

March 2

Friends—

The new semester is now in full swing and the weather is taking an upturn as well! Yesterday was my birthday, which was enjoyable. It might be the first time I've had weather in the 50s on March 1, so that was a pleasant experience. The three of us had a pretty typical evening at home but we did have some ice cream cake as well. Chelsea is adding more words to her vocabulary including saying 'yes' instead of just 'yeah' and can say some small complete sentences. Early in the month the three of us went to see Disney on ice downtown at the Scottrade center, which was fun! Lots of kids, and the highlight for them all was the segment for the movie Frozen (which gets watched at least every other day in this house.) We got her a flashy wand that has a snowflake at the end and which lights up, and she loves being chased around the house by me while I'm carrying it. That gets me some good exercise!

In the Letters of Paul class we have been working our way through his portion of the New Testament, sometimes spending one class period per letter and other times two periods per letter. We just finished Romans, which is certainly the most major of them all, and have also done 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians. We read a book written by the author of the class, Pastor Seifrid called *Christ Our Righteousness* which has a very Lutheran view of Pauline justification and theology, and also focuses heavily on Romans. It was written before he became a Lutheran when he was teaching at a Baptist seminary in Kentucky. I asked him if there was anything in it he no longer agreed with and he said no, that his was a gradual conversion but by the time he wrote the book he was basically a Lutheran already.

Intro to Practical Theology has been focusing a lot on missions as well as how the approach pastors and lay people should take with regards to making church and the faith more appealing nowadays in a society where it no longer has the influence it once did. Rather than being a cause for despair, Pastor Haupt sees it as returning to the years of the early early church, before Constantine, when the church still grew and attracted new people despite not having the support of the government or civil realm. We also briefly talked about other approaches other church bodies have done with regards to this. On one side there is the 'fad church' where people believe the church needs to adapt and change to the culture in order to be relevant, and that if the culture goes a certain way, the church should follow. A common example would be churches with rainbow flags decorating the worship space. Another example would be adopting the pattern of whatever the most relevant mainstream theological book is, such as how the Purpose Driven Life was 10 years ago. On the far opposite side of the spectrum are groups that want to be so countercultural that by virtue of doing this they end up standing out from the crowd and attracting people because of it. The example we discussed were those in the Greek Orthodox church who insist on long beards, having liturgy in Greek, formal vestments for the clergy, etc.

Homiletics has brought us slowly from understanding the theory behind preaching to the process of crafting sermons. We have discussed how to take a certain biblical text, look at the original language to get the main thrust of each sentence, followed by determining what theological point is being made here. From then the task is to take that point and apply it to the audience in the pews, including considering all the age groups and diverse backgrounds of people who will be there. This week we began a practice where one student in the class leads a 5 minute opening devotion on a passage of their choice as a 'mini sermon.' Two people have gone so far, but my date isn't until the beginning of April so that gives me a lot more time to prepare what I want to say! Along with this I have been

working my way through the book Law & Gospel by C.F.W. Walther, a book that every serious Lutheran theologian has read at least once. It is a series of lectures given in the 1880s on how to make sure that preaching utilizes both concepts but does them in the proper way that the hearers will not confuse them for each other. We will discuss the book together as a class in mid April. I had certainly heard of it but had never read it, and was concerned it was going to be very dry and difficult to read since it was written so long ago. So far I have been pleasantly surprised that it seems to be presented in an easy-to-understand format. There have been several sentences in each chapter that really capitalize on his key concepts.

Creeds & Confessions has been bringing us through the three ecumenical creeds as well as portions of the small and large catechisms. Most recently we discussed what it means to say God created all we see in the first article, including ourselves, what it means to say God begat a son in the second article, and how the Holy Spirit proceeds, as described in the third article. We spent time focusing on Arius who tried to resolve these conflicts (but was wrong), and then just today we focused on the long Athanasian creed and how it uses language to answer specific issues regarding the trinity. I can say this is still my favorite class this semester, so I always look forward to Tuesdays and Fridays when it takes place.

Hebrew lab has been focusing on reading text from each of the different types of texts in the Old Testament. We started in Exodus and Leviticus followed by Deuteronomy and Joshua, and coming up we will focus on passages from Psalms, Proverbs and one or two prophets.

At Zion Lutheran I led liturgy during service again just last Sunday, and Pastor Femmel said I did an excellent job with the readings, really nailing how to deliver them for dramatic effect. It's a good feeling to know he is seeing improvement! This month they also voted overwhelmingly to move forward with putting a coffee shop in the basement of the church. They see this as an opportunity to fill a niche since it is in a very business-heavy neighborhood with no coffee shops for miles, and that the church is situated on a heavily driven road. Pastor also sees it as a way for people to 'invite someone to church without inviting them to church' since he mentioned how that approach rarely works anymore.

Lastly I have begun helping with my institutional assignment, at a Lutheran Senior Services nursing home quite close to my house. The chaplain there is Pastor Dave Stratmann, and I can tell how this is a good environment for him to serve in, having a calm and peaceful demeanor. So far I have assisted with two Sunday afternoon services, and at the most recent this involved helping with monthly communion. Pastor gave the bread while I gave the wine, and some of the residents cherished receiving it so much, that it became an emotional time for me, the assistant. The residents I have met have been quite a friendly bunch and I am looking forward to getting to know them better in the upcoming weeks.

Thanks again for prayers and friendly reminders that you are thinking of us. It is a joy getting to share progress here with all of you.

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