

This morning we continue our series in Acts that we've been in this summer. In this series, we have tried to highlight different facets of the mission of the early church, starting with the mission that Jesus gave the disciples, to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the world...and then we've been looking at some of the ways they carried that out...and then we've tried to understand what that means for us today as we live into that same mission.

So today's passage tells us of Paul's journeys after he left Athens and his presentation of the Gospel to the Areopagus. This whole journey (**Map here**) (and you can see the journey on this map, starting in Jerusalem heading north along the red line to Athens and then Corinth out to the west, and then coming back along the black line) ...this journey is usually referred to Paul's second missionary journey. He had three, total.



One of the things the Book of Acts does is it gives us an overview of where Paul and other early church leaders went to start churches and share the gospel message. Acts also gives us a lot of the content of what they said in those places, what the response was, and so forth. But: **When we read some of the letters that are in the New Testament, such as those written by Paul, then we oftentimes find out more about what was going on in Acts.** Because all those letters – Romans, the Corinthian letters, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and so forth – were all written to the churches in those cities after Paul had visited them and helped start those churches, and taught them about Jesus and so forth. And oftentimes, the letters give us insight into what we're reading about in Acts.

So for instance, 1 Corinthians is the first of two letters that Paul wrote to the

church in Corinth. Now, remember, we just now read in 18:1 about how Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. He met Aquila and Priscilla, and of course others. Priscilla and Aquila ended up accompanying him to Ephesus, and it was while he was in Ephesus that he wrote to the Corinthian church. And in 1 Corinthians 2:3, he writes, **“I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling” (1 Corinthians 2:3)**. It’s an interesting note on his emotional and physical state when he arrived in Corinth that Acts doesn’t tell us. And what we see is that when Paul arrived in Corinth he was dejected...he was drained. Why? Because Athens was tough. There was *some* fruit from his ministry...the message of Jesus that he preached was received by a few. The end of Acts 17 lists a couple by name and says there were others. But do you know how many letters to the church in Athens we have in the New Testament? None. Why? Because no church started there – at least, not while he was there to help get it going. A few people scattered throughout the city became followers of Jesus, but his experience wasn’t anything like the experiences that he had in so many other cities. Athens was tough. And it left him weak, fearful, and trembling.

Oftentimes we get discouraged in our faith and in our ministry too. It might be a church-wide sense of discouragement when it doesn’t feel like things are going as we expected...it might be in a sub-set of a church such as a small group or a class, or it might be even more personal and individual than that. But discouragement and dejection happen, and they can really drain us. That’s where Paul is as he arrives in Corinth.

Now, Corinth was one of the leading cities of the Roman Empire in terms of trade and economics. Stuff from Africa to Europe to Asia could be purchased there. It had everything. Now, I have to confess, whenever I hear or think of the city of Corinth, or the Corinthian letters, I think of this car commercial from nearly 30 years ago.... (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UmnF0fv5dGg>).

“Corinthian leather.” Sounds fancy...and the car has “everything.” David Letterman once asked Ricardo Montalban, the actor in that commercial, about this “Corinthian leather” – was it really a thing? After avoiding the question for a bit, he confessed that “Corinthian Leather” really isn’t a thing. It was just a fancy word to put in front of “leather.” But it sure sounds nice,

doesn't it? Maybe in the glove box it came with a real Corinthian letter. ☺ Well, Corinth had everything...maybe even real Corinthian leather. It was quite the cosmopolitan city. And towering over the city was the Temple of Aphrodite. It had 1,000 prostitutes, and influenced the culture of Corinth heavily. In fact, in his letters to the church in Corinth, especially the first one, Paul addresses this sexualized culture and admonishes them that it has no place in the church. So we can see what a challenging place to minister Corinth was, and Paul shows up already dejected because of the difficulty of Athens.

But the Lord takes care of him. First, He brings him new friends in Priscilla and Aquila. Besides his time in Corinth, they accompany him when he goes on to Ephesus after that, where they end up staying. Second, the Lord gives him a word of encouragement through a vision that we read about in verse 9 **“Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:9-10).** So the Lord is providing for Paul and taking care of him even in the midst of a challenging city and in the midst of his own sense of dejection and uncertainty.

And when we have our times of dejection and discouragement, God will bring people into our lives – perhaps someone new, perhaps someone we've known for a long time – to encourage us and keep us going. Some of you are here this morning and you've had some discouragement in your life – maybe even this past week: a loss, a set-back, a health issue, a step in the wrong direction. And God will put people in your life to encourage you and support you in the middle of it. Others of you are in a place to *be* an encouragement to someone – by listening to them over a cup of coffee in the lobby or offering to get together and talk, or praying with them, or lending a helping hand in some way. That kind of encouragement and support in the face of discouragement and disappointment is a big part of what the mission of the church, as the community helps to shape us as disciples of Jesus. Care and compassion in the context of community are acts of discipleship and help to point people to Jesus when we engage in them.

