

Let's Talk TURKEY...



Happy 2023! Time is moving fast (and I'm moving slowly;) My trip had three parts: central Turkey to visit a family of workers living there, Zagreb Croatia to visit the House of Hope, and then a return to Turkey. I'm going to focus here on the third part. (Mostly because I did a write up on the first two legs of my trip and somehow it disappeared when I reopened this newsletter...)

In Istanbul I hooked up with a team of 35 from River Valley Church, where I am now attending. The goal for me was to get to know people, which was a little harder than you'd think. I felt like it took me the entire week together to remember names and who was married to whom. Everyone was nice and friendly, but it was still hard to get to know people (most people didn't know each other, as River Valley has 9 campuses in the U.S.)

It has been hard for me to process and synthesis this part of the trip. I feel like I have a lot of disparate pieces of information that stood out, and I don't know how to really connect them all or weave them into a cohesive narrative. So I'm just going to share the disconnected pieces:

- Turkey was where the early Church really was birthed and spread out from 2000+ years ago, but today it a secular Islamic country. Buildings that were initially churches are now mosques. There are lots of people in Turkey.
- Experienced an earthquake while in Turkey.
- The Islamic call to prayer is broadcast 6 times a day via loudspeaker across the city. I have to confess, it did prompt me to pray for the people, it repeatedly brought to mind the lyrics of the song I SPEAK JESUS, specifically:

Shout Jesus from the mountains, And Jesus in the streets

Jesus in the darkness over every enemy, Jesus for my family

I speak the holy name, Jesus

- Many of the cities we visited were huge back in the day. These were not little rural, dirt path, a few hundred people type of cities. They were huge, built of marble and stone, had beautiful mosaics and painting. The people had to be extremely intelligent, and resourceful to design and build cities with complex water and sewage systems. Ephesus was a huge port city. (250,000 men alone, not to mention women, children, and slaves). Today only about 15% of the city has been excavated and partially restored.
- Much history and culture permeate the landscape. Worship of gods and goddesses from Greece, Rome, and Egypt. Many different rulers over time. Cities burnt down and rebuilt. Cities conquered. Much influence from Greek, Roman, and Egyptian cultures. The message of Jesus didn't occur in a bubble, there were many conflicting cultures and schools of thought.
- The Apostle Paul started preaching at Jewish Synagogues in Ephesus, but eventually was no longer welcomed. So he moved to the city square and taught at Tyrannus Hall in Ephesus for over 2 years. This is where and how the gospel was preached and how the church expanded. Turkey/Ephesus was a major trade route between Europe, Asia, and Africa. So Paul's teachings impacted many people from all over the world who passed through Ephesus.

But what remains? The whole country of Turkey is filled with Biblical history and archeological remains, yet...there is currently no thriving church in Turkey, the country is Muslim. Christians make up a very small percentage of the population. In fact many believers have been persecuted and forced to leave the country. But somehow, through the teachings of Paul and other disciples the Bible was written and advanced from Turkey, and Christianity has not only has survived, but it is now thriving in many parts of the world. Let's continue to speak the name of Jesus. God is not done with Turkey and He is not done using us, His ordinary children to spread the Good News.





Pictures above are a representation of the different places we visited, lots of ruins and stadiums. The one directly above with the two stories is a library in Ephesus and is thought to be Tyrannus Hall where the Apostle Paul taught.

The photo to the left shows that the country of Turkey is roughly the size of North and South Dakota, Minnesota and Wisconsin. Population of around 86 million, around one-quarter of the population of the U.S. (U.S. is around 334 million).

Thanks so much for your prayers and support, without you I couldn't do the things God has led me to do. I will write soon with a glimpse of what 2023 might look like.

Love and Blessings, **Jill**



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