

## **The Acts of the Apostles: Aquilla and Pricilla A Remarkable Couple**

### **Introduction**

Early in the process of publishing this monthly bible study, a faithful reader asked me if I was going to do anything with Aquilla and Pricilla. Without giving it much thought at the time, I assured her that I probably would. As I was working on this month's bible study on selected texts from the Acts of the Apostles, I came to Acts 18 where we meet that remarkable couple.

I must confess that I had great difficulty reducing what I want to say about them to a paragraph or two. So, I have adapted the usual format for the bible study and in honor of National Marriage Week (February 7-14), and Valentine's Day, I offer this set of extended meditations with Aquilla and Pricilla at their center. They were dear friends of Paul. They opened their home to him and took him into their business. They founded the church in Ephesus while waiting for Paul to return from his travels. They risked their lives for him and were friends to the end.

Aquila and his wife Pricilla (sometimes referred to as Prisca) are mentioned six times and always together in the New Testament - three times in Acts 18 and in the personal notes and greetings that conclude three of Paul's letters, 1 Corinthians 16:19; Romans 16:3-5 and 2 Timothy 4:19. They were Jewish Christian exiles from Rome. Many Jews had emigrated to Rome from around the empire. Among them was Aquilla. He was from Pontus on the Black Sea in Modern Turkey. There is reason to believe that Pricilla was from a notable family in Rome. While there is no mention of their children, it is highly likely that they had a family. They were tentmakers (i.e., leatherworkers).

They were expelled from Rome when the emperor Claudius shut down the synagogue in Rome because of the continuing disturbances around the figure of "Chrestus" (probably a phonetic misspelling of "Christus"). They encountered Paul for the first time in Corinth sometime after his arrival in AD 51 (all dates are AD unless noted). When the apostle left Corinth for Ephesus in late 52, they traveled with him (Acts 18:18-19). They founded the church in Ephesus and were able to update the eloquent and learned Apollos (Acts 18:26). They risked their necks for Paul (Romans 16:3-5), probably during the silversmith riot in Ephesus and its aftermath (Acts 19:23-41). They remained his dear friends throughout their lives. In his letter to the Romans written sometime in 57 he wrote, "Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles." Romans 16:3-4.

It is far too easy to glamorize life in the ancient world. Most of our imaginings are conditioned by modern cinema that tends to make life look easier than it was. Scholars tell us that there were extraordinary levels of disorder, social dislocation, filth, disease, misery, fear and cultural chaos in the cities in which Christianity arose. There were very few "Hallmark" moments in the ancient world. Aquilla and Pricilla's marriage was filled with the normal things we all would recognize, long hours of work, the worry that comes with raising a family and the daily struggles of life. There were also moments of extraordinary danger. In it all, they were an integral part of the life

and ministry of St. Paul and the proclamation of the gospel to the ends of the earth. Their story offers a counterbalance to the overly sentimental and romanticized Hallmark version of Valentine's Day.

I recommend that you have your Bible handy and that you pause to talk about the various passages, points of interest and where you hear the Lord. While I've tried to confine my comments to the usual one page, some of them have spilled over. I hope that you will get to know this remarkable couple a little better, but mostly, as I'm sure they would say, I hope that you encounter the Lord for whom they toiled so tirelessly.

I have relied on N.T. Wright's *Paul: A Biography* for Paul's time in Ephesus and his timeline of events which I have included at the end.



## Pray

*God, come to our assistance.*

**-Lord, make haste to help us.**

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

**-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

## Reading: Ephesians 5:31-33

For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." <sup>32</sup> **This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.**

<sup>33</sup> Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

## Meditation

In this magnificent passage, marriage is revealed as the great sign of Christ's love for his bride the Church. St. Paul pulled together all the threads that we have been studying so far, from God's original intention that husband and wife be one, through the spousal language of God and his people (e.g., Hosea and Gomer etc.) to Jesus being the long-awaited divine bridegroom and the incredibly costly love of Christ for his bride. I suggest that the love of Aquilla and Priscilla for each other, their friendship with Paul, their work in the trades with him, and their selfless service in spreading the gospel may have given Paul a concrete example of marital love that made Ephesians 5:21-33 much more than a theological ideal.

