

September 3

Friends—

Happy Labor Day! Classes started last week and after one full week, we now get a long weekend. It was really great being on campus on a regular basis again and seeing how classmates spent their summer. It looks like this will be a busy semester with a couple classes in particular taking up a lot of our time, but it will all be worth it!

The summer, too, has been busy and eventful for me and our family. Chelsea completed her swim class and we chose to sign her up again to get her more familiar with the routines and things they do. I could see an improvement and we agree that next year she will be ready to advance to the next level. She also went to story time at the library once a week and although she was shy and hesitant to participate in the singalong songs and crafts, she finally started to come around right around the time I couldn't take her anymore due to other commitments. But it was nice seeing her make progress in that regard. The three of us also spent an evening this summer at the local Chik fil a where a special appearance was made by Cinderella! Chelsea has some rubber Disney princess dolls, and we knew she had to bring her Cinderella doll along. She got some nice pictures with the real life princess and even offered to give her doll to her, haha! Chelsea also came along to vacation bible school at my field congregation of Zion Maryland Heights, since I was asked to follow Pastor Femmel around as he led his bible activities for the different age groups each day. That kind of high energy church activity was something I hadn't experienced in a long time, probably not since my days of working at summer bible camp in 1999 and 2000.

The other big highlight in our household this summer is that Angie's parents have come to visit from Kenya, arriving at the beginning of August. Her father has some health issues which everyone agreed would be better treated here in America than back there, so they have been staying with us since that time. He hasn't started a regimen yet but at this point the plan is for him to do physical therapy along with some injections in the back as opposed to surgery, which was the original plan. She has really enjoyed seeing them again and we both like the added help with watching Chelsea, now that Angie and I are both in full time work and school mode. Two weeks after her parents arrived, Angie's sister, her husband, and their two young children also visited for two weeks. This gave us two weeks of six adults and three children under six under one roof! It was nice getting to show them all my school campus as well as the American culture and landscape but also made for a much different household than what we are used to! They have now returned to Kenya safe and sound, and last but not least, Angie's eldest brother from Minnesota drove down for a long weekend this weekend to see his parents, accompanied by his daughter and girlfriend. This was his first visit since we moved here a year ago and it was nice to show them our new home and lifestyle.

On a personal level, the other big highlight for me this summer was making a trip to Minnesota, my first since moving to Missouri, in the early part of August. In some ways it felt like I had just left yesterday and in others I could tell much had changed, with a lot more education and experience under my belt. I spent the first two nights in Rochester and got to see friends from when we lived there in addition to seeing my home congregation of Redeemer Lutheran and people we know there. I also managed to preach a sermon at Trinity Lutheran in Elgin, a congregation outside of Rochester where I used to play organ once a month. Then I drove and spent a day in the twin cities and was able to visit my sister. This then followed with driving two hours west to the western side of Minnesota to visit my parents in my hometown of Renville. Throughout all this I also managed to see all but one of my adopt a student sponsors as a seminary student. I got to meet with two separate individuals and two congregations during my travels who have been paired up with me by the financial aid office. After sending these updates to them for the past year it has been nice getting to put faces and personalities with all of them and for them to do the same with me. All in all it was a very relaxing and rejuvenating time away, just what I needed, and very encouraging to meet with everyone who is thankful to be helping me in this journey.

With one full week down of class I now have a basic idea of what each class will be like. Just as with the fall semester of last year, I will be having one class in each category. The exegetical class is Exodus and the Torah with Pastor Tom Egger. We spent this past week covering the book of Genesis and then the whole rest of the class will be devoted to the book of Exodus rather focusing on the other three books that make up the Pentateuch. His PhD work is focused on the book of Exodus so it makes sense he would want to devote the class to this material. We will be translating a few verses from Hebrew prior to each class and then quizzed to see how well we can explain our translations.

The practical class this semester is Pastoral Care & the Word with Pastor Mark Rockenbach. This will be focused on the counseling aspect of the pastoral position, both in situations where a parishoner comes to the pastor for counsel and where the pastor opts to approach them as a helpful resource. We will be doing a lot of in class role playing honing these skills in small groups as well as attending some private sessions on our own with an actual counselor, as well as learning how to write sermons for weddings and funerals. I am glad to be having him as my teacher for this class; I have heard him speak as a guest lecturer periodically last year and have really valued his knowledge and expertise. In addition, he is one of two teachers on campus who also possesses an active license as a psychologist, giving what he says several dimensions as to how to best help people. In fact, I suspect this may be my favorite class as this semester goes on. Time will tell!

For systematics the class is simply titled Systematics I. It is team taught as one large group, with three teachers taking turns on who will cover what topic. Periodically we will break up into smaller groups and the teacher I will have on those occasions is Pastor Joel Biermann. I am also very glad to be in his section, as many pastors I know have said to take as many classes with him as possible. I have heard him speak as a guest lecturer as well, in addition to listening to some prerecorded classes he has done which are available online. I could tell early on that he is a wealth of information and really knows his stuff. This class will cover many topics under the broad umbrella of God's story from creating all things to establishing the new heavens and new earth. Topics will include the trinity, caring for God's creation, what it means to be a human creature created by God, and how to care for those who are dying as we await the last day.

Lastly is history, and its class is History of the Reformation and the Lutheran Church with Pastor Tim Dost. The first half of the class appears to cover the life of Martin Luther as his theology and worldview changed from being a monk to a professor and finally to a reformer, while the second half of the class will cover Luther's theology and how his successors defended and organized his teachings after his death. This past week we have actually discussed the Greek philosophers of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, and how their influence wove its way into western thinking by the time of Luther.

Just as last year, students take a language lab if they are not enrolled in a class based on a particular biblical testament. This means I have a Greek lab once a week with Pastor Mark Seifrid. I had him as a teacher for a couple classes last year, and for this lab we will be looking at a few verses in the book of Acts each week and examining what possible translations can be derived from looking at the Greek text.

At Zion in Maryland Heights, besides helping with vacation bible school I also had two opportunities to preach! My very first time preaching a sermon, the first one I wrote for class, was in early July and comes from 2 Corinthians 12, discussing Paul's thorn in the flesh. The second sermon was in mid August and from 1 Kings 19, discussing Elijah fleeing from the wicked queen who wants his life. It was exciting getting to finally share the Word of God orally to a congregation, and to think about how the task seemed so daunting when starting my first preaching class last winter. It will be exciting to see what other preaching opportunities come up this year. I also have been able to lead liturgy there as well as sub as an organist periodically too. Go to <http://www.zionmh.org/audio/2018-07-08.mp3> to hear an audio recording of sermon #1 and <http://www.zionmh.org/audio/2018-08-12.mp3> for a recording of sermon #2

All in all it has been a very busy summer but an enjoyable one and now a busy year up ahead. I have no doubt despite the challenges it will be enjoyable as well as I continue this process of pastoral formation and knowledge. Thank you for your support; whether I was able to see you in person this summer or not know that I do appreciate your concern and care every step of the way.

Kevin Peterson
Angela, Chelsea