



One Page Sermon

By Pastor Robb McCoy

May 15, 2022

Worship Every Sunday at 9:30 AM

Fifth Sunday of Easter: Paul argues in Athens (Acts 17:16-34)

Blockbuster Video's mission was simple – deliver movies to people to enjoy at home. By taking advantage of a new technology – the VCR, and an aggressive business model that priced independent stores out of business, Blockbuster became one of the great retail brands of the turn of the last century. Blockbuster video rose to incredible prominence and fell to total obscurity over the course of a few decades. It started in 1986. It reached its peak of over 5,000 stores in 2004. The company was bankrupt in 2010 and has had only 1 store since 2016.

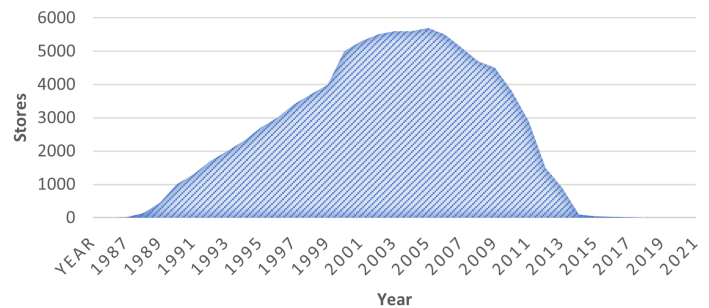
Again, Blockbuster's mission was to help people watch movies in their own homes. If you were to look at the chart and conclude that people no longer watch movies at home, you would be obviously mistaken. I would guess that there are actually many more movies watched at home today than there were at the peak of Blockbuster's power. Watching movies at home has not followed the same curve that Blockbuster followed.

It is not that people stopped watching movies at home, it is that Blockbuster failed to adapt to the ways that was happening. We still watch movies at home, we just don't use Blockbuster to do it. I'm not going to go into a deep-dive into how Blockbuster lost its market share to Redbox and Netflix (and how both of those companies are now struggling in their own right). Maybe it was failure to adapt to new technology, maybe it was a failure to communicate to their customers, maybe it was failure of imagination because they were so locked into the 5000 brick and mortar stores. Let's just say that Blockbuster lost its way. It stopped being able to deliver on its mission.

This is important because many look at the chart above and think it could be a describing Church attendance, and if the mission of the Church is to fill building and keep high attendance, it would be easy to declare that the Church is dying and has lost its way. If however, there is a deeper mission, then maybe we still have hope. The mission of the Church is not to fill pews and budgets. The mission of the Church is to connect people to the Divine. It is to share the good news of resurrection. It is to share the story of God's salvation and connect people to community, liberation, and plenty. The mission of the Church is to make known the Kingdom of God and declare the spiritual forces of wickedness will not have the last word.

This is why Paul's encounter in Athens is so important. In this chapter Paul goes to the intellectual heart of the Empire and speaks in their terms. In Acts 13 Paul speaks before a largely Jewish crowd. In this passage, he recalls Father Abraham. He retells the story of Exodus. He connects the lineage of David to Jesus and let's them know that in Resurrection Christ proves that he is the Messiah.

BLOCKBUSTER STORES BY YEAR
1986-2022



Here in Athens though, he speaks instead of the "Unknown God" and tells them of the Creator. He pulls the curtain back on their Temple bureaucracy, servants, and attendants. He even quotes "one of your own poets." He tells the people of an imminent and yet transcendent God and let's them know that changing their hearts and lives in needed for all and the proof is that Christ was Resurrected.

Two different sermons. Two different audiences. One mission— connect the people to the Resurrected Christ. If Paul had given the same sermon in Athens that he did in Acts 13, he would have been Blockbuster. If he had been unwilling to adapt, unwilling to yield, or unable to imagine another story, his message would have gone the way of the big blue and yellow signs.

This is our choice today as a church. Do we hold onto the stores, the late fees, the plastic containers holding obsolete technology, or do we adapt? Do we learn to communicate in new ways and meet people where they are?

This does not mean we change the mission. This does not mean we simply do what's popular or change to fit culture. It means that we are so willing to connect people to Christ that we are willing to let go of the ways that once worked but do no longer.

There is still a great need for what the Church offers. There is a hunger for connection. There is a desperate need for people to hear a story of redemption, grace, and plenty. There is a desperate need for people connect to something greater than themselves. The Church has exactly what people need. It has community. It has the good news. The question is, are we willing to communicate it in new and creative ways? Are we willing to meet people where they are, or are we going to go the way of Blockbuster?