

Soul Sisters 8 – Damaris



Detail from Raphael's *Paul at the Areopagus*.

Acts 17 (selected verses)

22 Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, 'Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. ²³For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands...

³⁰While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.' ³²When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed; but others said, 'We will hear you again about this.' ³³At that point Paul left them. ³⁴But some of them joined him and became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Damaris is one of the new believers mentioned in the book of Acts, from Paul's discourse at the Areopagus. The Areopagus was a rocky site northwest of the Acropolis in Athens which had been used as a kind of "court" by philosophers for centuries. After debating theology with Jewish, Stoic and Epicurean thinkers in the synagogue and marketplace, Paul was invited to make his case at the Areopagus. We are told so little about Damaris. Since women were rarely present at the Areopagus, it was assumed for centuries that she was a prostitute, a hetaera. However, more recent studies have demonstrated that the Stoic philosophers included women in their number, so it is also possible that she was present because of her own curiosity and that she found Paul's words about Jesus convincing. The fact that her name is remembered suggests she became a leader in the early movement.

What can we learn from our Soul Sister Damaris? Whatever her profession, Damaris went to a place where women rarely chose to go. She went with ears and heart wide open, and became a witness in her own right to a story about new life and courage.

Question for Reflection: Has there been a time when your curiosity has led you to a place you have never been, but where you have felt your heart or attitudes changed?

Prayer: *O God of open hearts, open ears, open minds, we give you thanks for the curiosity that fuels our minds and takes us on unexpected adventures. Fill us with your Spirit, we pray, that our curiosity might lead us deeper in our seeking for you. Amen*