

## **God Works Through Ordinary People: Priscilla & Aquila, Acts 18:1-4, 18-19, 24-28**

### **1. Aquila and Priscilla & Paul: Acts 18:1-4, 18-19**

### **2. Priscilla and Aquila & Apollos: Acts 18:24-25**

**Main Idea:** God works through the ordinary acts of our ordinary lives to grow the Church.

*Christ – be magnified this morning as we open your word. Amen.*

When did ordinary become a bad word?

Perhaps ordinary became a bad word when we became afraid that an ordinary life would have no meaning.

Perhaps it became a bad word when we began to believe that only an extraordinary life would be worth living.

That's the culture we live in, isn't it? Rarely do the ordinary acts of ordinary days get attention. I used to work in a TV newsroom – and the saying is true. Dog bites man? Ordinary. Not worthy of attention. Man bites dog? Now – there's a story.

I think it's gotten worse with social media. What pictures do we post? Lovely vacations. All our children standing and smiling winningly at the camera. Rarely do we post ordinary activities of ordinary days. Children fighting. The laundry sitting on the living room floor for the fourth day in a row because we can't find the time to fold it. The kitchen a mess.

Add in our culture's obsession with celebrity, and it's no wonder most elementary students want to be a YouTube influencer when they grow up. Or a superhero. Ideally both! Neither are ordinary, everyday people.

The idea we need to be extraordinary has seeped into the Church as well - at least the Church here in America. Well-known personalities or pastors capture our attention. Authors. Podcasters. Bloggers. World changers! I want to be a world-changer, don't you!? I want to be a super disciple! Then I'll make a difference for Jesus!

Based on our passage today, that's not what God wants. God does not require me – or you – to be a super disciple. In fact, this morning we will learn that **God works through the ordinary acts of our ordinary lives to grow the Church.**

Let's open our Bibles to the book of Acts, chapter 18. If you don't have a Bible, you should be able to find one in your row. If you have the large-print version, you'll find Acts 18 on page 1724.

Starting in verse 1: “After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.”

The book of Acts is written by a follower of Jesus named Luke. At this point in the book, Luke’s narrative is focused on Paul – and most of this chapter is about Paul and where he’s going, what he’s doing. But this morning, we’re going to focus on a couple of people Luke introduces us to in the next verse. We don’t know much about this couple, so at points in their story, we’re going to have to use our imagination. Acts 18, verse 2:

“There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife, Priscilla...”

Aquila and Priscilla had moved from Rome, in Italy, to Corinth, in Greece. That is a drastic move – across the world! Why did they make such a change? Let’s keep reading...

“Because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome.”

Wow. Aquila and Priscilla moved to Corinth *because they were kicked out of Rome*.

Here’s where we need to use a bit of imagination – Luke doesn’t tell us what that move looked like for them. Was an edict read in the marketplace, giving Aquila and Priscilla a little time to plan and prepare? Or did soldiers come kicking down their door, forcing them to grab some essentials and run? No matter how it happened, we do know they left a hostile environment, as well as a business, they likely left friends and they became refugees. And we know they ended up – somehow – in Corinth.

We also know at the time Paul shows up in Corinth, Aquila and Priscilla had been in town long enough to have established a business and a home, because, continuing in verses 2-3:

“Paul went to see them, and because he was a tent maker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.”

Paul shows up at Aquila and Priscilla’s door, looking for work and a place to stay. They could have said, “Nope, that won’t work for us. The house is tight, the business isn’t really bringing in enough to keep us all busy. That’s a big ask, and it’s not going to work right now.”

But they didn’t.

They welcomed Paul into their business and their home – which in those days, were the same place. Their ordinary act of hospitality gave Paul a place to live, a place to work, and allowed him to continue his mission of talking about Jesus on the Sabbath in the synagogue.

Which leads to the question – were Aquila and Priscilla already followers of Jesus when they met Paul? Or did they become followers after they welcomed Paul into their home? Some commentators say they were already followers of Jesus when they left Rome – historical records confirm an order from Claudius expelling Jews, perhaps because of an internal conflict over Jesus that spilled into the city. The other argument for Aquila and Priscilla's belief is that Luke never mentions Paul converting or baptizing them, which could mean they were already followers of Jesus before Paul came to Corinth.

However and whenever they came to be followers of Jesus, we can be sure that because they welcomed Paul into their home, their belief and knowledge of Jesus strengthened and deepened. Acts 18:18 – Luke says Paul stayed in Corinth for some time. Based on Claudius' edict and other events in chapter 18, historians estimate Paul was in Corinth about 18 months.