Like all passages in the Scripture, the Letter to the Ephesians has a context, both literary and historical. Ephesus was an important city in the Roman Empire on the coast of modern-day Turkey. It is directly east across the Aegean Sea from Athens, Greece. It was also the home of one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple of Artemis whose statue, according to the legend, had fallen from heaven.

Paul wrote this letter from prison in Ephesus sometime in 55 or 56. While Luke doesn't record this imprisonment in Ephesus which came on the heels of the great disturbance caused by the silversmith riot, some scholars think this was the darkest time of his life. In this dark place he saw the bright light of truth. And among the many brilliant insights we find in this letter, Paul challenged and subverted the riotous crowd's chant "**Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.**" For Paul, what is **great** is the mystery of Christ's love for his bride the Church made visible in the love of husband and wife.

**Quiet reflection:** Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

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**Lord's Prayer:** Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



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## Reading: Acts 18:1-3

After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.<sup>2</sup> **There he found a Jew named Aquila, 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,<sup>3</sup> and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked together -- by trade they were tentmakers.

## Meditation

There had been a thriving Jewish community in Rome since before the time of Julius Caesar (c.100 BC – 44 BC). The Jews were both secured and threatened by Roman policy and practices. Julius and Augustus Caesar supported laws that made it possible for them to live according to their ancestral practices. These normally included freedom to worship in a synagogue, assemble weekly, adjudicate their own affairs, and purchase kosher food at the market. These special allowances were common throughout the empire but could be withheld or granted by local authorities who could reward or punish the Jewish community to control them or to put down disturbances.

The first Christians were considered a Jewish sect, they enjoyed many of the same privileges with a few exceptions. While the Jews had a place to worship, a synagogue – Christians had no such place, so they met in homes. The permission to assemble on sacred days – and to assemble weekly benefited the Christians. Because the Jews were permitted to adjudicate their own disagreements, the disputes between Jews and Christians were often treated as debates about Jewish words and ideas and were not adjudicated by the Roman magistrate (see Acts 18:12-16). However, the Romans were intolerant of civic unrest and acted swiftly and decisively to put it down.

Sometime in the year 49, turmoil roiled the Jewish community in Rome. The Roman historian Suetonius wrote this, ““Since the Jews constantly make disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he (Claudius) expelled them from Rome.” It is probable that “Chrestus” is a phonetic spelling of Christos with the middle “I” pronounced long. It is not difficult to image the same type of commotion happening in Rome that happened often when Christian preachers proclaimed that Jesus who had been crucified was the long-awaited Messiah. At any rate, the troubles in Rome between Jews and Jewish Christians became public and disruptive to the point where the Roman authorities simply expelled the Jews from Rome.

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## Meditation

Aquila and Priscilla probably converted to Christianity in Rome. They reached Corinth sometime before Paul's own arrival in early 51 and set up a small shop to sell leathercraft. Their tools, knives, awls and needles were easy to transport. They had an established trade and were probably known to the other Jewish exiles in Corinth. Their shop was along one of the main roads near the bustling market in central Corinth. Based on the excavations in Corinth, their shop would probably have been about 13'x13' with an 8' ceiling and a loft for Aquila, Priscilla and their children. There would have been no running water in these kinds of accommodations.

Paul sought them out upon his arrival in Corinth. He must have been delighted to find believers who shared his own trade. Their friendship must have come easily. When Paul lived with them, he would have slept below in the shop with the tools strewn around and partially completed projects on work benches. A door that opened to the street facing the busy market was the only source of natural light. It also let in the cold during the winter. The brazier would have had trouble keeping Paul and the others comfortable. It was difficult work and long days. It is not hard to imagine the hours of conversations that Paul and his new friends had as they did the hard labor of making tents and other leather goods in the small, cramped workshop.

