

Wonder Women! Then and Now

Acts Ch 18 v 1-4, 18-19 and Romans Ch 16 v 1-5

I am sure that many MWA sisters remember travelling to Albania for a European Women's Conference in 2013. We had a wonderful time guided and led by our Albanian sisters Sr Merita and Sr Vjolca along with many others who helped to make our stay so enjoyable. The Moravian women in Albania are very strong as were the women in the early Christian Church. In his letters to those first churches in Corinth, Ephesus and throughout the whole region, Paul often mentions the many women who worked alongside their male brothers, held important roles in their church and helped to spread the Christian message. Pheobe was one such woman. It was she who was entrusted to take the letter that Paul wrote to the church that he had started in Rome to prepare them for his forthcoming visit. It was probably the most important letter that he ever wrote. In it he outlined his understanding of the Christian faith and its practical implications for the lives of Christians – both then and still is relevant for us today. It is thought that Pheobe was a wealthy, unmarried woman who lived in Cenchreae near the seaport of Corinth. The area round the seaport was a busy place always full of drunken sailors and was well known for its colourful night life. She must have been quite special to work in an environment like that and Paul thought so too. He refers to her as a 'sister', a 'deacon' and a 'benefactor'. Maybe she was like the Street pastors of today. It seems that she went confidently into a pagan culture - may be like our Moravian Missionaries – and interpreted her faith in a way that the people understood. She must have been a good communicator. She wasn't daunted by her gender, was willing to put herself forward for leadership roles and knew her faith so well that Paul trusted her to be a major player early Christian life.

Priscilla was another such 'Wonder Woman' in the early church. She worked alongside her husband Aquila and first met Paul through their common skills in being tent makers. Priscilla was very hospitable. She invited Paul into her home and always mixed well with the community wherever she found herself. She and Aquila moved home about six times and each time they started up a new business and new church groups. It appears that she was an active initiative taker as her name always appears first when listed with her husband which was unusual in 1st century writing. She, like Pheobe, was probably from a wealthy background but she was humble, held no airs and graces and was content to work alongside tradesmen and women. Priscilla was a good team worker, always working in harmony with others and never taking the limelight. She was as happy for the success of others as that of her own.

What can we learn from the lives of Pheobe and Priscilla?

For Discussion

1. Are we prepared to step out of our comfort zone to help others?
2. Do we welcome others into our homes showing something of God's welcome to us all?
3. Do we know our Bible well enough and pass on our faith to those we meet in everyday life?