

"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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I love seeing the sunrise each morning, and especially as I get to see the seasons change.

Unprepared for Worship

When I wrote [our January newsletter](#), our lives and the world looked very different than they do today. Within a few short weeks of composing that newsletter, our lives went into significant transition. In retrospect, that newsletter was a time capsule which God placed in our lives to provide us encouragement for all that has since transpired.

Despite the providence of God and the hope he has given to us, we were still pretty discouraged this Easter. Easter, for us, is usually a very involved season. We often do a lot of activities as a family and a church to lead us into the finale of Easter Sunday. But this year, all of our traditions fell by the wayside and Easter Sunday came without any fanfare. We didn't do our Easter week festivities, we hadn't prepared the kids through our normal Easter week devotionals, we hadn't done our walk through Holy Week as a church, and three of the kids and I were not even going to make it to church due to sickness. As the reality of this very un-special Easter sank in on Sunday morning as Catalina was preparing to leave without the rest of us, Catalina expressed her disappointment. She said, "we didn't even do anything to prepare for Easter. I don't feel ready to worship."

In that moment, an image of the first worshipper of the resurrection came into my mind - Mary in the garden. I responded to Catalina and said, "Mary wasn't prepared to worship when she went to the tomb on Sunday either."

There is a wonderful beauty present in the traditions we employ as vehicles of worship. They can teach us truths, facilitate emotions, and focus our attention on that which is appropriate. But at the same time, tradition often imports the future into the present, which may prevent us from feeling the full force of the event we're commemorating. When we celebrate Christmas, it's hard to marvel at the mundanity and simplicity of the incarnation because we are already thinking about the resurrection and second coming. Likewise, when we celebrate Easter, it's hard for us to imagine what hopelessness and anxiety the resurrection saves us from because tradition won't let us dwell on the despair in light of what we know is already accomplished - new life.

This Easter we felt more than ever how Mary must have felt on that first Easter morning. We have significant personal issues we're dealing with, an empire waging war on our doorstep, and the oppressed flooding into the country where we live. Like Mary on the first Easter morning, we came to Easter this year unprepared to worship.

But here is the beauty of Jesus. Jesus often calls to us at times and in manners that are least expected. God spoke to Elijah not in a cacophony of power and noise, but in a still small voice following the din. Likewise, while Mary may have expected to hear God's voice the day before Easter as she went to worship on the Sabbath, she was met only with the noise of crowds and the smells of empty sacrificial tradition which carried on, oblivious to the death of the Son of God. But on Easter Sunday, at a time when Mary was unprepared for worship and least expected to find God, God sought and found her. He called out to her in the most loving exchange possible, using the sweetest words he could have found to utter - her very own name. "Mary!" And immediately, she knew him and worshipped. Mary became the first worshipper of the resurrected Christ not because she came with anything to offer, but because He first called her name.

This year we have been deafened by the tumult of wars without, as well as wars within. On Easter Sunday we came to what still felt to us like a sealed tomb. What had we to offer God? Was God even there in all the noise? Of course God is somewhere in all the noise, though he is often indiscernible there. But this year, rather than try to find God in all the noise and expecting His treatises in response to evil and pain, we raised our expectations and simply listened for Him to call our name.



This is the song that moved Catalina to tears on Easter Sunday.

Prayer Requests

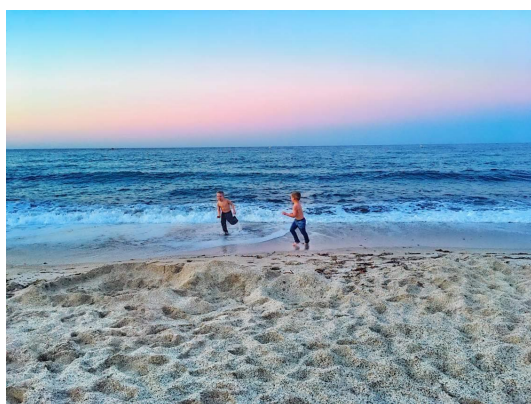
- Continue to pray for open doors to work with the Ukrainian refugees, and for strength for Team Odessa. As fighting has moved to the east, there has been such discouragement and depression among the refugee women. Team Odessa began a Bible Study with some of the women, and their church services are drawing in more people. Pray for the Lord to be their strength during such a unbearably difficult time.
- Please continue to pray for the protection of our family - and especially our children - against the schemes of the enemy, who wants to get a foothold however he can. Pray for their spiritual protection, and that they would continue growing in the Lord.
- Catalina's parents are coming to visit us May 6 - 16. We are all very excited to have them! But we also dread the difficult goodbyes for our children. Please pray for their safe travels, and that our time with them would be restorative and filled with joy for our children! And that as parents would have patience and abounding love to help walk them through the grief once they leave.
- Mama M is just eight weeks away from finishing her schooling! But for these last eight weeks, she has to also complete a practicum, which means she needs childcare five days a week. Pray for her to finish well!
- As Shannon and Hannah Ebbers go back to the States for two months, it has reinvigorated our prayers for regular Romanian musicians to lead worship. So far we have people to help for 4/5 weekends in May but are still looking for 3/4 weekends in June to be covered. Catalina can always lead by herself acapella, but this pushes her way out of her comfort zone, especially in Romanian. Please pray for the weekends to get covered and/or for God to strengthen Catalina to lead if He calls... and for regular Romanian musicians.

