

Series: "Lesser Known People of the NT"  
Prisca and Aquilla

Most of us recognize the names of some of the important characters in the New Testament – prominent people like the Apostle Paul, or Simon Peter. But for every one of these "big name" personalities there are untold numbers of faithful followers of Jesus who played an important role in the first century Church. And if these people are even mentioned in the New Testament story, little is said about them. But they can inspire and instruct us!

Today in this series we'll look at Prisca and Aquilla. Prisca is also called Priscilla. They are not twins. Not brother and sister. But husband and wife! We first meet them in Acts 18. "After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquilla, 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, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them" (Acts 18:1-3).

Aquilla (the husband) is a Jew. He was born in Pontus (a city in what is now modern day Turkey), lived in Rome, but fled to Corinth when Emperor Claudius around 50 A.D. issued an edict banning all Jews from Rome (anti-Semitism is nothing new). He meets Paul in Corinth, where Paul established a church. "Every Sabbath he (Paul) reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:4). They had a connection because they were both tentmakers. Even though Paul was a missionary, he also had a secular job to support himself. Perhaps Aquilla owned a business and Paul worked for him.

Verse 3 says that Paul stayed in Prisca and Aquilla's home (tuck that thought away – we'll come back to it). Later on, in verse 18, it says they went with Paul when he left Corinth, then settled in Ephesus, while Paul went on, preaching the gospel in other places.

In Ephesus, we hear more about them: "Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquilla heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately" (Acts 18:24-26).

Apollos was a silver-tongued preacher, but apparently he was deficient in at least one area of his faith. It hints that he had a limited understanding of baptism. ***Prisca and Aquilla took this man and coached him, so his faith could be more complete.*** We need people in the church like that today! People who can mentor others, help others grow in Christ.

Who has helped you grow in your faith? In your understanding of the Bible? Who as a Christian has coached you, encouraged you to grow? On the other hand, who are you and I mentoring, discipling, in the Lord? I'm thinking of a lay person in a church I served who was involved with the Navigators, a Christian organization. He would work one-on-one with other men, teaching them, mentoring them, so they could grow in their discipleship.

Church consultant and United Methodist pastor Bill Easum says the job of the church is to grow people into *spiritual redwoods, spiritual giants!* I like that! Many in the church are spiritual runts! Pygmies! Spiritual juveniles. Dependent. Just want to be fed. But there comes a time when we ought to be mature enough in our Christian walk that we can feed and nurture others!

Prisca and Aquilla not only taught Apollos, in a sense they held him accountable. Here's this eloquent, learned, dazzling preacher – yet these ordinary lay people took him aside and said, "You're lacking something important, here! You need to be more complete in this area of your Christian experience."

This business of holding each other in the church accountable is often missing today. We're so afraid that somebody will say we're *judging* someone. But being accountable to others in the Body of Christ is Scriptural. James 5:19-20 tells us: "My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins." If a believer wanders from the truth, hopefully someone will care enough to try to bring that person back. Notice the mutual concern we're to have for each other in this passage from Jude 20-23: "But you, dear friends: build each other up on the foundation of your most holy faith, pray in the Holy Spirit, keep each other in the love of God...have mercy on those who doubt, save some by snatching them from the fire. Fearing God, have mercy on some, hating even the clothing contaminated by their sinful urges." This holding each other accountable in love should be happening in the church in small groups, Sunday School classes, staff relationships, personal friendships.

Prisca (or Priscilla) and Aquilla were Jesus people who encouraged and mentored others so they could grow in the Lord. Prisca and Aquilla are mentioned again in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. They are still living in Ephesus when Paul wrote his first letter to the church in Corinth. He wrote it from Ephesus. So in it he sends greets from Priscilla and Aquilla. "The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquilla and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord and so does the church that meets at their house" (1 Corinthians 16:19). Notice, "the church that meets at their house."

At that time, Christians met in homes – "house churches." There were no church buildings until the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Remember, I said at the beginning of this message that they opened their home to Paul when they were in Corinth. They mentored Apollos in their home. Now, they open their home to sisters and brothers in the faith and it becomes a house-church. There aren't many references to this extraordinary couple in the New Testament, but where they are mentioned it seems that their home is always the center of Christian fellowship and service!

***Priscilla and Aquilla are examples of gracious hospitality!***

*Hospitality is so important for the church today!*

*Some of us open up our homes to others for meals and friendship. I served as a pastor in*

three different appointments while I was still single. In each of them, several families would regularly have me for a meal, or a family event. To this day, I remember their kind hospitality with deep appreciation.