Located near the marketplace, the workshop would have provided a great place for Paul to interact with a steady stream of potential converts. He would have been able to preach and tell people about Jesus while he plied his trade. Imagine what Aquila and Priscilla learned by listening to Paul interact with customers and hearing him preach in the synagogue. The evening meals must have been filled with wonderful conversation. During those times they would have shared all the joys and hardships of his ministry and mission. It is also not a great stretch to imagine that in the year and a half that Paul lived with them, he would have played with and come to love their children. But what was it like to be a tentmaker?

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**Reading: 1 Corinthians 4:10-14**

“We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. <sup>11</sup> To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, <sup>12</sup> and we grow weary from the work of our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; <sup>13</sup> when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day.”

**Meditation**

Paul was not a long-term guest, even though he could have imposed himself as an apostle. To avoid being a burden on his hosts, especially in Corinth where he stayed with Aquilla and Pricilla for a year and one-half, Paul earned his keep by plying his craft as a tentmaker/leather worker. It was a hard life for Paul and his friends Aquilla and Pricilla. From Paul’s letters and the works of Lucian the Greek satirist (125 – after AD 180) we get a glimpse how difficult it was for an artisan, like a tentmaker, to make a living in the ancient world.

Lucian wrote a dialogue between a poor shoemaker Micyllus and the rooster who woke him from his dream of riches. He threatens to kill the rooster who explains that he is a reincarnation of Pythagoras. During the conversation, we learn that the shoemaker’s lot was a hard one. The talking rooster told poor Micyllus that he better get up before the sunrise so he can get started on a pair of sandals. His meager earnings allow him to go to the baths and buy a modest supper. He can only afford a shabby cloak. In another dialogue/work, Micyllus is depicted as always hungry, poorly clothed, and cold. Death found him eager to lay down his knife and leather.

Paul’s life was probably much like that of Micyllus. A tentmaker would have worked hard for long hours each day. They were often bent over their work in the shop and took on the posture often associated with slaves. They were often treated as second class people, and it caused scandal for some of the elites in Corinth that an apostle should do such menial work. Paul would say he was, “In toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked” 2 Corinthians 11:27. And elsewhere, “You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God” 1 Thessalonians 2:9.

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## Reading: Acts 18:4-8

Every sabbath he would argue in the synagogue and would try to convince Jews and Greeks.<sup>5</sup> When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with proclaiming the word, testifying to the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus. When they opposed and reviled him, in protest he shook the dust from his clothes and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles. Then he left the synagogue and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God; his house was next door to the synagogue.<sup>8</sup> Crispus, the official of the synagogue, became a believer in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul became believers and were baptized.

## Meditation

Like other Jewish trades people Aquilla, Priscilla and Paul would not have worked on the Sabbath. On the Lord's Day their little home may have been the place where a few people would gather to share a meal and worship together. At some point they would go to the synagogue where Paul would preach about Jesus the crucified and risen Messiah. He would argue with the Jews about the meaning of the Scriptures. Inevitably, things would become too contentious, and Paul would leave the synagogue and begin preaching to the Gentiles. In Corinth, after shaking the dust off his clothes, Paul moved his preaching to a home next door to the synagogue. It was a move that must have infuriated the Jews. Further, the official of the synagogue along with his household converted.

As often happened, his preaching caused an uproar. The Jewish leaders were offended by what he was saying and the fact that he was doing it right next door. They hauled him before the local Roman magistrate on charges that he was persuading people to worship God in ways that were contrary to the Law. Gallio, the proconsul in AD 51-52, determined that this was one of those issues that the Jews would have to settle for themselves. Paul was not guilty of any offense against Rome or Roman law. The Jews were unhappy with the result and beat Sosthenes, the official of the synagogue, right in front of Gallio who took no action (Acts 18:9-17). Shortly after that incident, Aquilla and Priscilla left for Ephesus with Paul.

