

**Sermon for Sunday, August 28, 2022**  
**Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Traveling With the Spirit**  
**“Appreciating Our Travel Partners”**  
**Rev. Amy Zalk Larson**  
**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church Decorah, Iowa**

[Romans 16:1-16; Acts 18:1-4, 18, 24-28](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

I imagine as you listened to Brian Caton read that Romans passage earlier, you were glad that you aren't the reader today. Am I right? That was a long list of names! Thank you, Brian!

I love that Romans passage and our Acts reading today because they each highlight the ministry of women. Paul names ten women in that Romans passage. (I can give you the list later if you're interested.)

It's good to hear about Phoebe, an important woman deacon and the Apostle Junia, prominent among the apostles. Did you know there were women apostles? An apostle means one sent to share the good news, so actually Mary Magdalene was the first apostle. At the empty tomb, Jesus sends her to go tell the others that he is risen. She is the apostle to the apostles. Mary and Junia are the two women apostles mentioned in scripture and I'm guessing there were more.

It's good to hear about Priscilla, also known as Prisca, who shares in God's work with her husband Aquila. Most of the times that the couple is mentioned, Priscilla is named first - something rare in the ancient world and still today.

Women have always played an important role in the ministry of the Gospel, even when church leaders haven't recognized it. God has blessed all of us, of every gender, with gifts needed for God's work of loving and tending the world. Whatever your gender, sexuality, race, whatever your identity, you have a role to play.

I also love our readings today because they highlight that being a Christian is not an individual affair, not something that's just between me and Jesus. As we journey through this life as followers of Jesus, we need travel partners. I was reminded of that so often on my sabbatical this summer! I missed this congregation, especially on Sunday mornings! I'm so grateful for the time I had to read, reflect, and go deep into a topic. And it's so good to be back in community with you again. Community is so important for our lives of faith.

I'm grateful that we can provide online worship for those who need it as the pandemic continues, those who are always homebound, those traveling. But I hope we remember what a gift it is to gather as the body of Christ and to bring our whole selves into a space together. Online, people can be muted. We can hide ourselves, turning off the camera. Our beautiful, complicated bodies, with all their varied shapes, sounds, and smells, are kept at a safe distance.

Living as the body of Christ is not a sterile, one-dimensional, safe experience. It's messy and life-giving, hard and wondrous. All of who we are is welcomed, drawn in, and transformed by God.

We need to gather *and* stay connected to those who cannot gather. We need travel partners who encourage, teach, and correct us as Priscilla and Aquila did for Apollos in our Acts reading today. We need to live as the body of Christ.

This week, the Worship and Music Committee pondered one important way we do that. We confess the creeds of the whole Christian church. There's something healing and powerful about saying the ancient words of faith together. Certainly, there are some *issues* with the creeds. They arose out of church conflicts. They've been used to persecute and exclude. They can give the impression that faith is about assent to doctrines rather than relationships of trust with God and the body of Christ. They use masculine imagery for a God who is beyond gender.

Yet, as we confess these ancient words, we're united with people from across the ages and around the world. We're reminded that we have many travel partners we'll never meet, many who lived long ago yet who are part of Christ's body with us. As we confess, we also experience connection with those around us in this place as our bodies and voices together proclaim good news for the world, good news for each of us.

Sometimes we can't say some or any of these words because we're hurting, angry with God, or just don't believe them. That's OK. It doesn't depend on us. It isn't about us. These words are gifts of God who holds and carries us all. And the body of Christ that confesses these words also holds and carries us and proclaims the words even when we can't.

These days there are many alternate confessions of faith: Some that use feminine or non-gendered language for God; some that speak of Jesus' life and teachings, not just his birth, death, and resurrection; some that highlight wisdom of indigenous cultures and more. I respect this work and these efforts. But I do wonder if alternate confessions also reinforce the individualism and arrogance of modern American society. We assume we're more enlightened than those Christians long ago. Yet there were women in the early church, there were mystics, radicals and free thinkers, scientists, scholars, musicians. They found a home within the ancient confessions of faith. We can as well.

In a world that's so polarized, it's easy to feel divided from those with whom we disagree. The ancient creeds show that there's lots of room in the Christian faith. We don't have to agree with it all, we don't have to believe it all. It doesn't depend on us. It isn't about us. These creeds proclaim that God is at work to create, save and heal this world; that Christ has faith in us, that we are part of something much bigger than ourselves. This summer at Good Shepherd, portions of our Racial Justice Statement have been confessed in place of the Creed. I'm grateful for our Statement, our Antiracism Task Force, and our commitments as a congregation.

We will continue to keep that Statement before us in our bulletins and on the walls soon. We will often incorporate it into worship, sometimes as a part of a confession of sins and a commitment to change at the beginning of worship. Yet your Worship and Music Committee and pastor have discerned that it's time for us to return to confessing the ancient creeds of the church together. That is a powerful way that we can be strengthened for the journey and be in community with our travel partners.

As we confess these words together, may you know that you are held and carried by the body of Christ, and by God who will not let you go.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.