

Session 9—Lead

Following Christ in partnership as women and men.

Principal Text: Romans:16:3-5a

Supportive Texts: Acts:18:1-3; 18-19; 24-28; I Cor: 16:19; 2 Tim: 4:19

We will consider:

- The biblical precedence for leading together as women and men.
- How we make room for the gifts of all believers in our midst.
- How to be a people unafraid to take risks in the light of Christ.

Hymn: (*Found in Evangelical Lutheran Worship*) “Will You Come and Follow Me,” #798.

Prayer: (*Offered by the leader*)

Introduction

The life and ministry of Priscilla and Aquila model how women and men can be partners in God’s mission. When Jesus sent his disciples out, he sent them in pairs because each could encourage, counsel and uplift the other. Both Priscilla and Aquila were active in the work of the kingdom of God in Corinth, Ephesus and Rome; three of the most important cities in the Roman Empire.

Priscilla is one of the best known and most influential women in the Apostolic Church. Aquila was a Jew living in Rome at the time that the Roman Emperor, Claudius (A.D.41-54) gave the command for all Jews to leave Rome immediately. Claudius believed that the wrath of the gods that caused a famine in the years 51 and 52 A.D. would be appeased by the expulsion of foreigners who worshipped other gods.

Read Romans 16:3-5a

In each of the six times that the couple is mentioned in the Bible, the authors mention both Priscilla and Aquila by name. This is noteworthy because, in the patriarchal context in which these texts were written women went more or less unnoticed, let alone addressed directly by a man.

We see remnants of this convention in our modern day marriages. It is only now falling out of fashion, for example, for one to postmark a letter addressed to ‘Mr. and Mrs. Henry Skofield’; addressing the woman only in relation to her marital status (Mrs.) and never with her first name, but only her husband’s.

In the stories of Priscilla and Aquila found in scripture, we see a blurring of gender roles based on a new understanding of leadership and discipleship defined by Jesus himself; one in which women and men are partners in mission.

In our culture today, some couples still struggle to clarify their roles within the context of their marriage. Torn between traditions of the past (and sometimes of other cultures) and current realities, some men feel threatened if their wives achieves a higher level of education or earn more money than them.

How Then Shall We Live? Following Christ in a Broken World

Some of these men may struggle with depression or grow suspicious or more demanding, and may even turn aggressive to reestablish themselves as the 'head of the household.' The Church has a tremendous opportunity in our current context to highlight the strong and powerful model of marriage, partnership and discipleship offered by Priscilla and Aquila.

A MODEL FOR MINISTRY

Risk-Taking

Discipleship requires a willingness to take risks. Priscilla and Aquila risk their lives to establish a house church in Rome. They also open their home to Paul, who stays with them for some time in their house in Corinth. While there he attends the synagogue every Sabbath to persuade both the Jews and the Greeks to follow Christ. In his letters, Paul commends Priscilla and Aquila as 'fellow workers' who risked their lives for him. Paul writes that all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.

Over time, Priscilla and Aquila become partners with Paul both in mission and as tent makers. Their close association appears to have sustained Paul as he faced the many challenges associated with establishing the Church in Corinth and Ephesus.

When Paul leaves for his missionary journey, he turns over leadership of the church in Ephesus to Priscilla and Aquila. Priscilla and Aquila support and mentor other leaders like Paul in doing their ministry among both Jews and Gentiles.

Inclusive

New analysis of extra-canonical texts reveals that the early Christian movement was egalitarian, counter-cultural and multi-faceted. They rightly understood themselves as freed by the Holy Spirit into a new egalitarian discipleship. Women therefore played a major role in founding and promoting house churches.

Since Paul was prolific in writing so many of the New Testament texts there is a tendency to think of him as "the" leader of early church and others as his followers. However, Paul explicitly mentions women as his missionary co-workers and saints who worked equally hard for the Lord. It is also to be noted that out of the 36 names mentioned in Romans, 16 were women, testifying to women's active missionary involvement. Some might be surprised to know that women were ordained in the early churches, complete with Episcopal laying on of hands and there were women deacons until the 10th century. It was only when the church became established as a hierarchical structure, that the church claimed apostolic succession to justify the preeminence of male and the subordination of women.

The division between the Jew and Greek (that is of race or caste) was broken at the time of early Christianity itself. Gal: 3:28 clearly states that "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." The second division between the slave and the free was officially broken in the 19th century with the abolition of slavery. In the 20th century, through the efforts of those involved in the women's movement, the God inaugurated time of breaking the division between men and women was put in place so that we really could be a community of equals in Christ, loving God and loving one another.

Though the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19 emphasizes baptizing people, the command that precedes it, 'to make them disciples,' is often overlooked. "To make disciples" means first becoming disciples.

How Then Shall We Live? Following Christ in a Broken World

An important part of this is recognizing the giftedness of one another as co-workers in ministry. To follow Jesus requires of us to not look at one another in fear or insecurity or jealousy, but to allow and enable everyone to follow the one Lord who has called us.

Discussion

1. How do we model, in the church of today, the kind of leadership that Aquila and Priscilla modeled for the early church?
2. In what ways do risk-taking and inclusivity characterize our church community? In what ways do we fall short?
3. What are some other important characteristics of leadership within the community of Christ? Where do we find evidence of these in scripture?
4. Consider together Acts 18:24-28. What was the important lesson Aquila and Priscilla felt compelled to impart to Apollos? What are the implications for our ministry?

Closing Activity

Form a circle with lighted candles. To recapitulate, recite each sentence slowly. Pause between sentences to recall the bible character it reminds you of.

- All are invited to follow Christ, but we must come to know God personally like Rahab did;
- When we confess to the lordship of God in our lives, we gain new fellowship and family and a circle of belonging like Ruth had;
- Even when life becomes tough, there are ways God will sustain and bring us around to find new and greater possibilities like Bathsheba experienced;
- God does not expect us to do great things without first equipping us with the power, knowledge and accompaniment. Mary, who chose to be the mother of Jesus, realized, as we should, that the one who has called us is faithful and just;
- By giving his body and blood, Christ has made us whole; in body, mind and soul. God honours our faithfulness, just as Jesus honoured the wish of the Canaanite woman;
- As we experience wholeness in our body, mind and soul, our love for Christ compels us to follow him to the end, like Mary Magdalene did;
- Whatever we do does not earn us forgiveness of sins and eternal life. God alone has accomplished this on the cross. We accept this gracious sacrifice and follow Christ, confident that we are provided for in this life, and in the life to come;
- As we continue in fellowship with one another in the reading of scripture and the breaking of the bread, our hearts are made ready and our eyes are opened to see Christ in our midst, just as he was with the two disciples;
- Despite our trials, we work in partnership, enabling, accompanying and transforming one another for God's mission, baptized by water and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Close with singing the fifth stanza of the song "Will You Come and Follow Me"

Prayer (*Offered by a member of the group*)

Memory verse: John 8: 12

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

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