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## Reading: Acts 18:24-28.

Now there came to Ephesus a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria. He was an eloquent man, well-versed in the scriptures.<sup>25</sup> He 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.<sup>26</sup> He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately.

## Meditation

Paul dropped them off and went on to Jerusalem. It is probable that Paul intended that Aquilla and Priscilla would do the preparatory work of establishing a business, finding a place to stay, and identifying possible patrons whose homes would be suitable for church gatherings. All this would make his work go more smoothly when he returned. It is possible that many of those earliest converts saw Priscilla and Aquilla as the actual founders of the Church. While it meant that Paul would not have to start from scratch, his friends had to bear the burden of loneliness and alienation that comes from being in a foreign environment. But they did it and did it well.

During Paul's absence, Apollos, a native of Alexandria and a powerful orator arrived in Ephesus. It is most likely that Apollos would have been trained in the great philosophical schools in Alexandria. He would have been skilled in combining Jewish thought and the Scriptures with Greek philosophy. The goal would have been to make Jewish religious thought more acceptable to pagan audiences. It was clear that he knew a lot about Jesus but had not experienced the power of the Holy Spirit since he had only heard of the baptism of John.

Aquilla and Priscilla had spent all those hours with Paul in the workshop, listening to his conversations with customers and passersby, listening to him preach in the synagogue and in the marketplace. How many times would they have heard Paul talk about being baptized in the Holy Spirit? How many times would they have witnessed the power of the Spirit work through him? Although they were uniquely qualified to help the eloquent and learned Apollos learn the rest of the story, as they say, it could not have been easy. He was a formidable person, and they had no formal training. Once brought up to date, Apollos went on to Corinth where he preached powerfully (Acts 18:27-28).

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## Reading: Acts 19:11-20

God did extraordinary miracles through Paul,<sup>12</sup> so that when the handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were brought to the sick, their diseases left them, and the evil spirits came out of them.<sup>13</sup> Then some itinerant Jewish exorcists tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims."<sup>14</sup> Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this.<sup>15</sup> But the evil spirit said to them in reply, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?"<sup>16</sup> Then the man with the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered them all, and so overpowered them that they fled out of the house naked and wounded.<sup>17</sup> When this became known to all residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks, everyone was awestruck; and the name of the Lord Jesus was praised.<sup>18</sup> Also many of those who became believers confessed and disclosed their practices.<sup>19</sup> A number of those who practiced magic collected their books and burned them publicly; when the value of these books was calculated, it was found to come to fifty thousand silver coins.<sup>20</sup> **So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.**

## Meditation

Paul spent over two years in Ephesus arguing with Jews and Greeks, healing diseases, and driving out evil spirits. His preaching brought him into conflict with the local magicians. These were not the modern sleight of hand entertainers we have; these were individuals who made their livelihood by curing people with just the right spells and devices. The right words and the right order of things were written in magic books. When the magicians converted, they burned those books publicly. The value of those books was 50,000 silver coins – a vast fortune up in smoke!

Paul must have felt that he had accomplished a great deal. God was at work and Ephesus was being won over for Christ! The sick were being healed and people delivered from evil spirits. Paul's reputation was growing rapidly. People were breaking into his workshop to steal items that had touched his skin to use as amulets to heal the sick. The powerful magic industry in Ephesus had been delivered a great blow when the magicians burned their books of evil spells. Paul was ready to move on to the next phase of his ministry. "Now after these things had been accomplished, Paul resolved in the Spirit to go through Macedonia and Achaia, and then to go on to Jerusalem" Acts 19:21. But there was a dark cloud on the horizon. Paul's preaching had become a direct challenge to Artemis of Ephesus and the powerful forces at her disposal.