Then Paul leaves Corinth, accompanied by **Priscilla** and Aquila.

Which brings up two questions: first, why did they leave Corinth? Luke doesn't explain why. Perhaps it was because of conflict; perhaps it was a strategic decision; perhaps they sensed God's invitation to leave.

Second question: why did the order of their names change? At the beginning of Chapter 18, we're introduced to Aquila and Priscilla. From verse 18, Luke refers to them as Priscilla and Aquila. Perhaps the change in order was self-explanatory for the early church.

Commentators have a couple potential explanations – one is that Priscilla could have had a higher social standing, which meant her name should come first. Perhaps in verse 2, Luke is introducing us to this couple the way Paul was introduced, first Aquila, then Priscilla. Later, in verse 18, he returns to convention.

Another potential reason Priscilla's name comes first could be that she was the main teacher or instructor of the pair. Perhaps she ran the business. Perhaps all of the above are true. Perhaps there's another reason altogether that's been lost to history.

What we DO know is that Priscilla and Aquila were a team. We do not read of one without the other. They worked together. They supported each other. They both lead in the church. They both brought equally important gifts. They were both friends of Paul and he considered them both co-laborers.

And we know that when they left Corinth, they left with Paul and moved across the world again – this time to Ephesus, in modern-day Turkey. Paul did not stay in Ephesus, but Priscilla and Aquila did.

During the year and a half Priscilla, Aquila and Paul spent together, how do we see God working?

Priscilla and Aquila's **ordinary act of hospitality** led to God strengthening their faith and deepening their knowledge of Jesus. Their **ordinary act of sharing their resources** gave Paul a place to live and work, which allowed him to continue talking about Jesus. The time the three of them spent together knit their hearts together and allowed them to become trustworthy co-workers in trade and in the Church. And their **ordinary act of hospitality** led to loving, Christ-centered relationships with other, unnamed people – how do we know this? Because of Paul's letter to the church at Corinth – 1 Corinthians 16:19 "Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house."

Back to Acts. Paul leaves Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus and continues his journey. What is next for the couple?

Let's skip down to verse 24:

"Meanwhile, a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of 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 Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately."

A new person enters Luke's narrative – Apollos, from Alexandria, Egypt. You might remember from history that this city was the home of the great library of Alexandria. By this time, the library has been basically destroyed, but the tradition of learning and education continued.

Apollos is educated, and an excellent speaker. He understands and explains about Jesus accurately, but incompletely. Priscilla and Aquila heard him speak in the synagogue – and Aquila immediately stood up and confronted Apollos about his incomplete understanding of Jesus.

Is that what happened? No!

They hear him speak, realize his knowledge was incomplete, and **invite him into their home**. Again, an ordinary act of hospitality, sharing their resources to help Apollos understand Jesus and the way of God more adequately.

What exactly does this mean? Apollos understood the baptism of John, who proclaimed Jesus was coming. So it's likely Priscilla and Aquila explained Jesus' ministry, his death, his resurrection and his ascension that today we read about in the first books of the New Testament.

They shared their knowledge with Apollos. And Apollos had **the grace and humility to learn from them**. Likely, they were not as formally educated as Apollos was, and yet Apollos had something to learn from them. That's good for us to remember as well – I always want to be teachable, realizing I can learn from everyone around me, no matter their level of formal education.

After spending time with Priscilla and Aquila and the church in Ephesus, Apollos heads to Corinth, with their blessing. We learn from verse 27-28 “On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.”

God worked through Priscilla and Aquila's ordinary act of hospitality to Apollos – not only in their lives, but also in the lives of those in the church in Corinth and wherever else Apollos spoke.

We also know Priscilla and Aquila moved at least one more time across the world – back to Rome. Paul greets them in the letter he wrote to the church in Rome – Romans 16:3-4:

“Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.”

This couple didn't set out to influence all the churches of the Gentiles – after all, they were forced out of their home and business in Rome! Yet as they lived their ordinary lives, they offered ordinary acts of hospitality to the people they encountered in their everyday life that God caused to ripple throughout the early Church. How amazing is that?

Priscilla and Aquila's story could be one of upheaval and endings. They moved across the world multiple times! From Rome to Corinth to Ephesus and back to Rome. We know the first move was forced upon them – we don't know about the next three. Their story could be one of constant disruption and upheaval. Constantly looking back, longing for what they had lost.

It could be a story of businesspeople, moving to expand their business and contacts across the world.

