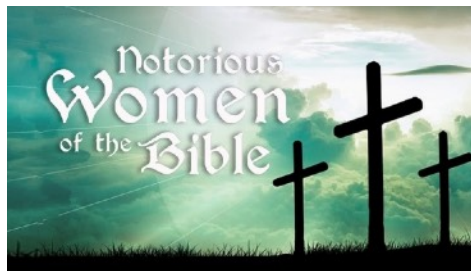


Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ  
The Reverend Dr Scott Everett Couper  
May 9, 2021  
Sixth Sunday after Easter

"Priscilla: Messenger of Christ's Word"

Fifth of six in a series entitled "Happy Easter (Thanks to Women)!"

Romans 16:1-16



How wonderful it is to have Priscilla read a scripture about her namesake!

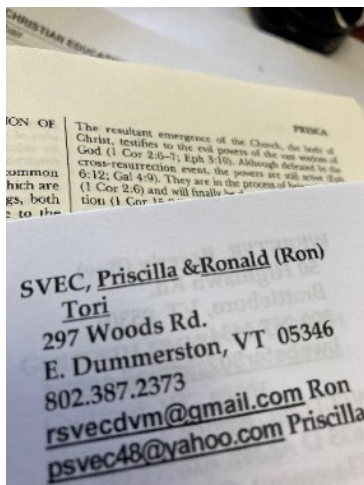
It is very interesting.



From all the commentaries I have read preparing for this week's message, it seems like the big hullabaloo for scholars is over whose name is frequently listed first in the Bible, Priscilla's or her husband's, Aquila. Apparently, it is a really big deal whose name is listed first.

The reason why scholars seem infatuated with the question of whose name is first, the wife's or the husband's, is because in **four out of six mentions** in the Bible where Priscilla and her husband are listed as a couple, Priscilla's name is listed before her husband's.<sup>1</sup> And the reason why that is a big deal is because it was, and perhaps still is to some, a scandal to have a woman's name before a man's.

Well, as you all know, while I am always interested in biblical scandal, I am even more interested in Centre Church scandal. So, I looked in our church directory and, low and behold, look what I found! A full-fledged scandal! Priscilla's name is listed before Ron's name! Well, you can't say that Centre Congregational Church is not a biblically-based church, now can you?



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<sup>1</sup> "Priscilla and Aquila", Wikipedia, found at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priscilla\\_and\\_Aquila](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priscilla_and_Aquila), accessed May 9, 2021.

First, I take it as an assumption that if someone's name is mentioned first then that is someone who can be considered to be important. That assumption could be inaccurate, yet for biblical scholars it is a safe assumption nonetheless. Before I share why Priscilla was so important, let us first identify why Priscilla's name would not normally be list before her husband's in the Bible. First, in the Greco-Roman world, patriarchy and hierarchy reigned. In fact, Priscilla would have been considered to be the property of her husband, legally speaking. So, that Priscilla's name comes before her husband's is significant. Second, Priscila was a Roman gentile who married a Jew. The fact that a female Gentile rather than her husband, a male Jew, is named first strikes me and many scholars as odd and thus significant. And last but not least, Paul probably came to know Aquila first as a Jew and therefore had a longer relationship with him. Yet, four out of six times in the Bible, the Bible lists Priscilla's name first.

Let's examine why Priscilla was so prominent.



Archeological evidence demonstrates that Priscilla had tremendous influence in the early Christian church. Her name is found on Roman monuments, churches, and at an ancient burial site called the 'Coemeterium Priscillae'. One of the churches in early Rome was called the 'Titulus of St Priscilla'. Priscilla was likely martyred (burned to death) and buried at the Church of St Prisca (the Roman form of her name). Someone named Priscilla was clearly an important leader in the early church.<sup>2</sup>

The story goes that Priscilla with her husband, Aquila, fled Rome after being banished by the Roman Emperor Claudius. They travelled from Rome to Corinth in about 51AD.

