

February 1

Friends—

It's hard to believe two months have gone by and the first week of the new semester is underway. Our family had a restful Christmas break; we stayed put in Missouri and celebrated the Christmas holiday just the three of us as a family. We attended a different congregation for Christmas Eve service, Zion Lutheran in St. Charles, which is much larger than my field congregation and closer to home. It was nice to have a different worship experience during this period of not being required to actively participate each week. Earlier in December we also went on the live Polar Express ride, which is a real train ride in downtown St. Louis that reenacts many of the scenes and items from the Tom Hanks movie. It was a lot of fun and Chelsea enjoyed it too, even though she was scared when Santa came to say hi! It is something we will definitely do again. My family came to visit over new year's weekend and they certainly enjoyed getting to spend time with Chelsea and watch her open the gifts they brought! With my parents and sister all visiting that weekend, everyone in my original nuclear family has now visited our new home. Angela also took off one week from work in December, which allowed us to enjoy some 'we' time after Chelsea went to bed, relaxing and watching movies night after night. This is something we used to do a lot before becoming parents but haven't done nearly as often these days, but it was definitely good and relaxing.

I managed to get all my assignments caught up and everything turned in on time, even despite having to play catch-up due to feeling ill right after Thanksgiving. I was pleased with all my grades, so semester 1 here was definitely a success! In the middle of January, all first year students were required to attend a two week intensive class, called Intro to Pastoral Leadership. The teacher was Pastor David Peter, and it took place on site of two local congregations. The focus of this class was to understand how a church functions as a physical, earthly 'business' or institution. There was no theology involved, but rather it was devoted to understand how congregations are organized structurally, how to manage finances, what the pastor's role is based on congregation size, etc. The first week was spent at a small congregation and the second week was spent at a large one. The pastors for each congregation led half of our lecture time, with Pastor Peter leading the other half. The small congregation I was assigned to was Messiah Lutheran in St. Louis, and the large one was Webster Gardens Lutheran in Webster Groves.

After this two week intensive class we had one more week off, and then starting with this present week, we have begun the new semester. I have four classes, just like before, and have now had a chance to experience them all. My exegetical class is the Letters of Paul, with Pastor Mark Seifrid, the same teacher I had for my exegetical class the previous semester. This week we looked at the book of Acts (ironically not written by Paul), in order to examine the possible timeline of his missionary journeys and correlate which letters he most likely wrote at what time. Later on we will focus on a specific text from Romans in Greek and hand in a paper analyzing our own translation of Greek when compared with two popular English translations. Because this class is New Testament-based and we will work with translating Greek in it, there is no Greek lab this semester.

Second is Intro to Practical Theology with Pastor Ben Haupt. This is a brand new class for the new semester curriculum, and so far it seems to focus on the aspect of missions and how being missiological can be different compared to what we typically think. It doesn't all involve sending people overseas, the culture has changed enough where there are plenty of unchurched people here in our own backyard.

Third is Homiletics with Pastor David Peter, the same teacher as the January intensive class. Here is where we take our first steps in creating sermons, and the final project will be to create two full length sermons and choose one to present orally for video recording in order to analyze with peers and the teacher afterwards. The two texts we have to create these sermons on are both texts that will be used in the lectionary this summer, with the idea being we can further refine them if we so choose and if we happen to travel home on those particular weeks, we can offer to present them to our home congregations at that time. This week we talked about what good preaching should include and what makes a good sermon different from simple storytelling or motivational speaking.

Lastly is Creeds & Confessions with Pastor David Maxwell. This class is being taught similarly to our systematics class from the previous semester where one day a week we meet as a big large group, and the other day we will divide into smaller classes to ask questions and have further clarification on what was previously discussed. So far we have examined why we have our creeds and confessions, what they do and don't do, among other things. I have really enjoyed his approach so far, and much of how he delivers the material reminds me of a favorite pastor from back home, so much so that it feels like being in one of his Sunday morning classes again. I suspect this will be my favorite class of the semester!

As before there is still a language lab if one is not taking a class directly related to one of the testaments, so I do still have a Hebrew lab once a week. This semester the teacher is Pastor Paul Raabe, and this week we looked at a passage from Exodus where God converses with Moses after the golden calf incident, and he explained how much gospel can be found in this passage. So much so that for those who believe God's behavior in the old testament is petty, tyrannical and genocidal, that they truly haven't read the text well enough to know what they're talking about. It was quite an insightful discussion!

At Zion Lutheran in Maryland Heights, my field congregation, I have gotten to assist leading liturgy three times now, twice in December and once last week. Last week was a matins service, so I got to do something I had never done, perform chanting! Having a lower voice, I performed the tones an octave lower than how I have heard them done by others, but I think it went well. Angela said it was like listening to monks, in a good way. ☺ Pastor Femmel wants to make a point to have dinner with the second year student there and myself once a month, for mutual support, prayer, and brotherly fellowship. Our second such meeting will be next Tuesday.

My time at Chai v'Shalom is over, but in this new semester I will experience a different module, one that is institution-based, which will be assisting a chaplain at a nursing home. I have not yet heard from him but that is another experience I am looking forward to.

Thank you for all the prayers, support and encouragement. It was a good and much-needed period of rest but I am ready now to get back at it again and look forward to giving all of you updates as things go along. Feel free to reach out anytime!

Kevin Peterson
Angela, Chelsea