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**“One Little Word, or Two”**  
A sermon by Marilyn Hedgpeth

**12<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)**  
**June 24, 2018**  
Mark 4:35-41; 1 Samuel 17:1-11, 32, 37b-47

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*Koinonia.*

*Koinonia.* May I have the definition?

A Christian fellowship or body of believers;

intimate spiritual communion and participative sharing in a common  
religious commitment and spiritual community.

May I have the language of origin?

Greek.

Are there any alternative pronunciations?

Koinonia. Koinonia.

May I have the part of speech?

Noun.

K-O-I-N-O-N-I-A. *Koinonia.*

And with that one little word, that one little Christian word,

14 year old Karthik Nemmani quelled the storm of competition  
among over 500 spellers to become became this year's winner  
of the Scripps Spelling Bee.

It's actually the only word that I knew and that I would have been able to spell

in the Spelling Bee finals – the only one!

*Koinonia* is a Greek Biblical word, best explained in the New Testament in Acts 2,

where it is used to describe life together for the earliest Christian community:

“they devoted themselves to the *apostles’ teaching* and to the *koinonia*,

to the breaking of bread and to prayer...they had everything in common...

they gave to anyone as he or she had need...they broke bread in their homes...

they ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and  
enjoying the favor of all people.” (Acts 2: 42-47)

I am thankful for David Smith, our teacher par excellence for 25 years  
of the adult Lectionary Class, for reminding me of the  
significance of this one little word for people of faith.

*Koinonia.*

That word bubbles to the forefront again in 1942,

when Clarence (and Florence) Jordan, a Georgian New Testament Greek scholar

and translator of New Testament stories into “Cotton Patch” versions using

colloquial Southern language, founded *Koinonia Farms* in Americus, Georgia.

That koinonia was established as *an intentionally integrated community*,

based upon the model of the early church,

where sharing with anyone and everyone, regardless of race, is the norm.

Their website states: “Our present focus is love through service to others,

joy through generous hospitality, and peace through reconciliation”.

As the storms of the civil rights movement began assailing our nation in the 1950’s,

Koinonia Farms was perceived as a threat to some at that time,

and consequently suffered through persecution via bullets, boycotts and bombs

as the KKK attempted to force them out of Georgia.

But Jordan and his community persevered to “do life together” and live

the Gospel koinonia through prayer, nonviolent resistance,

and a renewed commitment to embody racial equity,

pacifism and economic sharing.

*Koinonia*. That one little word had the power to anchor them through turbulent times.

*Koinonia*.

The twelve disciples are enjoying some quality time *koinonia*,  
far from the crowds, with their spiritual director, Jesus,  
gathered at *his* request in their boat,  
hoping that he will give them insight into those parables  
that he has been using to regale the crowds.

And Jesus, who has called them, commanded them, to cast off from the shore,

no life jackets required, ironically is enjoying his own *koinonia*  
with his favorite nautical pillow,  
catching a nap in the stern of their boat when gale-force winds  
and waves begin to break over the bow, causing alarm.

To which the disciples experience their own version  
of mystic sweet communion as they share among themselves  
the all-too-human ties that also bind us: anxiety, fear, panic,  
and doubt.

Do they pray that the storm will simmer down and abate, as we might expect?

Do they shake Jesus from his sleep, and demand that he do something?

No, they aim their consternation straight at the heart of their sleeping teacher,

with the poignant question: “Teacher, do you care?”

The wind, the waves, the barometric pressure, the dew point, the temperature,

the sturdiness and buoyancy of their boat are not their focus,

but rather the caring relationship and commitment they thought

they had established within their tight koinonia.

“Teacher, do you care? Are you not concerned that we are about to perish?”

But, before addressing their question,

Jesus flashes at the lightning, claps back at the thunder, and

howls into the wind, “Quiet! Muzzle it!”

And silence results....as the storm-demon is exorcised by his two little Greek words,

just as surely as other demons are rebuked, commanded to silence and exorcised by Teacher Jesus, and by the sole power of his words.

Words matter! The right words matter! Gospel words matter!

Then Teacher Jesus leans into the sudden silence, which is perhaps even more

frightening to the disciples than the howl of the storm,

and responds to their questions with a few of his own, as he is wont to do:

“Why so afraid? Have you no faith?”

The Greek word which Jesus uses for faith, *pistis*, means to have trust, and to have confidence in the reliability of the one whom is trusted. To me, what Jesus seems to question, is whether this inner-koinonia is going to hold together as a community based upon fear, or whether it will be able to step out of the boat and coalesce as a community based upon its ability to trust in him and in the power of God’s word to exorcise those forces hostile to God.