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**Reading: Acts 19:23-41**

About that time no little disturbance broke out concerning the Way.<sup>24</sup> A man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the artisans.<sup>25</sup> These he gathered together, with the workers of the same trade, and said, "Men, you know that we get our wealth from this business.<sup>26</sup> You also see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost the whole of Asia this Paul has persuaded and drawn away a considerable number of people by saying that gods made with hands are not gods.<sup>27</sup> And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be scorned, and she will be deprived of her majesty that brought all Asia and the world to worship her."<sup>28</sup> When they heard this, they were enraged and shouted, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"<sup>29</sup> The city was filled with the confusion; and people<sup>1</sup> rushed together to the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's travel companions.<sup>30</sup> Paul wished to go into the crowd, but the disciples would not let him;<sup>31</sup> even some officials of the province of Asia,<sup>1</sup> who were friendly to him, sent him a message urging him not to venture into the theater.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, some were shouting one thing, some another; for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together.<sup>33</sup> Some of the crowd gave instructions to Alexander, whom the Jews had pushed forward. And Alexander motioned for silence and tried to make a defense before the people.<sup>34</sup> But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours all of them shouted in unison, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"<sup>35</sup> But when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, "Citizens of Ephesus, who is there that does not know that the city of the Ephesians is the temple keeper of the great Artemis and of the statue that fell from heaven?<sup>1</sup>"<sup>36</sup> Since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash.<sup>37</sup> You have brought these men here who are neither temple robbers nor blasphemers of our<sup>1</sup> goddess.<sup>38</sup> If therefore Demetrius and the artisans with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls; let them bring charges there against one another.<sup>39</sup> If there is anything further<sup>1</sup> you want to know, it must be settled in the regular assembly.<sup>40</sup> For we are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion."<sup>41</sup> When he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

**Meditation**

But then disaster struck in the form of the perfect storm of economic disruption, religious challenge, civic pride, and ethnic prejudice. Ephesus was the home of the shrine of Artemis. The temple was one of the wonders of the ancient world. But Paul was preaching that gods made by human hands were not gods at all. His preaching undermined peoples' belief in the patroness of their town and in the divinity of the emperor. Paul's preaching was a direct threat to the powerful silversmith guild whose livelihood depended on selling idols. These little statues of the goddess were more than tourist souvenirs. The statues would have been placed in a little shrine in the home. The families would have decorated these shrines with candles and flowers. They would

have prayed to her for the protection of their family, blessings on their business, fields and flocks. What a shock it must have been to hear Paul say that gods made by human hands are not gods at all.

To make matters worse the silversmiths had tapped into the civic pride that went with being the home of the great goddess. "But when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, "Citizens of Ephesus, who is there that does not know that the city of the Ephesians is the temple keeper of the great Artemis and of the statue that fell from heaven?" Acts 19:35. Their identity was being assaulted and no city, ancient or modern, stands by idly for that.

His powerful acts of healing and deliverance from evil spirits became a multifaceted threat to powerful people who made money on the magic rituals. Remember the disturbance that Paul created in Philippi. There was a slave girl who made her owner a great deal of money by telling fortunes. She managed to irritate Paul to the point where he turned on her and delivered her of the evil spirit. The owner was furious that his source of income was gone, and they seized Paul and Silas. They stripped them, beat them, and threw them into prison but they were miraculously delivered (Acts 16:16-49). Things did not turn out that well in Ephesus. There was no miraculous escape. Paul ended up in prison and began one of the darkest periods of his life.

Aquila and Priscilla must have feared for their friend's life. They witnessed the riotous crowd drag their companions Gaius and Aristarchus to the amphitheater. They, with several others, struggled to keep Paul from going to the amphitheater where 50,000 screaming people were chanting in unison, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." From everything we know about Paul, he would have wanted to speak to the people and plead his case for himself and for Jesus. But his friends held him back. Did they have to tie him up? We don't know. But soon it turned even uglier. Economic threat, religious challenges, wounded civic pride morphed into ethnic prejudice. "It's the Jews!" When Alexander, whom the Jews had pushed forward tried to make a defense, the crowd shouted even louder, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." It went on for two hours.

