

December 5

Friends—

This has been a busy month of unpredictability and new experiences for our family. On the plus side, the weather returned to the 60s the past two days, so getting to go outside without a jacket in December is something we agreed we can get used to! Today it's back to the 40s and will be for the near future so the chilliness for this time of year is back to normal. No snow though, yay! My parents came to visit at the beginning of the month which was also an enjoyable time. My dad had been here once before but my mother never had, so she got to see the campus for the first time as well as our new house. She brought along a travelling stuffed bunny from her work and had him pose in several places around the campus which was fun to watch! She was impressed with the antiquity and privacy of the campus, remarking how it looks so picturesque like something off of a PBS special. Naturally they both enjoyed spending as much time as possible with their granddaughter. Dad is already planning ahead for when he can come back for visit number three! Two weeks ago then we got to experience a Thanksgiving meal on campus, spearheaded by other students who were staying locally and had nowhere to go; there were about 30 people with everyone bringing something, and plenty of food leftover! We brought some mashed potatoes and jellied cranberries, and got to have our fill of turkey, stuffing, pie, and the like. One of the teachers who attended, Pastor Jeff Gibbs, pointed out how all we need to do is look around at the other people there and how that was reason enough to give God thanks. True indeed!

On the other hand, however, I started feeling unwell Thursday evening with abdominal discomfort and which led to fatigue and strange appetite patterns and which continued throughout the long weekend and into the next week. I didn't have the energy to do any reading or writing for class and ended up missing classes on Monday and Tuesday right after Thanksgiving. I would wake up in the middle of the night each night from GI pain and would snack in order to go back to sleep. I made an appointment with a doctor who thought it could be related to my gall bladder and that following an ultrasound, we would decide whether surgery was needed. The doctor gave me some prescription strength painkillers which really helped! After taking them I felt like myself again and could help around the house like before. Last Friday then I had my ultrasound and the results showed everything was normal! Not only that but after two days of taking the pills I felt I didn't need them anymore, so all in all now I have a clean bill of health. This definitely seemed like a direct answer to prayer, both from myself and from friends and family who were in the know. My teachers were all personally sympathetic as well and accommodating in turning in assignments later than normal due to this. Now with no surgery pending I need to catch up with school work that I missed turning in due to this health scare. It will be a busy two weeks for me coming up before the semester ends!

Exegetical theology is the class with the most to make up. We turned in the major exegetical paper for this class last week, based on the same Romans text we did our bible study outline on, and then had a class period at Pastor Seifrid's house which was just a breakfast get-together rather than a lecture. It was a nice way to congratulate the class for having all the major work for the class turned in; unfortunately mine is not yet turned in, so that will be my major task to do throughout the remainder of this week.

Historical theology had us write a paper on a major theologian after Luther, John Calvin. This was my favorite of the three papers we have written so far, due to having more familiarity with his theology than the previous others. Despite knowing the differences that separated Calvin from Luther, it was interesting to learn how some of the differences which separate us Lutherans from those in the Reformed weren't the result of Calvin himself, but of Calvinists and Calvinism that came after him. Pastor Robinson said how some (not all) of the things Calvin wrote about would actually be in agreement with what Luther believed, but phrased in a different way that his later followers created a bigger gap between our theologies than was initially the case. Our fourth paper which I will have to turn in late will be on Søren Kierkegaard. Our final assignment will be to do a double essay on two readings from a selection of choices from other church fathers we did not discuss in class.

Systematic theology has delved into two important theological topics—two kinds of righteousness and law and gospel. The latter is quite familiar to every serious Lutheran and some would say is the cornerstone of

understanding our theology. Pastor Joel Biermann, who gave the lecture on both topics, argues that the former is much more significant than many give it credit for. Two kinds of righteousness deals with recognizing that our vertical relationship with God is totally dependent on God's forgiveness and mercy through Christ, with nothing we can do to contribute to that. Our horizontal relationship with other people is centered around doing God's will to others simply because those other people need us to. The tricky part is when people confuse the two, either by thinking they don't need to help those around them since they have forgiveness in Christ (lazy or uncaring Christians) or they think that they are scoring points with God to where God owes them forgiveness and favor due to their good deeds to others (a devout Mormon, for example.) Our final exam will be to write an essay explaining how we would describe ourselves as a theologian.

Practical theology is rounding out the various health aspects we have discussed. This month we focused on vocational and financial health, and later today we will conclude with intellectual health. At the end we are to turn in a list of goals we hope to work on in each of the 8 areas to show we have a vested interest in each one. This is to be a living document where goals change overtime and get refined as needs change.

At Zion Lutheran I had my first experience helping lead worship this past Sunday. I read all the lessons, gave the prayers and petitions, assisted with communion and gave the final blessing. Pastor Femmel said I speak clearly and concisely, now the trick is to take that to the next level by embodying the text as though I were the author delivering it orally for the first time. My next time at it will be two weekends from now.

At Chai v'Shalom I have attended bible study on Wednesdays and a couple more Sunday morning services. I also fulfilled the other requirements for this cross cultural experience, which were to visit the local holocaust museum and attend an actual Jewish synagogue service. The museum is very well kept and organized with an audio tour to guide visitors on what they are seeing. All three of us went and Angela also said she appreciated all the history and atrocity presented. Chelsea had a lot of room to run as we were looking at the exhibits which was very helpful! This was in the midst of my not feeling well so I suspect I would have enjoyed it even more had I been in tip top condition. Then on Saturday evening I found a conservative synagogue in Creve Coeur, MO to attend. It was a short prayer service to close out the Sabbath and the experience reminded me somewhat of a Catholic mass, with a book similar to a missal that gets used based on the day of the week, with a lot of reciting prayers and scripture in Hebrew between a cantor and the congregation. There was a translation to show what was being said, and a boy who appeared to be of bar mitzvah age was also assisting. This little service concluded with the lights turned out and only a candle for light, and included a glass of wine and perfume. This was to symbolize sending out the Sabbath in a good way and to hope for a good week ahead. Pastor Parviz said how one hurdle most Jews have with leaving Judaism is the strong sense of community they have, and in the short time I was there I could see what he meant. I really got the sense of *community* with this community of Jews, including how they occasionally gave their prayers and responses in a lighter, more joyous delivery of speech than what is typically found in a Christian worship service. As it turned out the bigger Sabbath service with a lesson from the rabbi takes place on Saturday morning instead of Saturday evening, so I missed out on that aspect. Otherwise I was very glad I went and appreciated my time there that evening.

Thanks to everyone for their thoughts, prayers and support. It felt like a busy month and these next two weeks seem like an extension of that before we all get a much-needed long break. Our plans for Christmas aren't set in stone yet, but if we do travel to Minnesota we will try to let everyone know. I'm not sure yet if I will send an update at the beginning of January. If not the next one will be at the beginning of February, just as the spring semester begins. Blessed Advent and Merry Christmas to all as you ponder and celebrate the incarnation in your own home!

Kevin & Angela Peterson  
Chelsea