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<sup>2</sup> Mimi Haddad, "Priscilla, Author of the Epistles to the Hebrews?" in *Priscilla Papers: The Academic Journal of CBE International*", January 30, 1993. Found at: <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/article/priscilla-papers-academic-journal/priscilla-author-epistle-hebrews>, accessed May 9, 2021.



There the couple met up with the apostle Paul, not necessarily because they were Christians but because all three were tent makers.



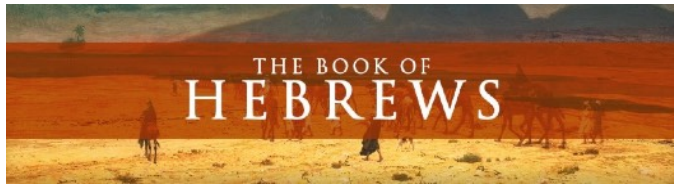
For eighteen months, Paul and the couple lived and worked together in Corinth. It is likely that there with Paul (and perhaps Timothy) the four made a master plan to evangelize much of Asia minor and southwestern Europe.



The couple travelled to Ephesus where they met a very intelligent and articulate evangelist named Apollos. Scholars write that Priscilla educated and at times corrected Apollos' teaching. This is significant because Apollos was known to be none other than a rival to the Apostle Paul. That a female gentile from Rome would be educating and instructing an evangelist whose authority was thought by some to equal or more than Paul's was extraordinary. Many rightly lament the biblical injunction to women 'to keep quiet in the church' (I Corinthians 14:34) that was quite possibly written by an interpolator rather than by Paul. Yet, nowhere does Paul nor the author of Acts, Luke, criticize Priscilla for having taught a man. In fact, precisely the opposite occurred. In Act 18:26, Luke and Paul celebrate Priscilla because she "explained the way of God more accurately". Priscilla, not her husband Aquila, was the instructor. The couple with Paul, especially Priscilla, can be credited with Paul for founding the church of Ephesus.

After Ephesus, the couple returned to Rome when it was safer. Yet, it was in Rome that she was martyred and her name lives on as a substantive companion to Paul, a faithful educator of the gospel, and a founder of at least three churches in Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome.

But, wait there is more. There is one book in the Bible that has baffled scholars for centuries, including the early Christian fathers.



The epistle to the Hebrews, despite it being such a beautiful piece of early Christian literature, lacks two crucial identifiers: an author and the people (the citizens of a given city) to whom it was written. Incredibly, there is no mention of who wrote the epistle and to who it was sent. The epistle is a masterpiece, often referred to as the ‘fifth gospel’.

Throughout my adult life, I have always wondered “Did any women write any of the books of the Bible”. I have always surmised not – or if parts of the Bible were written by women no one would know because male authors are usually cited as having written them. Yet, the epistle to the Hebrews could be the one book in the Bible written by a woman – and that woman is most likely to be Priscilla!<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Roger Barrier, “Were There Any Women Bible Writers”, *Preach It Teach It*, found at: <https://preachitteachit.org/ask-roger/detail/were-there-any-women-bible-writers/>, accessed May 9, 2021.



One biblical scholar, Mimi Haddad wrote, “Priscilla, a Roman Christian, a co-worker with Paul and Timothy, a woman who had not seen the Lord Jesus but had received confirmation of salvation by those who had; Priscilla, pious and wise, a church planter who was familiar with the struggles of Gentiles, exiles, and women; Priscilla, a teacher of teachers, whose name was female enough to pose a threat to a later interpolator unsympathetic with the authority and approval a woman such as she had enjoyed”.<sup>4</sup>



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<sup>4</sup> Mimi Haddad, “Priscilla, Author of the Epistles to the Hebrews?” in *Priscilla Papers: The Academic Journal of CBE International*, January 30, 1993.



On this Mother's Day, let us remember the mother of three early Christian churches. This Mother's Day, let us give credit where credit is due. Priscilla: Likely author of the epistle to the Hebrews and thus 'Messenger of Christ's Word'.

Respect her.

This was the Word of God. And it was delivered to the People of God. And the people of God responded, "Amen!"