

Priscilla: Called to Minister

Acts 18:1-3, 18-21, 24-26

¹ After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, ³ and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked together—by trade they were tentmakers.

¹⁸ After staying there for a considerable time, Paul said farewell to the believers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had his hair cut, for he was under a vow. ¹⁹ When they reached Ephesus, he left them there, but first he himself went into the synagogue and had a discussion with the Jews. ²⁰ When they asked him to stay longer, he declined; ²¹ but on taking leave of them, he said, “I will return to you, if God wills.” Then he set sail from Ephesus.

²⁴ Now there came to Ephesus a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria. He was an eloquent man, well-versed in the scriptures. ²⁵ He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord; and he spoke with burning enthusiasm and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ He began to speak

boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately.

Romans 16:3-4

³ Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, ⁴ and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

Theme Statement

Hearing about the life and ministry of Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, we appreciate the ministry of those who explain the Way of God with accuracy and seek opportunities to use our gifts to further the gospel.

Exploring the Word

Up to this point in our study, we have considered the call experienced by people who had a face-to-face encounter with Jesus Christ. In this session we explore the call to ministry of those who never met Jesus in person but who, through the words of others, came to know, love, and serve him.

We meet Aquila and Priscilla in Acts with a short narrative. They are mentioned by Paul (who calls her Prisca) in Romans, 1 Corinthians, and 2 Timothy. We don't know a lot about this couple, but scholars over the centuries have used circumstances in these mentions to piece together a story about them.

Acts 18:1-3 Common connections

Paul held many things in common with Aquila and Priscilla, including that they were not living in their home countries, and they practiced the same trade—tentmaking.

Emperor Claudius (41–54 CE) extended the pomerium (a religious boundary) of Rome in 49 CE. In the area under that order, only Roman gods could be worshiped, basically eliminating any worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and worship by those who were followers of Jesus. There probably had been tension between the Gentile Christians and the Jews in Rome; banning them was an easy solution to keep the peace. In other parts of the empire, Claudius tolerated Jewish practices and observances, and even protected them to a degree in Alexandria.

Tentmaking is a general term that refers to leatherwork. It was not uncommon for rabbis to work with their hands since they could not be paid for teaching the Hebrew Scriptures. Although Paul was not a rabbi, he was a teacher of Scripture. Under these circumstances, Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, and they became friends and coworkers.

Acts 18:18-21 Common commitments

The distance between Corinth and Ephesus is about 242 miles, most of it over water. It is likely that Paul and Priscilla and Aquila had time to talk about Jesus and his teaching. Paul showed his confidence in them by leaving them and continuing his journey. He knew their hearts and their understanding of the message he had been proclaiming with them. Priscilla and Aquila wouldn't have been left to lead the Ephesian congregation if Paul didn't have this assurance.

Acts 18:24-26 Common catechetics

The couple became friends with Apollos, an eloquent and knowledgeable orator. When Luke, the one whom tradition names as writer of the Acts of the Apostles, writes that Apollos was well versed in the Scriptures, we need to remember that these would be the Hebrew Scriptures, as the New Testament had not yet been assembled. There

probably were a few letters circulating between churches, but definitely no assembled writings as we have them today.

Expecting the Messiah, Apollos was continuing the work of John the Baptist, preparing a people for the coming of the Lord. His message was related to the message of Jesus, but he only knew of John's baptism. After a private consultation with Aquila and Priscilla, he was able to move beyond repentance to the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

While there were people traveling and preaching for their own financial gain, Luke is intentional to explain that Apollos was a great help to those in Achaia who had become believers (Acts 18:27-28). The conversation with Aquila and Priscilla had refined his understanding of the gospel and strengthened his proclamation.

Romans 16:3-4 Common commendations

Paul's greeting attests to the ongoing ministry of Priscilla and Aquila and their influence on the early Christian community. We have a hint that part of that influence was gained by the couple risking their own lives on Paul's behalf. Nowhere else in the scriptures do we find details about Paul's reference, but it appears that the churches were aware of them. Unfortunately, they have been lost in the silence of the centuries.

The Word Today

Alma is a Latin word that means "feeds one's soul" or "nourishing, kind." We know the phrase "alma mater," which is generally translated "someone or something providing nourishment."

Alma Lutheran Church, a 150-year-old congregation in Mead, Nebraska, has a knack for helping first-call pastors gain confidence and develop humility. Members of the congregation have repeatedly shown patience when recent seminary graduates come "with all the answers" and have gently, graciously welcomed these eager preachers into relationships where wisdom and strong pastoral skills can grow. Somehow they balance respect for the studious leader with down-home sensibility and lovingly help them see the value in ongoing learning from real life.

Each newly ordained pastor seems to find a mentor within the congregation. It is a shared responsibility embraced by those who are asked, not appointed. The congregation quietly rejoices as the encouraging relationship begins.

The mentors welcome the new pastor into their lives and into their homes. They help process the things that happen in the parish and explore a variety of options for providing caring ministry. Skillfully using questions about scripture and theology, they create conversation that enlightens both mentor and pastor. It seems that after just a few short years, the pastor is serving God "more accurately" (Acts 18:26). The mentor has walked with them into greater spiritual and relational maturity.

And it happens over and over. A first call leads to a second call for the pastor, and the people of Alma Lutheran start over again. They polish the work of the seminary in real-life situations and with real-life relationships. They expand the leader's vocabulary with words that come from the heart, not just the head. They are the Priscillas and Aquilas the church depends on. And they are always ready to welcome a new pastor to learn and grow with them. The church at large is blessed by Alma's willingness to mentor and encourage.

Questions for Discussion

Beginnings

1. Who has taken you aside to explain something in greater depth?
2. How do you feel when you need to help another understand something from a larger perspective?

Exploring the Word

1. How do you think the following similarities influenced the relationship between Paul and Aquila and Priscilla?

Away from home
Common trade
Time together
Sense of mission and purpose

2. Priscilla is named before Aquila in 18:18 and 18:26. List some reasons Luke, the writer of Acts, may have used this order.
3. What might have motivated Apollos to listen to Priscilla and Aquila?
4. We don't have a lot of information about Priscilla and Aquila. Why is it important to include Paul's mention in Romans 16 as we consider their contribution to the early church?

The Word Today

1. What are the various ways your congregation mentors others new to the faith?
2. Other than your pastor(s), who are the saints among you who help others see the faith from a larger perspective?

3. How might the congregation show gratitude for the wisdom shared by those who mentor others in the faith?

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, as you have called workers to varied tasks in the world and in your church, so you have called these servants to this ministry of [accurately sharing the good news]. Grant them joy and a spirit of bold trust, that their work may stir up each of us to a life of fruitful service; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (ELW, p. 74)

Further Study

1 Timothy 4:6-16; a good minister of Christ

Daily Readings

M. 2 Timothy 4:9-18	S. Romans 16:1-2, 6-7, 12-13, 16
T. Colossians 4:7-15	S. Acts 18:1-3, 18-21, 24-26; Romans 16:3-4;
W. 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-28	1 Corinthians 16:19;
T. Acts 18:4-11	2 Timothy 4:19
F. Acts 18:12-17	

Memorization

Romans 16:3-4

Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.