

## Priscilla and Aquila

As we study some of those who joined the Apostle Paul in his



Michael K. Olmsted

remarkable missionary journeys we find an interesting variety of people with a single devotion to Christ. Uniformity is found in their faith but not in their social standing or religious credentials.

It is also noteworthy that in a male-dominated culture women could be involved in significant ministry. For instance Aquila is mentioned before his wife when Paul first meets the couple in Corinth, but when Paul, Aquila and Priscilla arrived in Ephesus, Priscilla is not only named before her husband, she is also the one who teaches the promising young preacher Apollos. The couple ended up in Rome several years later; when Paul wrote his letter to the church at Rome he sent greetings to Priscilla and Aquila who “risked their necks for my life” (Romans 16:4). Paul also sent greetings for this couple to the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 16:19) and he later asked Timothy to greet Priscilla and Aquila (2 Timothy 4:19).

Aquila was from Pontus in northern Asia Minor, where there was a strong Jewish community. We don't know Priscilla's (Prisca's) homeland, but we suspect she came from a family of high social standing. You may have noticed that Paul's converts across the empire included not only Jews but Greeks and important women. Many Gentiles left the empty pagan religions for the hope and moral grounding of Judaism and saw in Christ the true spiritual promise no other religion offered.

Saul, the Jewish Pharisee, who was also Paul the Roman citizen, could cross the barrier between those two worlds. Aquila and Priscilla could do the same. The three also shared the profession of “tent maker,” which provided an income for Paul as well as acceptance into the working world for that team of three to share Christ. You may have heard the term “tent makers” in modern times to describe

missionaries who establish themselves in a community through secular work. In our world, when religious organizations and titles can present a barrier to those outside the church, we should learn from biblical accounts that communicating God's love happens when we live our faith outside the church structure and denominational walls. Organization is good but it cannot change a human heart.

Note that Paul, for all his gifts, partnered with others who then grew into their own ministry. He lived out his philosophy that the church as the body of Christ in this world has many members, each one different but necessary to a healthy spiritual life (1 Cor. 12:1-20). When Paul left Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila remained there and Priscilla taught Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria in Egypt, described as “eloquent and well-versed in the scriptures” (v. 24). Apollos 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” (v. 25).

This encounter reminds us that the message of Christ had only begun to spread across the empire and that often people were hearing only bits and pieces of the gospel. Apollos knew the teachings of John the baptizer, but did not know the complete message of Christ. Priscilla became the primary teacher of the gospel message to Apollos. A woman teaching a man was unusual in secular society and impossible within Judaism at that time. The New Testament is full of stories that reveal the power of the gospel breaking down all kinds of social barriers. Even today some churches struggle with gender limitations. Our English translation of Acts ends correctly with: “preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, **unhindered**” (Acts 28:31). There are still churches that build barriers instead of working beyond them.

It is fascinating to follow the work of the Holy Spirit through Barnabas to Saul

(Paul), then from Paul to Priscilla and Aquila, then from Priscilla and Aquila to Apollos, and finally through Apollos to the region of Achaia. God works through all kinds of people in different situations and places to share his love. We are not all destined for full-time ministry, but we are called to be mentors and encouragers, loving people into the family of God. I look back at my early days of ministry, when farmers, their wives, deacons, Sunday School teachers and older pastors took me under their wings, loving and encouraging me in ministry. My faith and ministry involves a lot of Priscillas and Aquilas.

Apollos sensed a calling to Achaia where he “greatly helped” those who through grace had become believers” (v. 27). He also “powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Messiah is Jesus” (v. 28).

Although much has changed from the earliest days of the church, the barriers to the good news of God's love remain the same. Personal faith in Christ is the one foundation of true spiritual hope and life. We are all “ministers,” that is, people who experience God's love and share that love by our values, behavior and words.

The church community of our day is lamenting the growth of those we call “nones” in American society, those who have walked away from organized religion, who are disillusioned by denominational bureaucracies, power politics and outdated church programs. Success, size and selfishness too often shape the modern church.

We can learn from the challenging and uncharted early days of the church that our relationship with God and with one another must be at the core of faith in Christ. We must be the modern Barnabas, Paul, Silas, Priscilla, Aquila, Apollos. We must be the encouragers and teachers in everything we do. With the beginning of each day we can ask God to help us see opportunities for ministering, to give us compassion for others and to bless others through our words and actions.