

"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." – 2 Corinthians 5:20

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When we had children, we realized early on that churches are very good at liturgically celebrating Christmas - nativity scenes, Christmas cantatas, Advent candles, Christmas carols, Christmas Eve candle lighting services. In contrast,

leading up to Easter, there seemed to be very little that marked the season and prepared our hearts. Perhaps there was an egg hunt, a potluck meal, or a Good Friday service. This realization became a driving force for our household: how do we help prepare our hearts for Easter and truly honor and celebrate what happened to Jesus? Over time, answering that question is what the Lord has used to lead us to creating and expanding our Walk Through Holy Week event. And we were very blessed this year to be joined by a team from the States to help us here in Romania.

As Catalina expanded the event by writing a follow-up devotional, she wanted the children and families to 1) better understand how the Jewish people went from celebrating Jesus to crucifying Him just five days apart, 2) better recognize what kind of King Jesus truly is, and 3) better respond to the question "Is Jesus your King?" As we read through the devotions with our children, we discussed all the ways that Jesus wasn't the type of King that the Israelites expected - or even wanted. He didn't lead a revolution against their oppressors; instead, He battled the Israelites who had become oppressors in His own temple. He didn't force others to bow down; instead He got on His knees to wash feet. He didn't destroy His enemies; instead He accepted the kiss of His betrayer, healed the ear of the man arresting Him, and willingly died on the cross for all of our sakes. And so we reflected on and spoke with our children about the idea that following Jesus isn't always going to be easy, what we expect, or what we want. He will continue to surprise us and move our hearts to understand what type of King He actually *is*.

In addition to the American team coming to lead the Stations, I led a group of five children from our Kids Club in going through several of the crafts and stories ahead of time so that they could be helpers on the day of the event. They did a great job! As a celebration of their hard work, I took them out for pizza the Monday after the team left. As we were eating our delicious pizzas, a familiar face walked by the window of the pizza shop. It was a Roma man we had relationship with a few years back when we lived in Codlea. I'll call him John. John perked up when he saw me. I waved to him, and he waved back. Then, right after he passed the restaurant, he paused and turned back to enter. The result was just like you'd imagine it in the movies. The wait staff and restaurant owner all stopped what they were doing and looked up. The kids I was with all stopped chewing, looked at John, and then looked at me like, "what is going on?"

John walked straight towards me and extended his grimy hand, greeting me

with the Romanian Easter phrase, "Isus a inviat!" (Jesus has risen). I responded with, "adevarat, a inviat!" (truly, he has risen!). I was thinking to myself, what are the kids going to think of me if I'm associated with John? Are they going to think that I'm naïve or stupid to work with a Roma man like John? Are they going to think my response to him is too stingy, or perhaps too lavish? John doesn't deserve help. Why is he ruining my lunch? I had some serious struggles with being judged by the company I kept. It was a real temptation to dismiss John in order to avoid being seen in a certain, unfavorable light.

It didn't take long for me to think back to the question we had been trying to lead our children to answer the entire Easter season. Right now, in this very situation, was I willing to give Jesus everything I had to offer His Kingdom? Was I willing to be despised and regarded as stupid and irresponsible? Was I willing to face the social ridicule of even those younger than me? How would King Jesus have treated John, and was I willing to follow Him there, too?

John proceeded to attempt handshakes with the wait staff, who refused, and greeted them with the Easter greetings. Then he walked over to me and asked if I could help him out with any food. We chatted for a bit, then he left, and that was it. Our whole interaction lasted only two or three minutes. There didn't seem to be any revolutionary happenings in a simple handshake or a few morsels of food. Yet isn't that the story of the last week of Jesus's life and His Kingdom - spreading the Gospel even through simple acts of love?

As I focus more on the life of Jesus each Easter, I'm learning more about who I am and how much I need both the work and the life of Jesus. While I was Jesus's enemy, he died for me. And despite my many failures, he is not ashamed to call me his own. I pray that God would help me more and more to walk in a life of love. I pray that God would give me wisdom to know how to be a defender of the image of God rather than a hypocritical religious leader or a condescending disciple. And I pray that God would use the life and death of Jesus to call you and everyone else to him and walk in his ways.

Prayer Requests

- Catalina's parents are visiting from 4/21 - 5/4. Please pray for a good visit and for the hard goodbyes.
- We will be Stateside from October 4 - January 22 for HMA. We do have some support raising to do because of worldwide inflation and salary adjustments. Please be in prayer for us as we make our itinerary for our time in the States.

Of course, we'll share more info later about this, too. Can't wait to see everyone!

- Pray for Derek as he leads these young children, especially since he doesn't have any translation help from Romanians on Monday nights. This is a new challenge for him, and he must rely on the Lord to help him with this!
- Continue praying for a Romanian pastor and worship leader. We have recently lost a few families in the church, but gained a few new regular attenders. We are constantly reminded that this is God's church, not ours.







Above you can see just a very small sampling of the hundreds of pictures we have to choose from to show you how the Walk Through Holy Week event went! The team from Restoration Presbyterian / Christ the King Presbyterian / 12Stone Church did such a wonderful job. They were the most joyful, flexible group who truly came to serve! We really loved having them, and we were so encouraged by all the families who came out to participate in the event. We heard over and over again that the team was prepared to share the stories with children, yet time and again they were surprised at how many of the adults didn't know these stories, either. Although Wikipedia tells us that this country is 96% Orthodox Christian, and you're hard pressed to find anyone on the street who doesn't claim Orthodox Christianity, their experience was a clear reminder of why the Lord has asked us here. People know the rituals and dutifully make the sign of the cross every time they pass a church, and yet they're missing out on God's Great Story of love! We are so grateful for the opportunity the Lord provided us to work with brothers and sisters from around the world, in five languages, at four different churches to spread His Gospel! What a mighty King we get to serve!

We are already planning to host a team again next year to help with Walk Through Holy Week! If you're interested in hosting a Walk Through Holy Week for the families at your church, feel free to reach out to Catalina! She would love to walk you through how to do it and give you access to the devotional she wrote this year.



This year we stole an idea from Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Charleston, one of our wonderful supporting churches and covered the cross in flowers for Easter Sunday. The cross was one Derek Ebbers made for us years ago when we did Walk Through Holy Week for the first time as a church event, and we used it again this year. At the Crucifixion Station, each child got to write their name on a wooden tag and then nail it to the cross. We had over 100 names covering the cross on Good Friday. But on Easter Morning, the cross was covered in beautiful flowers, just as the blood of Jesus covers over our sin! Hallelujah!

(We also have to say that we didn't have a fifth child. There are several new mothers coming to church who don't have husbands or whose husbands won't

attend. So Derek is holding the sleeping baby so that the mother could make plates for her other three children at our Easter Potluck Lunch.)





We hosted Medeea's 2nd birthday at our house at the end of March. We just love having them as part of our family. Then we celebrated Catalina's 35th birthday while the team was here.



April is always such a funny month in Romania. The first picture was taken right at the end of March, just days before the team arrived on April 1. We love getting to see all the lambs in the fields in Codlea. The next two pictures were taken about two weeks apart in April. We got a surprise 8-inches of snow while the team was here at the beginning of April, and now we've got weather in the 50s and Spring is springing forth!



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