

SLIDE 1

Acts 18.18-28

Discernment in Mission

Faith Bible BaptC'Hill 6/21

It's been a bit difficult during Covid to share life with people as we would like or to invite people into our homes, but our homes are a very important asset we have, not just a financial asset, but they are an important asset for sharing the gospel. Every time she moved house my mother used to pray that God would give her, neighbours with whom she could share the gospel. And when we celebrated her 100th birthday a number of her former neighbours came to show their love and wish her well. There are none that we know of, who came to faith, but they knew, respected and loved her, and each knew how important her relationship with God was.

I'm delighted for us to be able to spend this morning in the company of an amazing couple, **Priscilla & Aquila** whose home was always used for God's kingdom.

SLIDE 2. Prisca or Priscilla (as Luke likes to call her in Acts) was probably a well-educated Jewish lady. Her husband, Aquila was from Pontus, near the Black Sea in modern-day Turkey. His mother tongue was probably from that area, but he would have also spoken Greek, the common language of the Roman empire. He too was a Jew. Priscilla's name is usually mentioned first, so it is assumed she is of a higher social standing than him, or she was possibly a more prominent personality.

SLIDE 3. They were leather workers, mostly engaged in tent making for the Roman Army which consisted of 250-400,000 troops at this time. Thousands of tents were required to house them, when engaged in battle or on the move, so A & P had a constant market for their tents. Wikipedia tells me one 8-man tent took 77 large goatskins and 750 hours to make.

When we first meet P & A in Acts they are in **Corinth**, which stood on the Grecian peninsula at a strategic intersection of Roman roads and shipping routes - an important place to ply their trade.

SLIDE 4. They were among many Jews who had been expelled from **Rome** in AD49 by the Emperor Claudius. His edict had been a response to disturbances amongst Jews in Rome, probably involving Jewish- Christian persecution. They probably found faith while in Rome, but continued as they found asylum in Corinth.

Paul

SLIDE 5. There they met **Paul** on his missionary journeys and invited him to live with them in their home, sharing in the tentmaking business for 18 months. [I had a friend who said, visitors are like dead fish, after 3 or 4 days they begin to smell.] Well Paul stayed much longer than that. This couple were amazing. Wherever they went, whether it was rented or belonged to them, their home was always open to others. They used it for God. They didn't wait until life was settled. Every new place provided new people and new opportunities. It reminds me of Acts 8.4 when the believers were persecuted "*Those who were scattered abroad went everywhere proclaiming the word.*"

SLIDE 6. Their business happened at home. I imagine while they were preparing, cutting & sewing the goat-skin leather to make or repair tents, there was plenty of time to talk. And that meant plenty of opportunity for Paul, A & P to share the good news with each other & disciple other believers.

Hospitality is never all one way. Welcoming others into our homes, blesses them and us. During this time Paul's preaching & teaching aroused opposition in the synagogue, which led to his nearly being lynched. Romans 16 tells us that P & A also endangered their lives for his sake, so that possibly occurred there in Corinth. It was not easy for anyone being Christian in that first century world. A & P had been expelled from Rome and found refuge in Corinth, only to suffer persecution there.

SLIDE 7. Our reading picks up the narrative as A & P accompanied Paul by boat to **Ephesus**. They continued living there after Paul left, no doubt having set up their business for a third time in a new city.

SLIDE 8. The ruins of ancient Ephesus are amazing. It was a large important trading city on the Mediterranean coast. While they were there an impressive, travelling Jewish-Christian preacher and evangelist, **Apollos**, arrived, and as was the synagogue custom, he was invited to preach on the Sabbath.

SLIDE 9. He came from the second largest city in the Roman empire, **Alexandria**, in Egypt, where there was a sizable Jewish community. He would have spoken an Egyptian language, but knew Greek well.

