



The Rolling Stone

Rollstone Congregational Church

Summer 2019

Spiritual Mathematics

When we were in school it was important that we mastered mathematics and English. When you understood those two subjects it seemed as if everything fell into place. In mastering English, grammar, reading, and writing we could effectively communicate. In mathematics we could solve equations which gave us the ability to problem solve. These two areas were the building blocks upon which we were expected to learn, grow, and excel in life. However not everything that was learned in school can be applied to life in the church.

Yes, the communications skills are important in our church life, when we choose to use them. It is in the language skills that we can read the scriptures, we can tell the biblical stories, we can be in conversation with one another, and we can even read the meeting notes or a newsletter like this to remain connected and informed. If we fail to communicate, we all tend to be left sitting isolated and in the dark.

The use of mathematics allows us to understand our budget, permits us to chart trends, it even gives us a chance to realize that we all are responsible to help with our fair share of contributing to keeping the church operating. That's stewardship which I will talk about another time in greater depth. What is mathematics? How is it different in the church? In school we learned that in simple addition that the following, $1 + 1 = 2$ or $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$. Often at church that same principle applies, but not always because Jesus taught us that $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$. That equation is based on Jesus' assertion that they may all be One in John 17:21. Jesus talks about the trinity and how God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are in essence only One. The concept of the trinity does not always make sense, but I would encourage you to look at it from today's perspective.

In the world of churches and corporations we see mergers and acquisitions occurring with greater regularity, some are successful, and others are a total nightmare. Those corporate marriages are not always predictable for what type of outcome will result. Sometimes the marriage can be a fairy tale story like that of Disney and Pixar, where two creative entertainment companies came together in a partnership that's largely resulted in a license to print money. Or, on the other hand, the marriage might look like Exxon and Mobil, which is a remarriage of two, old 19th-century Rockefeller companies -- thus creating the largest corporation in the world.

Then again, there are times that these corporate marriages become the relational equivalent of a dumpster fire, to wit:

- The New York Central and Pennsylvania railroads merged in 1968 in the face of declining rail travel, but filed for bankruptcy just two years later, effectively killing large-scale passenger rail service in the United States.
- Time Warner and AOL merged, but quickly became a dial-up marriage in a DSL world.

The examples of similarly failed partnerships are too numerous to state. The list of failed mergers seems to be longer than that of successful ones. According to a study, the failure rate is as high as 83 percent, which leads us to ask why it's so hard for people to get together -- whether it's a marriage of two people, the merger of two corporate cultures, or even the coming together of two or more Christian denominations to form a new church.

Experts point to a number of reasons why mergers fail. The lack of due diligence in researching one another, poor communication and governance and a lack of a shared vision are just a few of the problems that can lead to an eventual divorce or Chapter 11.

Perhaps the biggest reason, however, is the inability to merge two different cultures into one new and cohesive culture. When employees get used to doing things one way, it's hard to do things another way. When a denominational culture and goals overshadow the other, it's little wonder that one of the ecclesial partners feels slighted. It's difficult to move forward when one side of a partnership is undervalued, be it in a marriage, a company or a church.

The best mergers, on the other hand, do the relational math differently. In a bad merger, $1+1$ often equals a sum of two different cultures in conflict with one another, or, perhaps even worse, the sum of $1+1$ equals 1.5, where one of the partners is devalued and treated as unequal.

The best merger math is $1+1=3$, i.e., a brand-new culture emerges that takes the value of both and adds to it. Both partners leave behind the things that divide them and invest in something completely different that adds value to everyone.

Unfortunately, that culture change has been slow in coming for Jesus' followers in the years since. Despite denominational mergers and calls for unity, the church often acts as though its disparate cultures are sacred cows that require constant care and feeding with separate visions of what Jesus would have those in the church do and be.

The divisions of liberal and conservative, high church and low church, eastern and western, Protestant and Catholic, individual gospel and social gospel and even traditional and contemporary have done precisely the opposite of what Jesus intended and prayed for us.

Rather than causing the world to believe that God sent Jesus for its salvation, we have instead caused the world to see the divisions of the church as evidence that if there's good news out there somewhere, it won't be found in the church. We've had far more spin-offs and breakups than mergers and acquisitions and the unifying message and person of Jesus gets lost as churches and denominations are more apt to argue and leave one another, than work to restore a common vision and life together.

Now, certainly, there are times when a merger isn't advisable. If the parties have different aims, and refuse to adapt, it's going to be a non-starter. When churches and individuals drift from a core belief in Jesus as being one with the Father and fail to act on that belief, unity will be elusive.

In many cases, however, it's the minor differences that often keep us from being truly one. We are quick to defend our positions on points of doctrine and practice, for example, but the relationship between Jesus and the Father reveals that it's posture that matters more than position. For Jesus, it's the posture of the Father toward him and from him toward the Father that provides the model for Jesus' followers. It's the posture of glorification and love.