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<sup>33</sup> Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

## Meditation

Luke does not record what happened after the riot settled down, but it is clear that Paul ended up in prison in Ephesus. The riot had nearly cost him everything. Even though he had escaped with his life, he had landed in prison and was awaiting trial, perhaps for a capital crime. It was not like modern incarceration where prisoners are clothed, fed, and provided with the basic necessities of life. He would have had to rely on his friends to bring him food. It may have taken some time for his friends to find out where his was. In the meantime, with little food and water, alone in a cell with minimal support from friends it is not hard to imagine that the two-hour chant of the angry crowd, was still ringing in his ears in the long, lonely days and nights of his imprisonment. It is not hard to imagine the depths of despair to which he sunk. Eventually, the brothers and sisters found him and supported him, among them must have been his courageous friends Aquilla and Priscilla. Along with others they must have cared for Paul, brought him food, and consoled him as best they could. And they may have gone to the local authorities to plead for Paul. That is perhaps the moment that Paul refers as the time they risked their lives for him.

In that dark period, I can imagine that over time and with much reflection and prayer, he saw a profound irony in the chant "**Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.**" The silver idol of a goddess who was not real was replaced by a sign that pointed beyond itself to the greatest reality of all the love of Christ for his bride the Church. ***The icon of God's great love is not a statue made of silver, rather it is the living relationship of husband and wife.*** All the spousal imagery of the Scripture, God's intention from the beginning that husband and wife be one, now is marshalled to make the great mystery of Christ's self-giving love for his bride the Church visible to the whole world. "This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church." It is not Artemis of the Ephesians who is great "the **mystery** of our religion is **great.**" (1 Timothy 3:16). Marriage and what it points to, the love of Christ for his bride the Church, is a fitting rival for the goddess whose temple was one of the wonders of the ancient world.

**Quiet reflection:** Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

**Prayers and Intentions:** As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

**Lord's Prayer:** Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



## **Pray**

*God, come to our assistance.*

**-Lord, make haste to help us.**

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

**-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

## **Reading: Romans 16:3-5**

Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Greet also the church in their house.

## **Meditation**

We know that Aquilla and Priscilla returned to Rome at least for a short time. In his letter to the church in Rome written sometime around 57, he sends greetings to his dear friends. The church that met in their home, may have included their family, servants, and a few Christians who lived nearby, about 10 people or so. It is possible that if they had prospered and were able to have a larger home, the church which gathered there could have been larger too, but certainly would have had fewer than 40 individuals. There is speculation that they may have returned to Ephesus as well, but we don't know for sure.

In Rome or Ephesus, Aquilla and Priscilla would have continued to work hard from sunrise to sunset, that was after all, the life of tradespeople in the ancient world. We don't have any specific mention of their children, but Christians were noted for their commitment to having and, as importantly, to rearing children. They would most likely have had the same experience of infant mortality as most couples in the ancient world. Nearly 25% of children died before age one, and another 25% died before age ten. They would not have escaped the hardship and grief associated with raising a family. There is a reasonable chance that they would have had as many girls as boys. That would have been contrary to what was happening in pagan families who did not value baby girls. If they had a son, Aquilla would most likely have begun training him in the trade of tentmaker at around age 13. Much of their time would have been taken up with meeting the challenges of daily life in the ancient world. At the same time, filled with the Holy Spirit, their ordinary life would have witnessed to and proclaimed the gospel. They spent their lives making the kingdom of God present in Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus.

