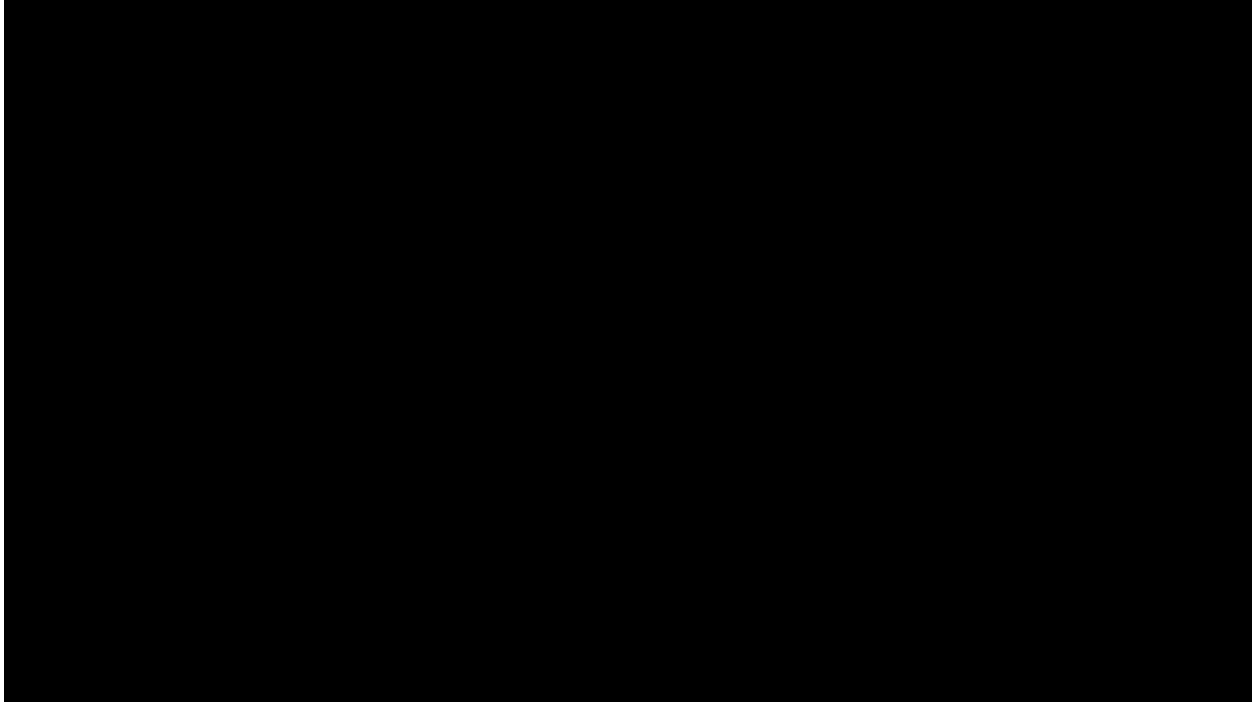


Making disciples

Matthew 28:16-20

June 11, 2017

What do you know about Moldova?



(To play the video, go to link: <http://sermons.believersjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/MoldovaSunday.mp4>)

Now what do you know about Moldova?

Moldova is a little over half the size of Iowa, with about the same number of people. It's capital Chişinău is the size of Des Moines. The land is covered with low hills and shallow valleys, fields of corn and wildflowers, and vineyards, lots of vineyards. Moldova is renowned for its wine-making, and for the world's largest wine cellar at Miliştii Mici -- 125 miles of limestone tunnels housing two million bottles of wine!

Moldova is bordered by Romania on the West and by Ukraine on the north, south, and east. Most Moldovans speak Romanian and many speak Russian as well. The Republic of Moldova is now an independent nation, but has a long history of subjugation. In turn, the land and people of Moldova were under the rule of the Ottoman empire, the Russian empire, Romania, and then the Soviet Union.

Moldova is currently the poorest economy in Europe, with many seeking work outside the country, leaving families and children behind, and leaving many children in the nation at risk: economic risk, social risk, emotional risk.

My friend, Rachel, and her colleagues invest themselves in caring for the children and youth of Chişinău at La Via Community Center. “La Via” means “the way,” the way of Jesus.