*Some of us may open up our homes for church groups to meet.* I served 3 years in a church in Easton. I lived alone through the week – Nancy stayed back in the last area we served so our daughter could finish high school without moving. Two of those three winters we had tons of snow. The Easton church was in the city, and it was hard to find parking with all the snow. Several times a member of our Administrative Board invited the Board to meet in his home – in their finished basement, nestled around a burning fire in the fireplace, with refreshments. The atmosphere at those meetings was so much warmer than when we met in the church building.

In a sense, it's like having "church in your home" when we offer our home as a warm place of fellowship in the name of Christ! How about inviting unchurched friends or neighbors to our home for a Bible study, or just a fun get-together. We can build relationships that can help lead people to Christ. I realize not everyone is comfortable doing this. But what a wonderful ministry if we can do that!

*We can all practice hospitality in the church!* Being warm and friendly and hospitable to guests when they come to the church is one of the most important things we can do. Studies show that one of the key factors that determines whether a first-time visitor will come back is whether they felt the people were friendly and welcoming.

Most churches say they are friendly! But if you ask someone who has come to the church as a stranger, you will probably get a different answer! I've gone into churches as a stranger and basically been ignored. Or the only welcome you get is from somebody who hands you a bulletin. A typical scene is for the regular attenders to chat with each other and pretty much ignore someone who is there as a stranger. I know very well a lay person in our Annual Conference who one year won the Harry Denman Evangelism Award. He once told me how he hangs out in the narthex, looking for people he doesn't know. He'll walk up to them and start a conversation. He's outgoing and friendly – a terrific advertisement for the church!

I simply can't emphasize enough how absolutely critical it is for a church to develop a hospitality team and ministry. Because if churches aren't intentional about being warm and friendly to guests, it probably won't happen!

One more thing about Priscilla and Aquilla that shines like a light: They are mentioned again in Romans 16 in a way that borders on the heroic! Romans 16:3-4 says, "Greet Priscilla and Aquilla, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them." These valued companions in Paul's missionary-evangelistic work at one point *risked their necks, risked their lives* for him! Wow! We're not sure what happened, but they literally put their lives on the line for him.

*Every once in a while we hear stories of heroism: someone gives up their life or puts themselves*

*at high risk for someone else. These stories touch and inspire us.* I mentioned recently that I read the book *Bound for Canaan*, a story of the Underground Railroad, the network providing escape for slaves heading north. The book tells of one person who, at night, would row slaves across a river, so they could continue their journey northward. In doing so, he was risking possible death if he got caught!

Actually risking our life for someone is rare. It may be hard for us to identify with that. But who are the people who have stood by you, no matter what? On the other hand, who are you and I so committed to that we've stood by them in a time of great need, or sacrificed for them in a very difficult time of their life?

A mother was sick in bed, and her very young daughter wanted to stick by her mom. So she brought some magazines to the bed, fluffed up her mom's pillows, then even brought her a cup of tea. The mother was very pleased with the tea and asked how she ever learned how to make tea on her own. The little girl proudly told her mom, "I saw you do it loads of times. Only this time I couldn't find a strainer, so I used a fly swatter instead." "You *what!*" her mom shrieked! "Oh, don't worry, mommy. I didn't use the new fly swatter. I used the old one!"

*Good News* magazine had an editorial following the death of Johnny Cash's wife, June Carter Cash. She was a Christian when she married him – he wasn't. And he writes in his autobiography: "What June did for me was post signs along the way, lift me up when I was weak, encourage me when I was discouraged, and love me when I felt alone and unlovable. She's the greatest woman I have ever known."

Think of people who've been there for you in the darkest moments of your life, the most difficult situations you've had to face. Someone who's gone to bat for you, stuck by you when you know you haven't deserved it, given a portion of themselves for you. Hopefully, you've done that for someone. And it's a wonderful thing when that happens in the body of Christ, in the church, when we have that kind of loving commitment to our sisters and brothers in the Lord. Priscilla and Aquilla risked their necks for Paul!

That's about all that the Bible says about Priscilla and Aquilla. Oh, they're mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:19, where Paul tells Timothy in his closing remarks to say hi to them. But that's it.

Maybe you never even heard of them before. But, my goodness, what a remarkable husband-wife combo who meant so much to those in the early church, and can be an inspiration to us today!

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