And, just as happened to Paul, the Lord gives us His own words of

encouragement. It might come to you in the form of a vision or a dream...it might come to you through reading His Word. Someone just this week told me how Psalm 27 gave her great comfort and encouragement in the face of her own challenges. Psalm 27 opens with these words:

**The Lord is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?**

**The Lord is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1)**

Talk about encouraging words in the midst of discouragement, right? So God ministers to us through His own words to us, and through others in community, just as He did with Paul.

After 18 months in Corinth, Paul heads out. Before he does, however, he gets his hair cut off. It's kind of an interesting side note that Luke gives us. This was an act that went with taking the Nazirite vow, which had originally been a lifetime commitment, but over time it was also adapted to be done for a shorter duration of time – 30 days was common at this point in time. It is discussed in the Old Testament in Number 6. **The Nazirite vow was a voluntary commitment by a person to dedicate themselves to God, and serve Him.** . So, Paul has his hair cut off because of this vow...we don't know anything beyond that...and then he sets sail.

They arrive in Ephesus, where Paul stays for a short time. He would return again a few years later and stay for 3 years, discipling many and getting a church established there. But that would come later.

The narrative then shifts its focus for a few verses to Apollos. Paul mentions Apollos a few times in his first letter to the Corinthians, including the well-known line when Paul addresses factions in the church that are centered around who has discipled them, and Paul writes, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (1:12). So the focus shifts to Apollos for a bit. And when he first came to Ephesus, he was an incomplete disciple of Jesus. In a lot of ways, he was a very attractive guy...not physically...I mean, he might have been tall, dark and handsome...but we don't know what he looked like...but he was attractive in other ways: He was educated, he spoke with

great enthusiasm and eloquence and boldness, he knew the Scriptures (what we call the OT) thoroughly. In fact, the Greek word here actually comes from the word *dunamis* – “dynamite” to you and me – and so we might say that he knew the Scriptures powerfully. Lastly: **he taught about Jesus accurately...but he was limited in what he knew about Jesus.** He hadn’t been fully discipled in who Jesus was, and he didn’t know anything of the Holy Spirit. That’s obvious when we’re told that he only knew of the baptism of John. In other words, he knew John’s teaching about repentance and being baptized for repentance, but he didn’t know about the connection between the Holy Spirit and baptism or what it meant to live by the power of the Spirit. His teaching, as good as it was, was all centered on his talents and abilities, and he has an incomplete understanding of Jesus.

So Aquila and Priscilla invite him into their home. Probably, this is not just for dinner, but for an extended stay. Verse 27, the sentence after we’re told he was invited to their home, says, “When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia...” This hints at a passage of time prior to this. And so I believe that he stayed with Aquila and Priscilla for some time as they explained to him more about Jesus. **Regardless, the upshot is that when he got to Achaia, he has a fuller understanding of Jesus, and now the text tells us that he proved “from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ” (the Messiah) (18:28).**

So, again, as we did with Paul, we see the role of people who are disciples of Jesus helping to shape and form others into disciples of Jesus. “Discipleship to Jesus” really is the foundation of the mission that Jesus gives. Being a disciple of Jesus is the necessary component in order to be his witness. And discipling others is part of witnessing to Jesus.

And Aquila and Priscilla give us a great model in their relationships with Apollos and also with Paul. **As they took these two men in and ministered to them, they helped form them both as disciples of Jesus.** With Paul it was more of a ministry of care and compassion – it’s like they were deacons in our church or caring for him through the parish ministry of our church – helping him to get back on his feet after showing up on their doorstep in Corinth a bit discouraged. They bore witness to Jesus and discipled him through *caring* for him and *encouraging* him.

And then with Apollos they bear witness to Jesus and disciple him through teaching him about Jesus. They take on more of a mentor and teacher role...of handing down to someone a more complete understanding of who Jesus is and what it means to be His disciple. We know that Paul continued on to be the great missionary church planter that he was...But Apollos was a great teacher himself and clearly impacted people there in Corinth, then in Achaia, and from a mention of his name in Paul's letter to Titus, we know that Apollos spent some time in Crete on his way to somewhere else – some think he went to Ephesus, though we don't know. But in at least four cities and regions – Corinth, Achaia, Crete, and a fourth un-known location, plus perhaps others – Apollos shared about the good news of Jesus Christ.

And if you're here this morning and don't know much about Jesus like Apollos, or if you've come in here dejected and defeated as Paul was when he arrived in Corinth...there are a host of disciples here that can help you along, just as Aquila and Priscilla did for these two guys. This is a place where you can find care and comfort and encouragement for this life...and be taught about the way of Jesus so you, too, might be Jesus' disciple and have hope for eternal life.

For those of us who are not struggling with dejection right now, and have a deeper understanding of Jesus: **Aquila and Priscilla show us what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.** And it's not about head knowledge. It's not about eloquence or education or any of the other great things that Apollos possessed. It's about living in and by the Spirit of God, living in fellowship and community...welcoming people in our midst and showing them hospitality and compassion, teaching people about the ways of Jesus and what it means to be His disciple. And as we do that, we will bear witness to Jesus, carrying out his mission in the 21st Century. Let's pray...Amen.