dies off, and so rather than being a new, stronger creation, it actually becomes weaker than it was before the merger.

That's what Jesus is striving to get us to understand. Through Christ, with the help of the Spirit, we become as a whole greater than we are when we are by ourselves.

"As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe you have sent me" (v. 21).

Jesus was praying not only for his disciples in his presence that night, but for his disciples throughout time, that we would reflect that idea of coming together, and being stronger and greater, when we work together.

Let me try one more example. As you might be aware, we here at Trinity Lutheran are

part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The ELCA is the largest branch of Lutherans in North America, and since our beginning, the ELCA strives to be ecumenical. That means, we recognize that other denominations are Christian as well, even if they may not worship the same as we do, or have the same kind of overall structure that we do. To that end, the ELCA is in what we call "full communion" with several other branches of Christianity here in North America. By the term "full communion," we mean that we welcome to worship - and commune - in those branches of Christianity, just as they are welcome to worship and commune with us. It also means that an ELCA pastor may preside, or even serve, one of those partner denominations, just as one of those pastors may serve a Lutheran congregation.

We have six Full Communion partners as of 2009: Reformed Church in America; United Church of Christ; The Episcopal Church; The Moravian Church; the United Methodist Church; and the Presbyterian Church USA. As a matter of fact, the Presbyterian Church USA was the first denomination with which we were in full communion. Even before we were in full communion with the Presbyterians, a lot of pastors were working together: they would assist in worship at one another's church's. For example, a Lutheran pastor could impose ashes on Ash Wednesday in a Presbyterian church. One Presbyterian pastor relayed what a Lutheran pastor had said to him at that time:

"How strange it is that we can share the ashes of death, but not the bread of life."

That is what Jesus is striving to tell us here: to remind us that it's not our differences that divide us; but it's Christ that brings us together. That Jesus is trying to remind us that, regardless of our background, regardless of our denomination, we are, as a whole, called to share together in the Bread of New Life. That all of us, together, regardless of our political affiliation, regardless of how we worship, whether we like traditional or contemporary or Saturday night, whatever, all of us as Christians are called to serve Christ. And it's when we strive to work together, that we become this New Creation. When we as Christians, regardless of our backgrounds, strive to work together, is when Christ's mission on earth is filled.

That's what we are called to do. Together, regardless of where we come from, to be one in Christ, and to serve Christ, in all that we do.

Amen.

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1. (http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/02/upshot/the-divorce-surge-is-over-but-the-myth-lives-on.html?smid=fb-nytimes&smtyp=cur&bicmp=AD&biclukp=WT.mc_id&bicmst=1409232722000&bicmet=1419773522000&r=4&abt=0002&abg=0)