

Words of Togetherness

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There are a number of words in the English language that have a sense of “togetherness”; words that often begin with the prefix *com* or *con*.

The Lexicon and the Liturgy of the Christian Church uses many words of togetherness. That is appropriate because Christianity is essentially a relational religion; mankind can have a close relationship with God, through the teachings and sacrifice of Jesus, and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of every Christian.

Jesus gave two imperatives to his disciples and to all who have accepted and embraced the saving grace provided by Jesus’ sacrificial crucifixion: the New Commandment and the Great Commission.

On the night before his death, Jesus celebrated the Passover *Seder* with his disciples and gave them this directive: “And now I give you a new commandment: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples” (John 13:34-35).

We continue to celebrate that Passover event; the day before Good Friday in Easter Week is called Maundy Thursday in the church calendar. The word *maundy* is from the Latin *mandare*, which means an official order to do something in particular, or to give someone authority to carry out a certain action. The word *command* has been created by adding the prefix *com* (together) to the participle of *mandare*.

Inherent in the word *command*, because of the prefix *com*, is the concept of a shared responsibility - between the one that gives the direction, and the one that is required to carry out the action. In a military context, a senior officer who gives a command to a subordinate has a responsibility to support and equip those under his authority.

Jesus, the authority figure, gave a new commandment to his disciples (to love one another). Fulfillment of this action requires co-operation between the human effort and the Holy Spirit. It is no coincidence that Jesus’ final instructions to his followers were a paramount requirement that they “love one another.” After all, God’s purpose through Jesus’ teachings, and his sacrificial death, was to make possible the re-establishment of a relationship between God and mankind.

After Jesus was crucified, the disciples went back to Galilee in northern Israel, as Jesus had told them to do. Jesus appeared to the disciples and gave them the Great Commission, the second directive, or *mandate*:



“I have been given all authority in Heaven and on Earth. Go then, to all peoples everywhere, and make them my Disciples; baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:16-20).

The word *commission*: the prefix *com* (together) and *mission*, from the Latin word *mittere*, which means “to give or send.” A commission is a shared authority with shared responsibility. The intent is that both the one who is sent, and the one who sends, will share authority and responsibility in any joint mission.

Jesus has been given ALL authority in Heaven and Earth. In Matthew 28:16-20, Jesus gave His authority to his disciples (and by inference, all those who believe in Him) to act in His name on Earth.

The Great Commission and the objectives that Jesus stated can be summarized by the 5 W's: what (teach, baptize, make disciples); who (everyone); where (everywhere); when (now); and why (to restore the relationship of all humanity with God, through Jesus).

Here are a few more words of togetherness:

Covenant: present participle of the Latin verb *covenire*, which means “to meet and to agree.” God has “met” with mankind through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, and has established a *covenant*, a joint promise for all those who “agree” and believe.

Cooperation: working together to achieve an objective (prefix *com* + Latin *operari*, “to work”). In the Christian context, that means cooperating with the Holy Spirit and with other Christians to fulfill the Great Commission.

Companion: someone who travels with another (prefix *com*, + Latin *panis* “bread”). The total sense of the word *companion* is “those who eat bread together.” The word *companion* is an appropriate description of the communal, congregational participation in the Eucharist.

Communion: a sharing of ideas or beliefs, fellowship, or mutual participation (prefix *com* + Latin *munus* “duty-responsibility,” also “community”). In some Christian congregations, *Communion* is used to describe the liturgical sharing of wine and bread.

Compassion: ruled by the heart not the head, or to give genuine empathy and care to those suffering emotional, mental, or physical distress (prefix *com* + Latin *pati* “to suffer, or to bear,” also the root of the English word *empathy*). This is the root of Romans 12:15: “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.”

Concord: the state of agreement or harmony; being of “one heart” (prefix *con* + Greek *kardia* “heart”).

Consecrate: to agree together and declare that an individual or a location be made holy/sacred by means of a ceremony, in the name of Almighty God (prefix *con* + Latin *sacrare* “holy”).

Commemorate: to keep the remembrance of an event, by means of a ceremony (prefix *com* + Latin *memorare* “to remind or remember”).

All the above words of togetherness remind us that individual Christians are not “Lone Arrangers.” We are all members of the Body of Christ; it is Jesus’ directive that we obey the New Commandment to “love one another,” and that we work (cooperate) with each other, and be empowered by the Holy Spirit to fulfill the Great Commission.

One of the strengths of Christianity is the willingness, and indeed the desire of Christians to aid others who may be less fortunate than themselves. Great things have been done by groups of Christians working together to achieve an objective.

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