April was a BUSY MONTH! So we have plenty of pictures and events to share about...



We had the privilege of hosting Baby M's first birthday at our house!! It is such a joy to have her and Mama M in our life! In the picture above, they are doing some of the first-birthday traditions, like the godmother cutting off the ponytail, and then allowing Baby M to choose from a box of items that helps determine what she will be when she grows up. Just fun traditions!

And in addition to Hannah Ebbers doing piano lessons with Elin and Atticus on Tuesdays, Shannon has started teaching Elin how to sew! I completely lack this skill, so I was very happy to have Shannon step in and teach her!





Every four years, MTW hosts a retreat for all the missionaries in Europe. Due to COVID, it was cancelled last year and rescheduled for this year, which meant we got to participate! It was a lovely venue, and we got to spend good time together as a family. But the best part was seeing our kids make friends with other MKs. We've heard about these quick and deep bonds that MKs make together, because of their shared language and relatable lifestyle, and we got to see it play out. It was such a joy to see them come alive with their new friends from all over Europe!



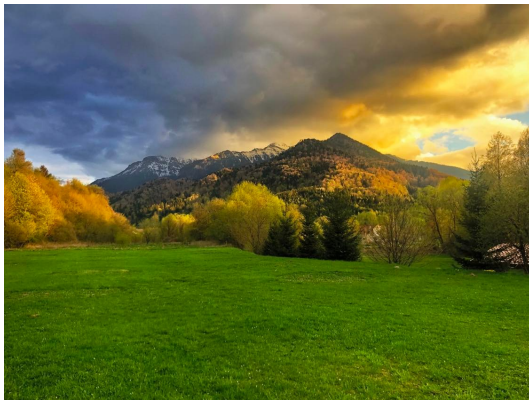
Work with the Ukrainians continues, though right now it's almost entirely behind-the-scenes work to help support the missionaries from Odessa. Because of the language barrier, working with them directly is difficult, but we were able to put together some Easter goody bags with a Bible activity to hand out to the children on Easter. Team Odessa and Team Brasov meet together over Zoom three mornings a week to discuss what's going on and how we can all help (picture above). Derek will be kicking off a frisbee team for the kids next

Wednesday. And I was so excited when my dear friend from the States sent Derek money for my birthday to get a massage - and the very same night I found a post on Facebook for a Ukrainian woman living very close to us who is a massage therapist and looking for work. So I was super happy to not only get a birthday massage, but also get to do so by supporting a Ukrainian woman! Also, a mother and her son just moved into the basement apartment in our small complex, and our kids have gotten to play with the little boy. Obviously they can't speak with each other, but that never seems to bother children too much.



We didn't do all of our Holy Week traditions this year, but we did at least do our Palm Sunday activity, which the children always love! Easter was a busy day this year. We had new visitors to our church that day - Mama M's sister and her

three children. So we were able to help with all the kiddos, which was fun! Then our church had an Easter meal together. Easter afternoon we took food over to the Ukrainian apartments for their Easter service and meal. And then the day after Easter, Jill Martin, one of the missionaries from Odessa, invited us over to learn the traditional Ukrainian way to dye eggs using panty hose, herbs, and onion paper skins! It was so interesting and beautiful!



There is a German missionary couple who have lived in Romania for over twenty years and run a Christian camp in a nearby town. A few weeks ago, Derek helped at the Kids Group camp at this location, and then last week we returned as a whole church for a conference on marriage and family that our church put together. It was such a magnificently gorgeous location, full of fun activities, childcare, and really good lectures to edify our church filled with young families. We even got to do ziplining at the end!



My favorite picture this month is of my boys, fast asleep in the middle of our prayer meeting. I had to sneak off to put Jemma to bed, and I found them like this when I came back. Prioritizing prayer as a team has become a lifeline for us and such a joy! We host dinner and prayer each Monday night, and the Odessa team joins us frequently, as well. With my kids fast asleep in the middle, it brought such joy and comfort to my heart to hear some of the men pray over them. As Bob Burnham (Team Odessa) prayed about how their deep, restful breathing reminded him of how Jesus must have been sleeping in the boat during the storm - totally at rest in the Lord, even in the midst of tumult going on around him - and how our children are able to be sheltered from the tumult going on around them in this difficult season of our lives, and for the whole world. What a powerful image of being so childlike and trusting!



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