Will they be able to lean upon the everlasting arms of God when the world tosses them about like a storm: as when they experience a sudden death in their family; or when they lose a much-loved job; or when they become physically or mentally unmoored?

The proposed quandary of Jesus’ questions is even more frightening to the disciples than the storm itself, I think, because the story ends with the disciples “fearing a great fear” and asking among themselves,

“Who is this, that both the wind and the waves obey him?”

And I hear Jesus' questions echoing through our sanctuaries these centuries later.

Will we withstand the storms, the chaos, the changing tides,  
based upon faith in the word of God alone, or will we find it  
necessary to bolster ourselves by fear?

**Will our koinonia be trust-based, or fear-based, that is the question?**

Is trust in God's word be enough to hold us together?

Will we continue to ground ourselves in the power of Scripture

to shape and mold our community and our moral character?

Or will we find it necessary to shore up our koinonia with stranger dangers,

and the imagined fear of the other, as some would tempt us to do?

I am reminded in this of the recent loss of one of the true heroes of the faith,

and an excellent teacher himself of theology, James H. Cone,

who died in April of this year.

Cone was a black liberation theologian, a lover of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,

who believed and taught and practiced that being a lover of the Gospel

is synonymous with being a freedom fighter for God's people

in the here and now.

And James Cone was a *fearless* freedom fighter; not afraid flash, clap back and howl

at forces which he saw as being hostile to God: at racism,

or at the passive acceptance of injustice

as being anathema to the Gospel call to proclaim

good news to the poor; freedom to the captives; and release to the oppressed.

In a speech which he delivered at Yale Divinity School as recently as 2017,

Cone read a litany of the names of black children “lynched”, as he said it,

by unjust police brutality.

Said one writer in a tribute to Cone, he “looked evil in the face

seeing with eyes wide open the grotesque in re-crucified black bodies

hanging from poplar trees, locked in cages by the justice system,

and lying dead in the streets.”

And yet Cone’s rebellion; Cone’s clap-back, Cone’s protest was his hope.

(White, Andrea. “God Revealed in Blackness”. *The Christian Century*, June 6, 2018)

Because Cone immersed himself in the power of Rabbi Jesus, his words,

his compassion, his mighty deeds of power *over anything that separates*



*people from God and from one another,*

like Jesus, James Cone was able to rebuke and reproach,

clap back and call out any forces hostile to God and hostile

to the love, peace, and justice which Jesus came to proclaim.

And such can be the church's power, too, if we claim it, to rebuke and reproach,

clap back and call out child abuse whenever and wherever we see it,

or the inadequacies of our state budget to educate all of our children

or to provide adequate health care for the least of these,

or the eviction of the poor from their homes in our rapidly gentrifying city,

or the yawning gaps between rich and poor in our nation.

That "exorcising" ability to name, claim and tame,

comes not from ourselves, but from the silencing, smack-down power of God's word.

Author and educator Patrick Overton has a poem inserted into the corner

of a larger piece of artwork by photographer Pete Anger entitled "Faith".

Anger's photograph has captured the brilliant hues of the aurora borealis;

a storm of swirling magnetic energy and color, I might describe it.

Overton's poem "Faith" embedded at the base of the color storm says this:

*When you walk to the edge of all the light you have*

*and take that first step into the darkness of the unknown,*

*you must believe that one of two things will happen:*

*There will be something solid for you to stand upon,*

*or, you will be taught how to fly.*

*(“Faith” Poem Poster. Murray’s Time Image, Copyright Pete Anger, 1998)*

That is exactly what I think Jesus is trying to convey about faith and trust

to his disciples, his inner circle, in this living parable of the storm,

of the darkness unknown.

K-O-I-N-O-N-I-A, koinonia, our life together must not be fear-based,

but rather based upon trust in God, and trust in the power of Jesus’  
words,

and trust in the Spirit of the teacher, Jesus, still alive, working

in and through those among us who live and die by the word of the  
Lord.

And that trust alone should be sufficient for the needs of our koinonia.

Amen.

*Because sermons are meant to be preached and are therefore prepared with the emphasis on verbal presentation (i.e., are written for the ear), the written accounts occasionally deviate from proper and generally accepted principles of grammar and punctuation. Most often, these deviations are not mistakes per se, but are indicative of an attempt to aid the listener in the delivery of the sermon.*

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