

November 1

Friends—

This month on campus culminated just last night with an event everyone in Lutheranism has been anticipating for a very long time, the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation! The service at our own chapel of Sts. Timothy & Titus did not disappoint, with great music and choral selections performed by a combination of our own campus choir, local high school choirs and brass and a combination of the above plus congregational singing. All this was topped off with exquisite organ arrangements and a variety of hymns from the past 500 years. Everything from the gentle ballad *By The Rivers Of Babylon* to the reformation standard *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, a German piece by Buxtehude, and ending with the contemporary favorite *In Christ Alone*. We had four sermons, including two by two of my teachers—Pastor Nafzger and Pastor Sanchez—for a worship service that totaled almost two hours. Plus, the chapel was seated to absolute full capacity—folding chairs in the narthex, standing room only, plus sending people to classrooms to view the video feed there! Staff reflected they have never seen the chapel that full before. An amazing event!!

We had ‘reading week’ during the middle of October, the halfway point in the semester and in which no classes took place. It was a much-appreciated break where everyone got a chance to rest and regroup, and I spent time with Chelsea at home which she enjoyed. Chelsea had her second birthday during this time, now 2 years old! We had a special day just the three of us and then that weekend had a party with a couple seminary families joining for fun and food as well as an appearance by one of Angela’s relatives. Back at the beginning of the month my dad came down for a weekend and this too was a fun event for our family. We all went to the Grant’s farm site, owned by the Busch family, and saw the famous Budweiser Clydesdales (huge!) along with several other animals. It was an enjoyable excursion and something we would do again!

Exegetical theology is slowly but surely starting to become more concrete, as we talk about the reasons why the methods of interpretation for biblical texts our church uses are the best and how they have stood the tests of time and scrutiny. We are also getting some preliminary instructions for a bible study outline and our first exegetical paper (both based on a short text in Romans 3) that will be due by November’s end.

Historical theology saw us writing another paper based on a different church father, Thomas Aquinas. I found his selections to be more difficult to decipher than Augustine but was nonetheless impressed with how precise and logical his work was organized, down to the minute details. Apparently he had a significant event (which he believed was divine, though perhaps it was a medical ailment) that made him choose to abandon his life’s work for the short remainder of his life. Whatever it was it must have been quite significant to bring forth such a result! Right now we are just starting to read the writings of Luther, and will be discussing the first of those in class tomorrow.

Systematic theology has had us write a paper on issues involving congregational conflict (one person believing we need to act ASAP if the congregation is to thrive while another believes we shouldn’t do anything and rely on the Holy Spirit.) We also had a midterm exam for this class covering the content we have learned thus far. These assignments haven’t been graded and returned yet so hopefully my answers were satisfactory! Tomorrow we are going to start the topic of the ‘theology of the cross.’ While I have heard pastors discuss this in the past and had a good idea what it means, reading one of the books in this class (*On Being A Theologian Of The Cross* by Gerhard Forde) has been an eye opening

experience at how wonderfully he communicates this concept. So many nuggets of wisdom in this book, I suspect I will want my own copy at some point!

Practical theology has been moving along dealing with various health aspects that make us a healthy, holistic person. This month we have covered emotional health and cultural health as well as discussed the differences between the Office of Holy Ministry and the priesthood of all believers. We watched a video based on the Swedish book *The Hammer Of God* by Bo Giertz with a scene that emphasized both in action. A young pastor goes to see a dying man who is convinced he will go to hell due to all the times he could have repented and chose to continue sinning. The pastor speaks in vague theological points but isn't really listening to the man's concerns. A woman who knows the man better approaches his bedside and reminds him that Jesus already paid the penalty for ALL sin, that no sin is too big or frequent to be left out. It isn't the man's lack of choosing to repent that determines his fate. He is asked whether he believes this and he agrees. The look of relief on his face afterwards is quite apparent. Next the woman asks the pastor to celebrate communion for everyone gathered round. This scene helps emphasize that anyone has the freedom to share the gospel with someone who needs to hear it in order to ease their conscience, while at the same time recognizing that the pastor should be the one to celebrate the sacrament of communion as part of his regular call and duty to keep things in good and proper order.

At my field congregation of Zion Lutheran my family and I have been continuing to attend Sunday services. Pastor Femmel invited our family to his home for a meal a couple times after church in order to have fellowship with his family as well as the other seminarian attending there. This coming Sunday he and I will have a practice session after church going through the liturgy and figure out a schedule for me to actively lead liturgy on Sunday mornings.

At my other congregation, Chai v'Shalom I have been attending weekly bible studies as well as some Sunday services, getting to experience liturgy and collects in Hebrew along with songs that have a more middle eastern feel to them. Pastor Kevin Parviz does a nice job showing how the first century Christians (most of them Jews) would have worshipped and prayed as well as emphasizing what significance communion would have had to them in that time and place. In small group meetings he has shared with us the particular challenges Christians face when conversing and witnessing to Jews. He explained if a Jewish person is willing to meet to talk about theology, we should promise not to bring up Jesus but instead talk about the nature and character of God, and go through some select passages of the Old Testament which reflect this. Only mention Jesus if/when the other person brings him up (which hopefully will happen if the conversation goes the right way) and allow plenty of time for seeds to be planted. Belief in Jesus can't happen overnight but being a calm and inviting presence who is open to listening in a gentle manner is the key.

It's been a busy and exciting month with a lot of variety, and looking ahead I see more busyness and variety ahead for November. As we approach this month of giving thanks I want to thank all of you for prayers, encouragement and support. My family and I truly appreciate knowing others care about us and our success. Feel free to reach out anytime!

Kevin & Angela Peterson  
Chelsea