

October 8

Friends—

It has been a busy first month of school and I was not able to get my monthly letter out as promptly as I had hoped! I have found the set of classes, two in particular, contain a lot more reading than any of the classes last year (which also contained considerable amounts of reading in their own right.) I know it is all useful knowledge and information, however, and that my time hasn't been spent in vain.

It has been a different dynamic at home as well, with Angie's parents still here visiting with us. We have now settled into a routine with Chelsea going to daycare twice a week and grandparents taking care of her the other three days. Angie's father has had a few physical therapy appointments and learned a variety of exercises which he has been good at implementing twice a day, per instructions. From what he says they seem to be helping so now it's a matter of slow but sure progress towards less pain and more flexibility for him. They are hoping to make a trip to Minnesota to visit their two sons up there sometime later this month, but will ultimately be staying in this country most likely until December or January.

Chelsea has been continuing to grow more independent and used the potty successfully while at daycare! I have yet to witness it at home but it's good there's progress made in that area. She has also been getting slowly better at feeding herself bites for meals rather than being fed all the time. A few weekends ago we all went to the St. Louis science center as a family, and then last weekend we went to Big Joel's farm, a petting zoo on a family homestead that we had visited almost exactly a year ago. It was fun seeing her interact with the animals more actively this time, being a year older. Angie continues doing her best at her job and recently attended a dinner meeting for medical professionals to learn new developments in her area over a fine meal.

The Exodus & Torah class has now been focused entirely on the book of Exodus after week 1. We have discussed the structure of the book, themes in the book that show God's character compared to that of Pharaoh, how God revealed himself to Moses in ways he had not previously revealed to Abraham and the other Genesis characters, and how the instructions for God's people to build a tabernacle for him ultimately finds its completion in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the fulfillment of God truly being among his people, coming directly to them in their midst, with the building of the tabernacle in Exodus being a forerunner of that. We have also been translating and quizzed on certain Hebrew passages in Exodus.

The Pastoral Care class has had us do a lot of practical exercises, both inside and outside of class, dealing with listening. We have learned how to actively listen to others who come to share personal stories as well as techniques to ensure we are understanding them correctly and to provide the best care for them as we help them work through their problem. We have also had some very interesting discussions regarding premarital counseling and possible high-stress issues we may face as pastors, such as infidelity within a marriage. We were required to become certified in a particular brand of marriage counseling, called SYMBIS, and find an engaged couple that we can discuss a SYMBIS assessment with. Over the next couple weeks I will finish my mini counseling sessions with them as well as write a wedding sermon for them as if I was the one officiating their wedding. We also discussed the role the pastor plays in coordinating a smooth and reverent wedding ceremony, and in the second half of the semester we will begin discussing the pastor's role during funerals.

Systematics has been divided into 'units' with each of the three teachers lecturing on one particular unit, followed by us dividing into smaller groups to review and debrief what was discussed (I am in the smaller group with Pastor Biermann). We started by a bit of review from last year regarding the trinity, then moved on to understanding what it means to be a creature within God's creation, how to respect and be

good stewards of creation, what role science plays in our theology and how to spot when science oversteps its bounds, and right now we are in the middle of discussing what makes human life special and sacred among God's creatures. This topic has far reaching implications with regards to how we view issues like cloning, euthanasia, and what it means to be 'in the image' of God.

History of the Reformation has had us do a lot of reading from Martin Luther's exhaustive body of work. His more famous works that we have covered so far are the *95 Theses*, *the Heidelberg Disputation*, *Freedom of a Christian*, *the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* and *How Christians Should Regard Moses*. That last selection of course fits in nicely with the content of my Exodus class. While class discussion often goes in a variety of unexpected and unpredictable ways, it has been nice learning some of the extra context that caused Luther to write as well as some of the competing views by his contemporaries and earlier church fathers in history. We are also reading a small but succinct biography of Luther written by one of our other history teachers, Pastor Paul Robinson (my intro to history teacher from last year.)

At my field congregation of Zion Lutheran I have led liturgy two times since the school year began. Pastor Femmel and I met this past week to visit over coffee, discuss odds and ends things regarding theology, parish life and seminary life, and brainstorm ideas for what I can do this upcoming year. I have not yet preached since my two opportunities this summer but I'm sure we will work out a date to do so yet this semester.

Two final highlights for me are how last week I attended the first of four lectures throughout the month of October given by Pastor David Lewis, one of my teacher from last year, on his favorite topic, Christ and theology in movies. Being a huge movie lover myself I knew I had to sign up. Last week's presentation was on biblical movies in general, and how oftentimes the filmmakers take liberties and artistic license with the original story. We spent most of our time focusing on the film *The Ten Commandments*, and how almost the entire 3.5 hour narrative is completely made up. Only the final sections of the film are based on the Exodus narrative but even there certain scenes were composited or drawn from other biblical events. Because of this, he pointed out that many people *think* they know how familiar bible stories occurred but in fact what they know is how they were portrayed in popular movies. I am really looking forward to the three remaining lectures in this series this month.

The other big highlight was getting to have our first large class meeting regarding vicarage, next year's yearlong internship, with the campus vicarage director, Pastor Glenn Nielsen. He shared how the process will work with us each getting to know him throughout this year, what factors we consider most important in where we hope to get placed, and how he ultimately makes his recommendation on our behalf to the council of presidents, who in turn decide where each of us will have our vicarage next year. We will have a few more large group meetings with him throughout the school year discussing various aspects of the vicarage experience, along with an individual meeting with him over Christmas break.

It's hard to believe all of this has occurred in just over a month's time. The semester is going really fast with midterm break just one week away. Thanks to everyone for prayers, support and encouragement continuing through this process!

Kevin Peterson
Angela, Chelsea