

Community of Believers

by Randall Schlabach and Carol Duerksen

FAITH STORY:

Acts 18:24-19:10

FAITH STORY SUMMARY:

Apollos was an intelligent man who knew his scripture, and he was a believer to the extent that he knew that someone was coming after John the Baptist. Although he spoke boldly about what he knew, he didn't know "the whole picture." When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and told him about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Apollos decided he wanted to go to Achaia to preach and teach, and the Christians in Ephesus encouraged him and sent a letter to the Christians in Achaia telling them to welcome him.

Paul also arrived in Ephesus and discovered that some of the disciples there had been baptized with John's baptism but had not received the Holy Spirit. He baptized them in the name of Jesus, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Paul also encountered people who refused to believe, and when that happened, he left and held discussions with potential believers elsewhere.

MATERIALS AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- Bibles for each student
- Chocolate chip cookies WITHOUT the chips—one for each student
- Chocolate chip cookies WITH the chips—one for each student
- Large sheets of paper and markers
- White board or sheets with questions for groups to discussion

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS:

Greet youth as they arrive. Begin the session by saying that you have a treat for them—that you brought some chocolate chip cookies. Pass around the cookies without the chips. Talk with youth about their week, etc, and if someone mentions that the cookies don't have any chips, say "Well, isn't that interesting" or some other non-committal statement.

CONNECT:

Ask:

What kind of cookies did you just eat?

Were they good? What was missing?

And now, the big question: What does this have to do with Mennonite beliefs?

(Allow students to guess but don't say if the answers are right or wrong.)

EXPLORE THE BIBLE STORY:

Read the scripture passage. Then say:

As Anabaptist Mennonites, one of our core values is the importance of the community of believers. In the community of believers, we discern what the Bible is saying to us and how we should live that out in our lives. For us, our faith is not complete without this community of believers, just like chocolate chip cookies are not complete without the chocolate chips.

Divide into two groups. Give each group paper and markers to record their answers. Group 1 will read and discuss Acts 18:24-28. Group 2 will read and discuss Acts 19:1-10.

Discussion questions for Group 1:

1. Who are the people involved in this story?
2. What did Priscilla and Aquila do?
3. How did this help Apollos?
4. What did the Christians do?
5. How did this help Apollos?
6. What did Apollos do?
7. Whom did Apollos help? How?

Discussion questions for Group 2:

1. Who are the people involved in this story?
2. How did Paul help the disciples?

3. What happened when Paul spoke in the synagogue?
4. Do you think it was good that Paul left or should he have stayed and kept preaching?

Bring the groups together and discuss their passages and the answers.

POINTS TO MAKE:

Apollos was full of enthusiasm to go along with his knowledge of the scriptures, but he didn't know the whole story. Aquila and Priscilla didn't challenge him in front of everyone, but pulled him aside and told him "the rest of the story." They were a community of believers for him, helping him in his faith journey. Likewise, the Christians in Ephesus didn't say "This guy doesn't know what he's talking about;" instead they taught and uplifted him in his knowledge and then encouraged him and wrote a letter to go with him to his next place of ministry. And of course it all paid off for the Kingdom of God, because he effectively proved through the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

When Paul learned that the disciples had been baptized but hadn't received the Holy Spirit, he didn't put them down or write them off. He helped them. He explained what needed to happen next, and led them into baptism in the name of Jesus, and the receiving of the Holy Spirit. This is what the community of believers is all about—helping, encouraging, and being with each other.

Not everyone chooses to follow Jesus and join the community of believers, as we see in verse 9. Nevertheless, Paul continued to spread the Good News of Jesus.

APPLY:

Hand out the cookies with the chocolate chips, but tell students that when they take a cookie, they need to say one thing that they think the community of believers (your youth group, or church, or denomination) should discuss as it relates to what the Bible says and how to apply it to your lives. You might begin by giving an example yourself.

Make a list of the suggestions. Optional: use these as future topics in youth group or Sunday school and/or share them with your pastor.

RESPOND:

Say:

The community of believers exists not just to encourage and help each other. As we see in this story, believers also have the responsibility of telling others about God. How do we do that? How does our church do that? How do we go beyond taking care of each other and reach out to other people?

Spend some time talking about this and then spend some time praying together. Ask the Holy Spirit to work in and among each young person there—name them one by one. This prayer can be done by the youth with each other, or by the adult leader(s).