

A couple of years ago, Martha's brother was given a subscription to ancestry.com. It's a fascinating service, seeing where your ancestors are from and being able to look at artifacts of your family along the way. The best thing they found so far was a letter sent from Martha's great great grandmother (who also happens to be named Martha) to not one, but two, gentlemen. The story goes both these men were in the military and stationed together. In conversation they learned they were both from the same town. And in further conversation, they both realized they were in love with the same woman. So, as you'd do in that situation, they wrote her a letter *together*, asking her to choose between the two of them. She obliged and declared her love and choice for the man who would ultimately become Martha's great great grandfather. From them the family grew, from generation to generation to generation, down to Martha, who married Kurt (there was no other choice!) and together we added another generation to the family tree.

If you are follower of Jesus, not only are you a part of a biological family tree, you are part of a spiritual family tree. And just like in our biological family tree, in the family tree of God, we are all products of the generations that came before us and producers of the next. God uses followers of his to bring others to saving faith, making them his children, and part of the family of God. But in the church, we often try to complicate it. Individually we can feel ill-equipped, incapable, and overwhelmed by a sense of having to do it perfectly. Organizationally, we can focus too much on good things like programs, strategies, conferences. When that happens, we forget the basics...the basics of discipleship, the basics of passing on our faith, the basics of growing the family of God. This morning, as we continue in our series in Acts, we're going back to the basics as we look at chapters 18 and 19.

Last week, Paul traveled to Corinth where Jesus reminded him "I am with you" and he met Priscilla and Aquila. It was the beginning of a relationship that led to years of partnership in ministry. We have talked of the 4i's of discipleship: Identify, Invite, Invest, and Ignite. Paul identified, invited, and invested in the two of them in Corinth, and he's about to ignite them into their own ministry. Paul wants to visit the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch and goes by way of Ephesus, taking Priscilla and Aquila with him. He stays there for a short time but, upon his departure, leaves them to continue the work. That's where we pick up the story and see Basic #1.

We all have something to learn. No matter where you are in your relationship with Jesus, there is still room to grow.

[Acts 18:24-28] ²⁴Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. ²⁵He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. ²⁷And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, ²⁸for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

Ephesus was the capital of Asia, a vibrant economic center, and the home of the temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. An Alexandrian Jew named Apollos had made

his way there and preached the Word. He spoke eloquently, powerfully, and knowledgeably. It would be easy for him to think and everyone else to say “Well, he’s got it all down. He knows it all.” But that wouldn’t be true. Luke tells us that this up front and out front guy actually has some learning to do. What he says is accurate, but it’s also incomplete. He’s teaching about Jesus but knows only of the baptism of repentance taught by John the Baptist, not the regenerative baptism of the Holy Spirit spoken long ago by the prophets and fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. The teacher needs to become the student. And so do we.

When is it ok for a doctor to stop learning more about medicine? A pilot about flying? A scientist about their discipline? A husband about his wife? You’d probably say “Never.” But what about a Christian about the Christ? **We have been given the great privilege and blessing of being lifelong learners because we worship an infinite God who always has something new to show us.** No matter where you are in your walk with Jesus, there is more room to grow.

[Philippians 1:6] ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

The day you stop growing is the day your heart stops beating, or the day Jesus comes back. The believers I admire most are not those who have it all figured out, but those humble enough to admit they don’t and spend their days getting to know God more and more. I love the idea that in five years I can read and preach this passage differently because I know my Savior more. This is not a must/should/have to. It is a joyful daily discovery that God invites us into. And as we learn...

We all have something to tell. Consider the legacy of faith here. Apollos is taught by Priscilla and Aquila, Priscilla and Aquila were taught by Paul, Paul was taught by Barnabas, Barnabas taught by the Twelve, and the Twelve taught by Jesus. I also love that we hear the echo of John the Baptist in this passage. Each took what they learned and turned around and told it to someone else.

This is a consistent theme presented in Luke and Acts, but this is how anything is passed along from one person to the next. The trades, cooking, what it means to be a man, sports. The NFL draft just took place, and all those rookies were in camp this last week being told what it means to be a Cowboy, how to play the game, how to conduct themselves, how to handle their newfound riches, etc. And it was told to them by those who went before them and have already learned it themselves.