Jesus calls us to be One. To work through our difference and to focus upon bringing glory to God. And how is that glory best revealed? It's made known through our love for God and one another. "I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them," Jesus prayed (v. 26). This is akin to what Jesus says in 15:12, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." Notice the chain of love -- the Father gives his love to Jesus; Jesus gives it to us, and we give it to one another. Love is not something we conjure up from within ourselves. It is a gift given to us to be passed on to someone else. We reveal the love-glory of God when we love one another in the way that Jesus loved us -- love, despite our sin; love, regardless of our positions; and love, with little heed paid to minor differences in doctrine and practice. Jesus invites us to form a new culture centered on reflecting the glory of God through our love for God and one another.

The body of Christ will become more spiritually profitable and practically successful in reaching the world if it is willing to adapt to that culture change.

One of the questions we might ask ourselves often as we merge with Jesus' vision is this: Are we working toward becoming the church for which Jesus prayed?

Corporations have a tough time pulling off mergers because everyone tends to be in it for themselves. In a post-Christendom world, can Christians successfully merge because we're in it for God's glory, mission and love -- and nothing else?

Blessings,

Pastor Dave

DEACON NEWS

Hi everyone, it is so nice that we finally have some warm weather. The question is where did spring go? The month of May just flew by.

On May 5th we celebrated Cinco De Mayo after the worship service in Cookman Hall. We had salsa and chips hot cheese spread, virgin margaritas, and other delicious things. The tables were decorated with festive tablecloths and everyone had a great time.

The Trustees have let the Deacons use the room to the right of the stage for fellowship supplies. This is a big help because all the supplies can be in the same room and organized. Hal Smith cleaned out the room and Mary Anne and Ron Smith did a great job cleaning it. Some of the Deacons and Anne came and set it up. A big thank you to the trustees.

The women of the church received carnations on Mother's Day. They also got a small notebook and pen which will come in handy in the car and anywhere else.

On May 18th there was a Memorial service for Phyllis Smith. Phyllis was a longtime member of the church. She served the church in many capacities. She was very faithful. After the service there was a fellowship time in Cookman Hall. She will be missed but we have very fond memories of her.

There is not very much else to say. I hope everyone has a great summer. There will still be worship at Rollstone and vespers at Camp Wellville on Sunday evenings at 7:00 pm in Pow Wow.

Linda Hass

News from the Facilities Chairman

Saturday, June 15th from 9:00 am to noon we will have a Rollstone "Getup, Cleanup, & Fixup" day at the church. All are invited! Any questions contact me. 978-337-1608.

Paul Stansel

WAYSIDE PULPIT

Sock Sorters

As a young man just out of the Army, I wanted to simplify my life. Sorting socks from the laundry into pairs was a chore I thought I could simplify by wearing only two kinds of socks: solid black for dress and solid white (not olive drab) for casual. It didn't work. Unlike socks obtained by military procurement subject to rigid specifications, plain black and plain white socks from civilian stores come in a dizzying assortment of fabrics and weaves, shapes and lengths, so that finding a pair in a pile of all one color was anything but simple.

Then my brother told me about sock sorters. These are plastic rings about the size of a quarter, with flexible plastic tabs on their inner periphery. When socks are taken off, in pairs, they can be pushed halfway through one of these bands, to be held together through the turbulence of the washer and the tumbling of the dryer.

Like socks, people are more effective when united in groups with others like themselves, usually more than in pairs. The bonds that unite us through the turbulence and tumbling of life are not rings of plastic, but codes of constitutions and bylaws, mission and purpose covenants, and statements of shared beliefs. In our unities, great good can be accomplished.

But there is a caution. The bonds which unite us necessarily divide us from those bound to other groups. This can cause despair for those pursuing the motto of the United Church of Christ, "that all may be one."

And another caution: the same kinds of bonds which produce a church, a corporation, or a country can produce a cult, a gang, or a jihad. Choose your socks and your sock sorters with care.

Chuck Funk

Missionary Ladies Spring Update



Our recent project:

We gave blankets for two new babies. Hal Smith's new granddaughter Jasmine and Janet and Rick Lane's new grandson Lucas. Lucas is also the Great Grandson of Bob and Doris Lane.

We gave a donation to the Church Day Camp and we hope to also volunteer in the camp kitchen.

We will be working on projects at home or camp during the summer and gather again in the Fall.

Happy and healthy summer...
... from Becky, Edwina and Marilyn



Day Camp is just around the corner June 24-28.

Sign up during Fellowship if you would like to help with snacks or camperships!!

Fun and Fellowship with old friends and new. A few photos from last summer!!



Frisbee fun for ALL



Campers make a memory rock garden for Rebecca



Craft Shed

Closing Flag Crafts

