

## KOINONIA *(pronounced koy-know-nee-ah)*

ACTS 2:42-47<sup>i</sup>

*Rev. Matthew Williams*

Friends am excited to be with you this on this Second Sunday of Easter. Over the next few weeks, we are going to examine what it means to be people of the resurrection. I am calling this sermon series “The Easter People.” Friends, today we are going to dig into a topic that is rather interesting to me and is one of the key things about being *the Easter People*. There is a Greek word that I learned in seminary called Koinonia, and it is the term that is used throughout Scripture to describe the concept of community or fellowship within the church.

Today friends, we are going to be exploring a little bit more about what *koinonia* means for us in the 21st century, and especially what it means for us during this pandemic. Let us start today by diving right into Scripture. We found ourselves in the beginning of the book of Acts. Specifically, we are looking at Acts 2:42-47. In these verses, we see that the early church was beginning to form and shape rituals of how to be together. In verse 42 Luke writes,

*"All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's supper), and to prayer."*

This is a description of what was going on during the very earliest days of the church. Just weeks after the resurrection of the Lord, the church began to structure itself, and the church began to grow. The gatherings began to form their own rituals and routines grounded in the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. The scripture highlights this fact. When the scripture says that the people were devoted to the teachings of the apostles, that means they were beginning to devote themselves to the way of Jesus. Remember, at this point, the New Testament was not yet written. They were creating it as they lived and expressed their faith. We see from this verse, though, that there was an important focus on personal responsibility for their faith.

I have talked many times in church about the importance of having personal responsibility for your faith. We must decide to follow Jesus. As we remember our previous sermon series on who Jesus was, this concept of personal responsibility

should make a lot of sense. We need to have Jesus in our lives. Nobody can put Jesus in our lives and help us to attach (remember  $\text{men}\bar{o}$ ) to him except ourselves. We have to decide to prioritize Jesus. Therefore, there is a personal responsibility involved in the formation and maintenance of our faith journey.

Christianity was not meant to be an individual faith. We are not meant to practice our faith alone. In fact, we remember from Scripture that Jesus says, "where two or more are gathered, I am there." That quote is from the Matt Williams Paraphrase version of the Bible. Jesus, from the very beginning of this movement, emphasized the importance of being in community with one another. That is why, when we look at the Scripture for today, in this very first verse of our passage, we see the second thing listed was the word "fellowship."

Now, this word "fellowship" that was translated here in English is that all-important Greek word *koinonia*. I wanted to give an exact definition of this Greek word, and so I will share with you what was written inside of my study Bible.

*Koinonia* means, "a close mutual relationship and participation in life together."<sup>ii</sup>

Let us break that definition down a little bit the first part of this is the close mutual relationship. First, we will think about this part of the definition in terms of the church. If we think about our particular church, I believe we can start to understand what it means to have a close mutual relationship with one another.

I first experienced this part of *koinonia* in one of my first interactions I had with members of this church. Now, I know I have shared the story on an occasion before, but I think it highlights the importance of this mutual and close relationship within the church. When my wife and I first met with the staff parish relations committee back in March 2017, we began to see the kind of structure this church has. We intuitively knew that this church had what we would call a church family. I have observed some churches and I have had friends who have served churches where there was not this atmosphere of being a church family. It is a kind of atmosphere where you know people will come and gather for worship but they do not talk to each other. They do not stick around at the end of the service; they just leave right away.

That is not how it is a Calvary church. We have people within our congregation that deeply care about one another. We see it even right now amid this pandemic. We have individuals from our congregation making phone calls to

other individuals from our congregation checking up on the making sure that they are all right. We have other people who were involved in our gopher program. They are receiving calls for help and going out into the community and shopping for the things that are most vulnerable members need. I have seen in this church when a person is ill or is just getting out of the hospital how we rally around them. We will support them in their recovery. This church has a close relationship with the other people in our congregation.

The second part of this definition of *koinonia* is participation in life together. This is another thing that I think our church does well. Whenever we hold an event we try our best to be present there to support it. If it is something new, perhaps it might take a second year until we get the momentum rolling with it, but we have people who support it. For example, I think we can see this by the participation in Holy Week services this year online. We had many people from the congregation join in for our Bake & Bible Study that I did on Holy Wednesday. Not everyone stuck around for the Bible study portion, but there were quite a few who logged on and participated in the baking portion. I think it is safe to assume that if you were participating in the baking portion to make a Love Feast Loaf on Holy Wednesday, most likely you were participating in the Love Feast on Maundy Thursday. When the church does something, we rally around it and do our best to participate in it. We participate in the life of the church together. I am sure you can think of other examples of ministries that we do throughout the year at Calvary church but I think you probably get the point; we work together!

It is important to remember that not every church does this. There are plenty of churches out there where the most their building gets used is on Sunday morning, and the rest of the week, the building sits empty. With the exception of our closure, it is not uncommon to see our building in use on Sundays, Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays every week. Sometimes, people are using it on Fridays and Saturdays as well. We have a busy church with an active participation in its ministries. We have the foundation of *koinonia* within our congregation!

As we continue through the rest of the Scripture from our passage in Acts today, we see that the community comes together. They share in the sacraments together. They share their resources with one another. They worship in their

homes together. One of the fundamental foundations of our faith is to be together in community.

I have been reflecting on our church's response to the pandemic, and I think, overall, we have done an exceptional job of maintaining our sense of community together. We, of course, continue to love Jesus and we worship Jesus from week to week here in this online format. We have been adding more and more people into worship with us from week to week here in this virtual space. We have created new ways for people to access it whether it is through mailed out worship packets sent out weekly, or by joining on the telephone and listening in. Once more, we have maintained our sense of community by creating a space to have a virtual Sunday school class where we can gather together and study Scripture and hear each other's voices and talk to one another. We have maintained our community by setting up calling trees and going on gopher runs to help those who are most in need within our congregation and our community.

I am excited to see how God continues to move in us and through us amid this pandemic. It does not feel like normal church, but the beauty of what is going on around us right now is that the darkness of this virus is not defeating the light of Christ through us. I saw an image on Facebook this week. It was an image of God and the devil sitting down at a table and a globe was in front of them. The devil said to God, "look God see, I have closed all of your churches haha." God responded to the devil and said, "no you've opened a church in everyone's home!"

We are living in an unprecedented time, friends. The beauty is we are maintaining our personal commitment to Christ and we are finding new ways to have *koinonia*. The truth is, I do not know how long we are going to be worshipping in this way, but I do know that God is with us. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> All Scripture, unless otherwise noted will be derived from the New Living Translation. Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Acts 2:42-47). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>ii</sup> Study Note entitled "Acts 2:42" from *New Living Translation Study Bible* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc), 1828.