

October 1, 2017

Friends--

Another month has gone by, with school, work and life in full swing. As a family we have gone to Big Joel's Safari (a petting zoo) in which Chelsea got to ride a pony as well as feed the other animals there. Lots of goats as well as piglets, chickens, and other assorted animals up close and personal. Chelsea also had a couple experiences with backup daycare. These were both very last-minute situations so getting to see God's people in action during our time of need has been a real blessing! Other than that we had a couple unusually hot September weekends, making it harder to enjoy other sites around town. We are also looking forward to seeing my dad when he visits next weekend, making his first trip to Missouri and our first shot at hosting company here.

On my own I got to attend a lecture at a nearby congregation featuring two keynote speakers who are pastors in our synod. First was Pastor Bryan Wolfmuehler from Colorado who spoke about the serious theological issues surrounding the church at the time leading up to the reformation. Second was Pastor Jonathan Fisk, now at KFJO radio here in St. Louis, who spoke about the Augsburg confession and how rich a document it is with regards to being a starting point in dialoguing with other individuals and church bodies on where we stand on a whole host of issues. Both of them have published a book and they each signed one for me, and they both can be seen and heard on the youtube channel Worldview Everlasting. Check it out sometime if you haven't already!

We also had a couple particularly moving chapel services this month. One was focused on first responders, policemen, firemen, ambulance drivers, etc. who arrived in uniform and were recognized for the selflessness their profession requires. This service featured an eclectic musical palate, with a bagpiper handling preservice music followed by a trio of a vocalist, a cellist and a bass guitar who sang stirring renditions of a couple hymns. Christ Be My Leader was especially moving as performed by them!

The second touching service was due to the faculty member who gave the sermon that day. The text was on the parable of vineyard workers in Matthew 20. Some workers are hired for a full day, some half a day, and some only for one hour. The chapel sermon started with how the first set of workers were upset due to thinking they would be getting more. That word can lead many people to despair and frustration, always wanting what they don't have. Our world measures success by who has the most of something. The most friends, toys, money, etc. He then went on to discuss how just two weeks prior his son passed away suddenly of a suspected blood clot in his 30s. He talked about how his son suffered from depression, social anxiety, and obsessive compulsive behaviors. Due to all this he had difficulty keeping employment and lived with his parents all his life. He didn't have many friends; when he shared a facebook status it didn't get many likes or comments. All of this led to a lot of frustration and he started to drift away from the church. But his dad informed us that he was confirmed in the faith, and when he did attend church he still communed with them, and towards the end he partook in a comfort dog ministry that his dad was spearheading, which always had a gospel component each time the dog would visit those needing a furry friend. And in the sermon we were reminded (amidst a very emotional preacher by this point, barely able to finish his sermon) that it is the generosity of Jesus that matters, and that it is more than sufficient for us, regardless of how much or how little we have in terms of material possessions--this is the generosity his son is now experiencing, all thanks to Jesus without any requirements on his part. Praise God!

Classes are moving along at a fair pace. With my exegetical class we are still focusing on abstract concepts and theories of how to derive a proper meaning from a text, and what factors should be involved to get at the meaning the author would have had when writing it. Later in the class we will be creating a Bible study

outline on a passage from Romans, demonstrating how we would present it to a group were we to do so. That will be a chance to put the theories we are learning into practice.

Historical theology has had us reading more work by early church fathers, including one of the most famous, Augustine. I found it particularly interesting how many 'Lutheran' concepts and beliefs he writes on despite living centuries before Luther concreted them. Our teacher, Pastor Robinson, was interviewed as a guest on the Martin Luther documentary featured on PBS this past month, along with a few other faculty members. It was nice seeing someone I know personally as a source of authority on a nationally viewed program! The name of it is Martin Luther: The Idea That Changed The World.

Systematic theology has been quite interesting. We have been learning from a variety of teachers on topics such as how the Word of God encompasses more than the scriptures in the Bible as well as what exactly it means to be considered 'confessional'. We also have discussed the big stumbling blocks many people have as to why they can't accept Christian theology. All very interesting!

Pastoral Ministry has also been interesting, also dealing with a variety of topics, including going over a personality test we each took this summer. We learned how we typically process information and relate to others, as well as what our own strengths and weaknesses are based on this model. We also got to practice in small groups going over the pastor's portion of the liturgy at the beginning of a typical service. This includes which way to face, how to guide people to stand and sit, etc. It seems easy after seeing it done so many times but certainly feels different actually standing there and declaring God's words of forgiveness to actual, living people in front of you!

Language labs are also moving along. This gives us a chance to keep vocabulary, grammar and syntax in mind as well as learn some new meanings to particular words. Greek with Pastor Raj has been going through the middle of John while Hebrew with Pastor David Adams has been focused on select portions of Genesis.

At my field congregation, Zion Lutheran, I have enjoyed attending service with my family and listening to the Sunday bible study. It is a much smaller congregation than what I had in Rochester, being more similar to my home congregation growing up. Pastor Mark likes to make a point to commune everyone by name, which has been a nice benefit I hadn't experienced in a long time. We were invited to his home to have lunch with his wife and children last weekend, which we all enjoyed. There is a second year seminary student who attends there as well, and in the next month we will probably be coordinating a schedule for when I should start assisting with portions of the service.

One final addition this month is a secondary real-world experience. Each student has to spend 40 hours in the semester involved in a cross cultural ministry. I chose to work with a congregation that focuses on outreach towards Jewish people. The pastor there, Pastor Kevin Parviz, was raised in an Orthodox Jewish home and overtime came to believe the New Testament was true and correct, and has made a point to outreach to Jews in the St. Louis area after finishing his seminary education. Besides attending a few Bible studies I also got to attend a service on the evening of Rosh Hashanah. He mentioned in his sermon how Jews all over the world are meeting tonight, hoping to keep their good deeds outweighing their bad ones in God's book of records. Yet despite all this they have no way of being assured their sins are covered. He reminded us that only we can offer that hope, the hope in Yeshua Hamashiach, how very true! Thank you again for your continued interest and support; feel free to reach out to us anytime!

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