

April 3

Friends—

Christ has risen! Hopefully you all have had a blessed and contemplative Lenten season and now are able to rest in the assurance that Good Friday was not the end of the story, but that our Lord Jesus lives and has conquered death forever! My family and I chose to attend Easter services at Zion Lutheran in St. Charles, which is closer than my field congregation of Zion Maryland Heights, and it was great being surrounded by a big group of people who were there for those same reasons. Later that day we went to the Easter potluck meal organized by other students. There was lots of food and fellowship by all of us who were there.

Earlier in the month we had our midterm break week and my family and I went on a vacation to San Antonio. We had never been to Texas before but really enjoyed ourselves between the hospitality, the picturesque river walk, the Alamo, and (a personal favorite for me), seeing the Lyndon Johnson museum in Austin. I have had an affinity for our country's presidents since middle school, so I knew that was the one thing I wanted to see. This now makes the 5th presidential museum we have been to, I believe. It was also the first domestic vacation we have taken since becoming parents, one which was not spurred by a work conference for Angie. So she said she greatly appreciated not having any set agenda but getting to just take in the sights, the three of us, as we used to when it was just the two of us. Another personal highlight was getting to visit with a pastor friend I hadn't seen in over 15 years, someone I knew from my days as a student at Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato when he was the dean of students.

Most exegetical classes are only half a semester long, so my Letters of Paul class is now over. For the rest of the semester, then, I will have a class on the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), with Pastor David Lewis. We have only had one class period so far but I think I am really going to enjoy his approach in delivering the material. We talked about what makes these three gospels different from John, what the four all have in common, as well as what ways the three are different from each other. We will explore these more in depth as time goes on, with most of our focus being on Luke and briefly touching on Matthew and Mark at the end.

Intro to Practical Theology has been focusing on examining 'case studies.' This involves us being given a certain scenario of something that happened within a church setting, why it happened, and asking us to reflect on whether it was a good idea or not. There is a specific four step process we are supposed to use in arriving at our conclusions, and now over the next month we will be working on a small group project creating a case of our own and presenting to the class how we would handle such a situation were we engaged with it in a real-world manner.

Homiletics has been walking us through the various aspects of preparing and delivering a sermon. In particular we have focused on how to preach the law in a sermon (for people who aren't convicted of the seriousness of their sin), how to preach the gospel (for those who are burdened by their sin and need assurance of forgiveness), and how to preach on sanctification (how people can and should act after receiving the gospel, now motivated to strengthen their walk with God and with others around them.) We will also turn in the transcript for our first sermon assignment on Thursday, and will begin work on our second one then as well. Between the two, we will then choose one of them to present orally to the class during the final week of the term. In addition, it will be my turn to give a five minute devotional, a mini sermon, on Monday of next week.

Creeds & Confessions has had us discussing several major points of controversy over the centuries. We discussed the errors of Arius (who believed that Jesus must have been a lesser being than God the Father, that they weren't of equal glory), as well as the errors of Nestorius (who tried to correct Arius's error by

keeping Jesus' two natures entirely separate, emphasizing that only Jesus' divine nature did certain things and only his human nature did other things), in addition to the controversy over whether the body and blood of Christ is actually present in holy communion and why some theologians and church bodies believe it isn't, and now have gotten to the topic of original sin and to what degree sin has infected our character and essence as humans. All very fascinating! Just today the teacher mentioned how most people tend to either love reading our Book of Concord because it is so precise and organized that it leaves no doubt what exactly is being taught, or they hate it because it can come off as dry, boring and sterile. Hopefully no Lutheran pastors fall into the second group! That's where those of us who really enjoy it have the job of explaining and presenting it to those who find it a burden.

Hebrew lab recently covered the song of Hannah in 1 Samuel as well as the story of David & Goliath, as we continue to try and hit each type of genre of writing in the Old Testament.

At my field congregation of Zion Lutheran in Maryland Heights, Pastor Femmel has made a point to meet with me and the second year student there once a month to discuss life, theology, and give us a chance to think about how we might answer questions we will come across as pastors. The last time we met, towards the beginning of March, was a very insightful discussion, including going into detail regarding the flaws in evolutionary theory.

At the Lutheran Senior Services nursing home I have continued to assist with the afternoon chapel service by reading a lesson or two, offering the benediction and being a friendly face as the residents come in and out. It's touching how such a small act seems to make the day of several people there.

We are now in the home stretch of finishing year 1! It's hard to believe; it's been time-consuming and challenging at times to meet all the deadlines and balance the different vocations that come with being a student, spouse and parent, but it also has been a year of encouraging growth. Thanks for the encouragement and well-wishes, I always enjoy feedback when the letters go out letting me know you're thinking of all of us. God's blessings as you enjoy the feast of this Easter season!

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