But in the New Testament, we learn God's perspective of their story. From God's perspective, Priscilla and Aquila's story is one of:

**-relationships:** their ordinary acts of hospitality opened the door to deeper relationships with Paul, with Apollos and with dozens of unnamed people who participated in the churches hosted in their homes. *Which leads me to ask - In what ways are you opening the door to deeper relationships with those along your path – here at Covenant? In your neighborhood? In your*

*workplace? In your school? Maybe even in your family? With whom is God inviting you into deeper relationship?*

**-from God's perspective, their story is one of allowing God to use their resources and gifts:**

hosting Paul, welcoming and instructing Apollos, hosting churches in their homes in Ephesus and in Rome. Even risking their lives for Paul – though we don't know the details of that story. *Where are you sensing God's invitation to use your resources and gifts to help the Church? Perhaps God's inviting you to begin, or increase, your financial giving? Perhaps He's inviting you to explore volunteer opportunities with children, students, worship arts, tech team – or any number of ways to gift your resources, talents and gifts at Covenant?*

**-from God's perspective, Priscilla and Aquila's story is one of living an ordinary life, following an extraordinary God** – allowing God to work through them wherever He took them – through difficult circumstances, the upheaval of moves across the world, through hosting churches in their homes wherever God placed them.

When did ordinary become a bad word? Perhaps when we needed to become something, someone *more*, in the eyes of people around us – and we worked for their approval. Perhaps when we needed recognition, to see ourselves as someone with influence in the eyes of others.

Each one of us is living an ordinary life. We are going about our daily lives – doing laundry, making dinner, going to work, going to school, helping aging parents, caring for young children, living in our neighborhood. Ordinary life. Which could feel meaningless.

And yet. And yet!!

We need to realize what CS Lewis put so eloquently in *The Weight of Glory*,

“There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations – those are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit – immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. ... Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses.”

Do you believe that? Each of us are extraordinary *simply by virtue of being human, created in God's image*. Not because of what we do. Not because we manage to live an extraordinary life. We are extraordinary because God created us in His image.

AND this means Every. Single. Person we encounter is created in God's image. The clerk at the grocery store. The person walking their dog. The server at the restaurant. The parent at the playground. The infant in the nursery. Our spouse. Our parent. Our child. Each and every person.

Last Sunday we saw Paul building bridges with the Athenians, and anticipating God was already at work in a city full of idols. We can do the same! When we go through our day anticipating God is already at work, the frustrations and annoyances become opportunities to see Him working and to build bridges with others.

And **God works through our ordinary acts in our ordinary lives to grow the Church.** Just as Priscilla and Aquila's ordinary acts of hospitality grew and strengthened the church, so do ours.

The ordinary act of stopping to greet a neighbor before going into your house. The ordinary act of putting down your phone, smiling and greeting the clerk at the grocery store. The ordinary act of inviting someone to dinner – in your home or out. The ordinary act of eating a meal together, as a family, around the table. The ordinary act of serving aging parents.

We may, or may not, ever know how our ordinary acts of our ordinary life ripple through out our communities, or down through time.

*I remember my dad's mom, my Grandma Sabourin, as a quiet, unassuming woman. She lived in the same town most of her life, attended the church her father helped build when she was a girl. She sang in the choir and loved to hold babies in the nursery on Sunday - and faithfully served until she grew too frail. She taught me to cross-stitch and tried to teach me to crochet. She lived an ordinary life. And I knew she loved me. Did her life change the world? No. Her life changed **my** world. She was just one person who made me who I am today – one reason why I love Michigan's Upper Peninsula. And one reason why I cannot imagine life without Jesus and the Church – because of her ordinary, faithful life.*

When we learn to see the people we encounter as extraordinary, we will learn to love them as God does. When my goal is to love the person next to me, in my home, my school, my workplace, my neighborhood – the results ripple across the Church and the community, mostly unseen by me.

**God works through ordinary acts in our ordinary lives to build the church** — as Paul says in the letter to the Ephesians, and perhaps he had Priscilla and Aquila in mind as he wrote Ephesians 4:11-13 - "It was Jesus who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for *works of service* so that the body of Christ may be *built up* until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

We are extraordinary because we are human, created in God's image – and we live ordinary lives God chooses to work through to grow the Church – and slowly, life by life, change the world.

Let's pray: *Lord, I pray we will settle into your extraordinary love for us and realize we are extraordinary people living ordinary lives. Thank you for your willingness to work in and through us*

*in the midst of our ordinary acts – and somehow you multiply our meager resources of our time, our talents and our treasures to build the church and glorify you. We love you, Lord! Amen.*