But the purpose of telling is not to just pass on information. Romans says we are to be *transformed* by the renewing of our minds, and God wants to speak through you for the transformation and activation of someone else. The truth of God is compelling. “Here’s who Jesus is. Here’s what Jesus said. Here’s what Jesus did. And here’s what he calls us to be and do.” When we do that, we show someone how God’s story intersects with their story, and it has the potential to change the trajectory of their present and eternal life. Apollos will go on to Corinth and have a huge impact there, equipped with a greater understanding of the gospel that he’ll tell to others. Priscilla and Aquila will continue to minister with Paul and make appearances in several of his epistles. He will call them “my fellow workers in Christ” and commend for “risking their necks for me”. And it all began with someone telling them. When you awaken someone to the truth of God, you awaken them to the adventure of life lived with him and for him.

When learners learn and tellers tell, the family grows. When we focus on the basics, believers grow, and new people come to faith in Christ.

[Acts 19:1-10] And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. ² And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” ³ And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John’s baptism.” ⁴ And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.” ⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. ⁷ There were about twelve men in all. ⁸ And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. ⁹ But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰ This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

We are a people who build on the labor of others. As Apollos goes to Corinth to build on the work Paul has started there, Paul returns to Ephesus to build on the work of Apollos, Priscilla, and Aquila. **Ministry is a team sport.** Paul encounters a group who know only the baptism of John the Baptist and who have not received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We don’t know if they were yet believers in Jesus. Acts is a transitional book, and the distribution of the Holy Spirit does not follow a pattern. Normatively, God indwells believers with his Spirit at the time of conversion. They were baptized in the name of Jesus, Paul laid hands on them, and they received the Spirit and spoke in tongues, just like we saw in Acts 2. It was a confirmation of their belief and confirmation Pauls’ ministry and message.

Paul continues by going through his normal routine, preaching in the synagogue, getting mixed results, and adjusting accordingly. By God’s grace, he spends two years there, teaching mostly at the hall of Tyrannus, and followers of Jesus learn and tell and so that the gospel spreads to such an extent that all of Asia hears within that time.

I wondered this week if we struggle with the basics because we are so used to instant results. We can microwave anything, listen to any song on demand, never be out of reach, and maybe even expect the church to instantly bounce back after the pandemic. But we look at this pattern of learn, tell, learn, tell, and it’s just not fast or productive enough for us, so we drop it, try to shortcut it, or try to force results. But God’s way and God’s timing are perfect. He asks us to be faithful in learning and telling. Remember, God told Paul to skip Asia during his second missionary journey. That didn’t seem very nice at the time. But God, instead, took Paul to Corinth where he met Priscilla and Aquila, invited them in, and through their ministry, the entire province of Asia has been saturated with the Good News of Jesus. Let’s be passionate, let’s be creative, let’s be strategic, but as we are, remember we are, at our core, followers who are called to learn and tell.

Remember and thank those who told you.

You are the product of faithful witnesses who can be traced all the way back to Jesus. You are a branch on a spiritual family tree that God has been lovingly and faithfully growing over the centuries. There is no spiritual ancestry.com, so you can't go back that far, but who do you know in the generations that came before you? As I think about my spiritual family tree, I think of Mr. and Mrs. Roberts, Father Flynn, Father Mark, Martha, Thad, Steve, Gary, Tim, Bill, John. What about you? Would you take some time this week to remember and thank them and thank God for them? And as you think about the investment they made in your life, let that inspire you to do the same for someone else.

Find and tell someone else. I have said it many times in the last year: If you are a follower of Jesus, know him even just a little bit, you have something to pass on to someone else. God does not want the tree to stop growing with you. He wants to use you to plant new generations. Paul goes all over the Mediterranean world. You don't have to go that far, though God may call you to. You can go...home, to your work, to your kids' games, to your neighborhood. Perhaps the first place God wants you to go is to the gathering of his body. All of what we read in Acts happens in community. We appear to be coming out of a dark and difficult fifteen months, and if we commit to doing the basics, everyone who shows up here on Sunday mornings has something to learn and something to tell. Ask God to open your eyes to whom he has for you to learn from and to tell.

Paul's missionary journeys are coming to an end. He's about to head to Jerusalem and wants to ultimately get to Rome. But his faithfulness and the faithfulness of those who learned from him and told others has overcome persecution, demonic oppression, and other challenges. Luke ends this section with his sixth and final progress report. [Acts 19:20] ²⁰ **So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.** What was said about the Church 2000 years ago can be said again today. Let us be learners and tellers and trust that, no matter what comes, God's Word will prevail, because he will make it so.