**Quiet reflection:** Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

**Prayers and Intentions:** As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

**Lord's Prayer:** Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.

**Pray**

*God, come to our assistance.*

**-Lord, make haste to help us.**

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

**-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

**Reading: Ephesians 5:21-33**

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. <sup>22</sup> Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. <sup>24</sup> Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. <sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, <sup>27</sup> so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind -- yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. <sup>28</sup> In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, <sup>30</sup> because we are members of his body. <sup>31</sup> "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." <sup>32</sup> This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. <sup>33</sup> Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

**Meditation**

For National Marriage Week and Valentine's Day let us reflect on the life and mission of this remarkable couple who were friends and coworkers with Paul. Let their love for each other and for their family, their commitment to the Lord, their tireless service to the Church and to the Lord inspire us. Their missionary zeal and witness to the love of Christ for his bride the Church reminds us that our marriages are missional as well. Aquilla and Priscilla were an ordinary couple. They worked hard day and night, toiled to make ends meet, opened their home as a place for the small Christian community to meet. They were an ordinary couple who was a fitting rival for the great goddess of Ephesus. Their married love was an icon of the great mystery of Christ the divine bridegroom and the Church his beloved bride.

**Great is the Mystery**

Ropes snap, wood creaks,  
Bosses shout, workers curse  
Salt and seaweed,  
Sewage and smoke

A busy port, a wonder of the world,  
Temple of Artemis,  
Goddess of the hunt.  
Welcome to Ephesus where

Clever silversmiths, intolerant of  
Competition, fashion  
Statues of Apollo's twin,  
And images of the great temple.

Shouts echo, parades wander  
Through the streets. Nowhere to hide  
From the cry  
"Great is the mystery of Artemis!"

Here's a Rival! Real competition!  
Not a building or statue of silver  
But a living temple, a husband and wife,  
Images of a loving God.

Lives echo in the streets.  
Love poured out, Love returned.  
Two become one  
Husband and wife.

Great is the mystery,  
Christ and his Church!  
Son of God and beautiful bride  
Rival to Artemis, in power and mystery.

The clamor of a busy kitchen,  
Comforting creaks and groans of the family house  
One risks love, the loved one responds  
Great is the mystery in an ordinary home.

**Quiet reflection:** Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation.  
Share one idea with your spouse.

**Prayers and Intentions:** As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

**Lord's Prayer:** Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.

## Some key dates<sup>1</sup>

? 4 BC	Birth of Jesus
? AD 5-10	Birth of Saul of Tarsus
30	Crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth
? 33	Revelation of Jesus to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus
33-36	Paul in Damascus, Arabia, Damascus again
47-48	Paul and Barnabas on <b>first missionary journey: Cyprus and South Galatia</b>
48	<b>GALATIANS</b>
48/49	Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15)
? 49	Edict of Claudius expelling Jews from Rome
49	Paul and Silas on <b>second missionary journey: Greece</b>
50/51	<b>1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS</b>
51 (early) – 52 (late)	Paul in Corinth
52/53	Paul in Jerusalem, Antioch; <b>third missionary journey: Ephesus</b>
53-56	Paul in Ephesus
? 53	<b>1 CORINTHIANS</b>
53/54	Short painful visit to Corinth
54	Death of Claudius; ascension of Nero
? 55-56	Imprisonment in Ephesus
? 55	<b>PHILIPPIANS</b>
? 55/56	<b>PHILEMON, COLOSSIANS, EPHESIANS</b>
56	Release from prison; <b>travel from Ephesus to Corinth</b>
56	<b>2 CORINTHIANS</b>
57	<b>ROMANS</b>
57	<b>Travel from Corinth to Jerusalem</b>
57-59	“Hearings” and imprisonment in Jerusalem and Caesarea
59, autumn	<b>Voyage to Rome: shipwreck on Malta</b>
60, early	<b>Arrival in Rome</b>
60-62	House arrest in Rome
64	Fire in Rome, persecution of Christians
? 64 or later	Death of Paul
66-70	Roman-Jewish war
68	Death of Nero
70	Fall of Jerusalem

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<sup>1</sup> Dates taken from N. T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography*, HarperOne, San Francisco, CA, 2018, pp. 433-434. All caps indicate Paul's letters, bold indicate journeys or travel.