SLIDE 10. The city of Alexandria valued learning & had one of the largest libraries in the ancient world, housing well over ¼ million manuscripts of poetry, geography, history, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy & medicine. Apollos probably studied rhetoric there and learned the popular Greco-Roman skills of persuasion through oratory. When he preached that first Sabbath morning in the Ephesus synagogue, it was a powerful sermon which showed he knew the Scriptures well. He talked about Jesus and his teachings and those of John the Baptist, but although he spoke with burning enthusiasm, and what he said was right, he seemed ignorant of the full Christian message. P & A could have criticised the preacher for not knowing more, but they were people who encouraged, and didn't criticise.

SLIDE 11. They invited Apollos to their home and privately explained to him the Way of God more accurately. They both knew from Paul's teaching that Jesus was the Messiah promised throughout the OT Scriptures and so they shared their understanding with him. Priscilla's name is mentioned before Aquila's here, which infers that she took a prominent part in the teaching of Apollos, in no way allowing the conversation to involve the men only. She taught Apollos concerning the faith and he became one of the great Christian leaders & preachers of the day. He stayed in Ephesus for some time and met with the believers in their home.

SLIDE 12. When it was time for him to continue his travels the believers fully endorsed his teaching and recommended him to the churches in the province of Achaia. Having received teaching from P & A, he was fully equipped to continue his preaching ministry and to argue with traditional Jews & Greek philosophers, in both synagogue & public forum, that Jesus was the Messiah, the fulfilment of Jewish expectations.

Evangelism & church planting through our work and homes

P & A were a highly mobile couple. In the New Testament we can follow their movements through various writings and letters and see them living in the cities of **Ephesus, Rome & Corinth** (1 Cor 19.9; Rom 16.3, 2 Tim 4.19). They returned to live in those cities to live, on further occasions. Wherever they lived they shared their faith and gathered new believers into their home, planting house churches in different places. In those early days of Christianity, establishing a house church didn't mean taking people from other churches. There were none. It was front-line evangelism centred in homes, & probably done through their neighbours, work contacts & the local synagogue. Why did P & A do this? They could have resented having to move countries. They were persecuted. They could have felt sorry for themselves and just wanted to settle down in life, to stay in one place & feel some stability.

SLIDE 13. But they had experienced the transforming nature of the gospel and wanted to share that with others. They could say with Paul, *"I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile."* (Rom 1.16). Their home & business was always a place of welcome and sharing.

SLIDE 14. Hospitality was highly valued by Jews and Christians in the ancient world. It is no wonder that both Paul and Peter were strong advocates for believers & especially leaders in their day, to extend hospitality, not just to family, friends & fellow believers but to strangers (Rom 12.13) and Peter adds, to do it without complaining (1 Pet 4.9)! I must say that has challenged me, not to complain, even if my guests do strange things. Hospitality is not just sharing a meal & thinking that's all, it is sharing our homes and our time, our very lives. That's what Jesus did. For 3 years he shared his life with the Twelve.

Learning doesn't always have to happen in formal situations. We can know God better by seeing others' relationship to him, by informal conversations and by our questions & answers as we encounter life.

I've been single or widowed for much of my adult life and shared my home with many different people over the years. Some have stayed. Some have been frequent, or infrequent, visitors. I have learnt so much from them. It has been a real blessing in my life. Home is a 24 hour opportunity for us to learn from others and to show our faith in daily life. Whether people are believers or not, both need encouragement & learning. There's no need to preach to the people we live or work with. They see the reality of our walk with God, not in our perfection, because none of us can do that, but in how we deal with our failures & discouragements. We may have opportunity to explain our actions and when necessary, acknowledge our sin and ask forgiveness from them & from God. They should see our example of love, humility, kindness & generosity and learn from our attitudes & values as we walk with Jesus through life. Our homes should welcome all - providing safety and sustenance both physically and spiritually.

SLIDE 15. Our homes and our daily lives wherever we live and work, are given to us by God, to be used for him. They are not just a roof over our head, they are our mission field.

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