

"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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# Sarbatoare de Toamna

Fall festival; all things pumpkin

- Competitie de "Sculptură în dovleac" (pentru adulti/copii si aduceți-vă propriul dovleac)
- Alimente tradiționale de Toamnă
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Joi, 17 Noiembrie | 17:00  
Strada Libertatii 22, Codlea

## Always Home

As I sit down to compose this letter, my family is currently working through two different portions of the Bible. For our family devotions we have been reading the Exodus - a story of the oppression by the Egyptian empire in its enslavement of the Hebrew people. Simultaneously, Catalina and I have started working through the book of Isaiah, which, very similarly, recounts the oppression of empires, as it looks toward Israel's exile by Babylon and Assyria.

While there are many aspects of these stories that would be worth dwelling upon, this year I find that what stands out for me is the idea of families being uprooted. After finally living in one place for more than a year - the first time that's happened in nearly a decade for our family - we are experiencing a small taste of "rootedness." This stability functions to highlight for us the uprooting of others. We are seeing millions of Ukrainians being uprooted through war. In our own community we fairly frequently experience a loss of those in the church as they move across Europe for work. While the world has always had wars and economic stressors, this year we are seeing these things in a different light.

As we read the Exodus or Isaiah, I see uprootedness everywhere. Jacob's family - only two generations removed from being uprooted in Ur - all move to settle in Egypt, where they are foreigners, and eventually slaves. After 400 years of living in a land that isn't even theirs, they move again, first to the wilderness, then to Canaan. Finally, they have a place to call their own! But eventually Israel's sin leads her to experience an exile from her land to live under the oppression of empire for most of the rest of her history, until she's eventually scattered to the wind.

At the heart of much of the uprooting we see in the Bible and in the world is the beast of empire. Egypt was seeking the best for her own people, even and especially at the cost of the lives of those who are foreigners. Babylon and Assyria were seeking to make their names great through the acquisition of land, gold, and vassals. Today, Ukraine is experiencing the fangs of empire as Russia seeks wealth, renown, security, and control. And even some we know who are seeking employment out of country are doing so because of the way empires take advantage of labor in Romania, reminiscent of James's warning to employers in regard to providing fair wages. Injustice is everywhere, and wherever there is injustice there is alienation, because God's good home is where there is a community of shalom.

Yet in all of this injustice and homelessness, we Christians have hope in knowing that God is in control. We know that God guides even the hearts of kings (Proverbs 21:1) and we know that he works all things together for good to those who love him (Romans 8:28). We can see specific examples of this play out in stories like those of Joseph or Esther, even though we may not always see how God is working things out today. Those stories give us hope that, though we may not understand, God is with those who are without a home.

What I love even more than God telling us these stories of hope, is the fact that

our God shows us hope by example. Our God doesn't lead, like a cowardly general, from the back. He leads from the front. God, in the person of Jesus, left his home, so that he could come and lead all of us there to be with him. It is no coincidence that the death of Jesus occurred at the time of Passover - a time commemorating the Exodus of Israel to a land they could call home. Jesus became homeless to lead us back home, because we are aliens and strangers in a world where power, control, and dominance abound - where empires create and perpetuate injustice. Jesus leads from the front and calls us to live in his Kingdom - a Kingdom without borders, and a Kingdom made not of erodible rock, but of living stones. We, the church, are the living stones of Jesus, built on top of him who is the ever living, chief cornerstone. Through our love and our lives as living sacrifices, we welcome all others who seek to enter into a home that is universal and perpetual. A home which can never be taken away.

As I dwell this year on the power and injustice of empire, and I compare that to the humble birth of Jesus and his rescue mission, I have to admit that the Exodus led by Jesus seems underwhelming. What is a life of sacrifice and death at the hands of enemies compared to rivers of blood and the parting of seas? On its face, the second exodus seems anticlimactic in comparison to the first. I think Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem "Ozymandias," probably my favorite poem ever, is helpful here. Shelley writes,

*I met a traveller from an antique land,  
 Who said—"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
 Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,  
 Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
 And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
 Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
 Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
 The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;  
 And on the pedestal, these words appear:  
 My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;  
 Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!  
 Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
 Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare  
 The lone and level sands stretch far away.*

Every empire from time immemorial has, like that statue of Ozymandias, weathered away into nothingness. Every victim of empire and injustice, as well as every citizen of empire, has eventually found themselves homeless in the

face of some form of injustice or exile. But not so with the living Kingdom of God. The Kingdom has both perpetuity and continuity. When the Ukrainian refugees fled their nation, many found that they had fellow citizens - brothers and sisters - living in Poland, Romania, Moldova, Germany, Hungary, and the United States. These Ukrainian brothers and sisters aren't moving across one border to another, from one empire to another. They are traveling within the borders of one Kingdom and one people - a Kingdom which stands forever. Jesus has come and secured our exodus to the eternal Kingdom so that we will never be homeless again. This is an exciting truth which is becoming more real to us each day, and a truth which we seek to be made known to others.

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### Prayer Requests

- Continue to pray for a Romanian pastor. Our American pastor, Maurice Sikes, will be stepping back to preaching just once each month starting in January. This Spirit-led decision is encouraging the other men in leadership to step up more. Yet we continue to wait for the Lord to provide a full-time Romanian pastor.
- Since we moved away from Codlea and into Brasov, our opportunity to work with the Roma community lessened. However, in the past few months we have had contact with \*Alexa a few times, as she's stopped by church to greet us and ask for supplies. We have also started a relationship with a Roma family Catalina met at a supermarket a several months ago. Derek has been out to their village twice to meet with the family. You can be in prayer for both of these families, and for us. Pray that these relationships can grow and that the gospel would be compelling to these families.
- Please pray for our team as we try to figure out how to best reach out to the community. English courses haven't been the draw that it used to be, so we're working on some other ideas. Please pray that God would give us wisdom as to how we can connect with the community, and how we can help our church grow in an outward-focused vision.
- We are praising God that we don't have any major injuries to report since our last newsletter. Please continue to pray for our family's health and safety.

**October and November were BUSY MONTHS! So we have plenty of pictures and events to share about...**



We finally had Jemma baptized! With COVID and a number of other happenings in Jemma's early life, we had never had her baptism. We finally got the ball rolling on that and it was a wonderful day. We love the way they do baptisms here in Romania, where it's a unique event, usually held on a Saturday, and followed by a meal. It worked out perfectly that we could schedule her baptism for when Derek's parents were here to witness it.





A part of what makes Romania feel like home is all the people we love here. The table is a very common occurrence. In the last two months we have had prayer nights every Monday with the Romanian team, and every other week with the Ukrainian team joining us. We have also held our second family conference for 2022, where participants worked on conflict resolution, specifically within marriage. We teamed with the Ebbers to cater the weekend event! We hosted two game nights, and we plan to do this monthly to be able to invite people from outside the church, as well. Plus, with Atticus turning 7 on November 1 and Jemma turning 3 on November 7, plus a few other churchwide birthdays in the last several months, we've had plenty of opportunity for fellowship! This upcoming week we're hosting two Thanksgiving meals, one of which we're anticipating thirty plus guests in our small apartment. Please pray for all of these events to bear fruit for God's Kingdom!



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