This is Jesus’ way:

Go to all peoples everywhere and make them my converts: baptize them and strive always to add to the numbers of people in my church.

Is that what Jesus said? Did you hear when I read the gospel? Is this Jesus’ way? No! Jesus said:

Go to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples.

What is the difference between making a convert and making a disciple? Which is easier? Making a disciple requires time, a long term personal investment, consistency, endurance, discipline, and integrity. Integrity because it is your life, not just your words, that make a disciple.

Rachel’s ministry is a ministry of integrity. Rachel Simons Dyachenko is the daughter of a high school friend. As a college student, she went to Romania as a short-term volunteer and was so moved by that experience that after graduation she returned to Eastern Europe as a full-time World Made Flesh staff member. She spent eight years working with children in Romania, in the city of Galati. You may remember that Word Made Flesh in Galati was our Sunday School project for a year. We raised funds for their work and the children of Galati shared with us letters and artwork.

Rachel left Romania seven years ago with several co-workers to begin a new work in Chişinău in Moldova. She began her work fifteen years ago as a single woman, but married a colleague from Ukraine and she is about to give birth to their first child ... or already has!

Rachel and her colleagues invite at risk children and youth into La Via Community Center, doing both prevention work with school children in the afternoons, and intervention work with street children in the mornings. “La Via” means “the way,” but it is also an acronym: “V” -- vindecare (healing), “I” -- integritate (ntegrity), and “A” -- acţiune (action). Healing, integrity, action.

Healing: healing broken spirits and lonely souls.

Integrity: providing a ministry of presence and love.

Action: proactive engagement, committed servanthood, making disciples.

Making disciples is the focus of the work of Word Made Flesh, but making disciples and becoming disciples go hand in hand. Word Made Flesh is governed by nine core values: intimacy, obedience, humility, community, service, simplicity, submission, brokenness, suffering.

Obedience, humility, brokenness, suffering. This is the way of servanthood! This is the way of integrity! This is the way of a disciple! Disciple-makers are healed healers, reconciled reconcilers, people who have themselves been drawn into community drawing others into community.

Eduard Babijdir is one such disciple-maker. Here is a story he shared about a Moldovan child with whom he worked ...

Athletes need time, discipline and hard work in order to succeed in their career. We at Word Made Flesh are like athletes since we work with difficult children, many of whom lack a healthy education in their families. We desire to see changes in their lives on all levels – spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical. Sometimes in order to see these changes, years of hard work are required.

A third grade boy, who I will call Andy ... joined my after-school group when he was in second grade and was one of the most difficult kids – violent, disrespectful, and disobedient. He received all sorts of consequences for his behavior, that seemed to help for the moment, but then he was back at it, unchanged.

At one point in time I wanted to exclude him permanently from my class, but I decided to persevere with more patience and fight for him. As a result, this little boy became a living sign of the change that God can bring about. His mother, teachers and our whole team are truly amazed by the changes we see in Andy. He is smart and funny, generous and truly good-hearted. He just needed that which had been lacking in his life – to be accepted, valued, and empowered. He needed the Father's Divine Love.

Making that kind of investment. Taking that kind of risk. Going that long. Going that wide. Going that deep. This is making disciples, in Chişinău or in Waterloo. Going long. Going wide. Going deep.

By bringing healing: offering acceptance (“No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here”), offering forgiveness, providing tools and motivation for reconciliation, inviting into community.

By living with integrity: being there, living what we believe, not just giving lip service to our faith, but living a faith that is genuine and always growing and learning.

By action: “To believe is to care, to care is to do.”

In preparation for this service, I asked Rachel: “What can we learn from our Moldovan brothers and sisters? What do they have to offer to the body of Christ and to us?” And she told me these four things:

- Dedication and hard work. Many Moldovan church workers work for no pay at all, simply dedicated to the work of the gospel.

- Identification with Christ's suffering. Moldovans understand the meaning of suffering and hardship because of their history of domination by foreign powers and the current state of so many families with displaced members.

- Awareness of community. Moldovans know that faith is not about who we are one by one by one, but about who we are together.

- A deep sense of reverence for God. And this is where making disciples begins: with awe and wonder and humility, and with deep hunger, hunger for God. Because God is our home. This is where we belong. Making disciples is about bringing people home!