

Prisca

Story

I am Prisca. I wrote the letter to the Hebrews. In there you find my theology. I come from the city of Pontus on the Black Sea. (This is where today Turkey is). I am a tentmaker. I am married to Aquila who is a tentmaker, too.

Soon after our wedding, we left our hometown on the Black Sea and moved to Rome. In Rome we started a tentmaker's workshop. We made tents and we repaired tents. We had a good life. The Roman military with their army tents were our best clients.

In Rome we met a small community of Christians. We loved the city and the little congregation. We could have stayed forever. But then, all of a sudden, Claudius, the emperor, demanded for all Jews to leave the country. We had to flee, because from our upbringing we were Jews. We found asylum and a new home in Corinth. There was a Christian community, too. We joined them. We opened a tent workshop.

One night, a stranger arrived. His name was Paul. He'd come from Athens where he'd just given a famous speech. Paul believed in Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth. And he talked about him everywhere. He just couldn't stop. He invited people into a life with Jesus and encouraged them to believe in the living God.

We welcomed Paul in our modest home and let him live and work with us, because his profession too, was tentmaking. Paul was with us way over a year.

Unfortunately, he got in trouble with the Jews in Corinth who could not stand his talking about Jesus. They wanted to get rid of him. The young Christian community loved Paul, but they could not protect him from the attacks of the Jews. Paul decided to leave. And we went with him.

We entered a ship to Ephesus. There we bought a house, set up a workshop, joined the Christian community, and lived and worked together. Paul and us – we'd become family for each other. We made tents and preached the good news of Jesus. We became real experts in theology. I had students to teach, because my knowledge of Jesus and his way of loving and living had grown immensely over the years.

Ephesus was a beautiful city. We liked our life there. But again, Paul got in trouble. The majority of the people in Ephesus worshipped the Goddess Artemis. They deeply disliked Paul's sermons on the one and only invisible God.

Eventually they hated him so much that they threw him into prison.

Aquila and I bought him out of prison and hid him. But we were not safe anymore. We had to be quick. By night and fog, we had to flee. We risked our lives for Paul who somehow always got in trouble. Deep trouble.

Paul went to Macedonia, whereas Aquila and I went back to Rome. We had heard that the situation in Rome for Jews and Christians was safe again. We'd loved living there before, so we had a strong desire to return. We found a house and a church. We started a business again.

Here we live. I still teach and make tents. Aquila too. We are in contact with Paul who travels the world. We receive letters from him. He never forgets to greet all his friends.

In those letters we share our believe, strengthen each other in faith, and most of all hold each other in constant prayer. We are living in a wonderful circle of Christian friends and hope from the bottom of our hearts that Rome will now remain the place where we belong.

Oh, just one little last thing: when I was little my parents called me Priscilla, - little Prisca. Some of my friends and my husband sometimes still do. But Paul, my good friend Paul, always calls me Prisca.

Meditation

Acts 18 & Romans 16

Prisca was a woman who knew hardship and survived it.

When the Emperor Claudius drove the Jews out of Rome, around 40 AD, she had been forced to leave everyone she knew, to relinquish everything she held dear, to give up all the security, all the warmth that the familiar gives.

She was a refugee, forced to begin again, required against her will to start life over in a new land and with new people.

She had been uprooted, displaced, left to find her way in a society that was new and foreign.

She had no friends, but she made new friends.

She had no community, but she found a small one and made it grow and prosper.

She survived the flight. And as soon as she had a new little place that one could call home, she reached out to others.

It was in her nature. She just couldn't hold back.

It is in Corinth that Prisca and her husband Aquila, two tentmakers meet another tentmaker. The apostle Paul. They open their home to him, live and work with him. They have a house church in their home. It grows, and it attracts people.

Prisca, Aquila and Paul are theologians as well as tentmakers. They begin to share their knowledge with others. They teach and preach.

The refugee woman becomes a skilled leader. She is important and significant. What she does is noticed. What she says is heard. She speaks her own truth in her own name, and she is respected for it.

Prisca was prominent as a leader in the early church. She is mentioned six times in the New Testament. Since the authors of the Bible did not really have a genuine interest in reporting on women and what they did, six times mentioning Prisca's name is remarkable. She must have done much more than we find in the Bible, I am sure.

Prisca was and is an example of loving leadership.

Meeting her changed people's lives.

Being her friend enabled people to find out who they really are and what wonderful things they can do together – in community.

The Benedictine nun Joan Chittister writes about Prisca: "In her I recognize the one who has the capacity to draw from the well of the self when there is every reason in the world to believe that the well must be dry."

In other words: Prisca is the woman who never gives up. Not on herself nor on the others.

She finds hidden resources when everything else seems empty and dry. And as she does so, she encourages others to do the same. She helps people seek and find what they have not yet discovered about themselves.

No surprise that the community in her house grows and people like to be around her and with her and her husband.

Prisca's story makes me think. I wonder when and where I can be Prisca for others?

Encouraging, welcoming, strengthening them... Overcoming hardship and bitterness, not staying stuck in the past and licking old wounds, but move forward in hope and faith.

I also wonder who were and are the Prisca's in my life?

Who are the people who helped me grow and develop?

Who are the people who shaped me? The people who crossed my path and opened ways for me that I alone would have never seen? As Prisca taught Apollos, who taught me? And to whom can I be a teacher?

And last but not least: I admire Prisca's energy to begin a new life in a new place over and over again. And I rejoice with her, when eventually she returned to Rome and made a home there. I hope and pray that this is where she could stay and where she found grace and peace.

What I take from this almost unknown woman and her hidden story is very simple.

I would like to draw strength from the same well as Prisca did. She lived out of her unceasing faith in a loving and all-embracing God. She had made Jesus her friend and followed fearlessly in his footsteps...

I pray that I can do so too. ...that we all can do so too. Amen.