



# LEVENHAGEN UPDATE NOVEMBER 2021



## Family Update

It has been much too long since I sent a newsletter, but the second year in the M.Div. program is not for the faint of heart! The Thanksgiving holiday will be here soon, and the kids are both looking forward to a week off school and a trip “home” to Indiana.

November is a month of birthdays for our family. On November 7<sup>th</sup>, Faith finally became a teenager. Our tradition is for the family member to choose a place where they’d like to go out for dinner. Somehow Faith managed to convert the traditional single meal into a form of progressive dinner lasting



A quick family selfie on at our celebration for Nathan’s 17<sup>th</sup> birthday!

all day! Starting her day with a pastry from Panera, then coffee from Starbucks, lunch from Chick-fil-A, and then dinner at Cracker Barrel. That’s a lot of carbs, folks!

Faith is well into the school year now at her new school, Christ Community Lutheran School. She has met the challenge of a new school and catching up from a year of online school. We were so proud of her when received High Honors for the first quarter or her academic year. She continues to be active in the youth group at the Seminary and has started Confirmation classes twice per week at our field congregation, Zion Lutheran Church.

Jill and I are still in disbelief...but Nathan turned 17 on November 13<sup>th</sup>. After a day at his job, we celebrated in the evening with pizza and homemade ice cream. Nathan continues his work at the Gateway Kartplex in the infield of WWT Raceway in Madison,



Celebrating Faith’s 13<sup>th</sup> birthday!

### THE LEVENHAGENS

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Illinois. From August through October, Nathan competed in a karting championship held at the Kartplex using rental karts and did really well. He was a consistent contender, regularly qualifying on pole, winning, several times on his way to a second-place finish in the championship. He lost the championship by less than two feet! School is going well for Nathan and, as a family, we're beginning to turn our attention to college visits and all that will entail. How is that possible?!



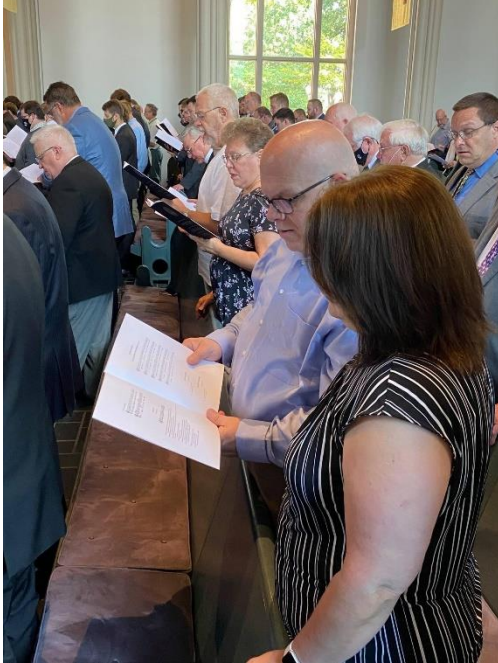
Jill on her first day of work at the LWML Headquarters

The last month has brought a lot of changes for Jill. She started a new job with the Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML) headquarters here in Saint Louis. She is working on converting their national website to a different platform with a new design. She also is responsible for other matters relating to digital marketing. She loves her job and is excited about the opportunity to work with the LWML and is anxious to see it grow and thrive with another generation. The LWML headquarters is located on campus just across the street from the chapel, so it's nice to be able to drop in and say hello when I have a break in classes. She still does some *ad hoc* consulting for the Arnold P. Gold Foundation, but that has necessarily reduced with her new position at the LWML.

And last but not least is me. As I mentioned earlier, this semester has been by far the most challenging yet at the seminary. Check out page four for a more detailed update in the Classroom Corner. Outside the classroom, I have been doing a hospice chaplaincy rotation with Lutheran Senior Services. I spend about four hours a week with patients, reading Scripture, praying with them, and just being a companion. I also began serving at our new fieldwork congregation, Zion Lutheran Church in Maryland Heights, Missouri. Zion began as a grade school in 1869 and eventually became an official congregation of the LCMS in 1896. The congregation is very focused on community engagement and current has a coffee shop/café outreach among other ministries. I've had the opportunity to serve as liturgist, assist with the Lord's Supper, and teach one of the adult Bible classes. I will have the opportunity to preach for services in the future as well. This placement has been a tremendous blessing to our whole family. Rev. Mark Femmel is an incredible mentor, and it would be hard to overstate how much I'm learning from him.



The sanctuary and congregation at Zion Lutheran Church.



**Aaron and Jill at the Opening Service for the academic year in the Chapel of St. Timothy and St. Titus**

In this month where we all pause to give thanks to our God for His many blessings, our family is giving thanks for each of you. Whether family, friend, or a kind supporter we may never meet until heaven comes, you continue to give us the encouragement we need to carry on with the work God has called us to. Thank you...thank you...thank you. May God return to you a measure of the blessings you have shared with us.

May the peace of God be with you. Until next time ... in the love of Christ.

*Aaron R. Levenhagen*

# Classroom Corner

## Academic & Field Work Update

Here's a quick update on my upcoming coursework and field work.

**The Torah** – this is a half-semester course taught by Dr. David Adams concluded in mid-October. This course gave significant opportunities to work with the original Hebrew text of the Book of Exodus. We learned to carefully analyze textual variants and did a deep dive on the first thirty chapters or so. We were also given the challenge of teaching the class on a day covering a section of the text. It was fascinating to see how the Book of Exodus is really the theological heart and soul of the entire Old Testament. It was just a great class!

**The Prophets** – You may be noticing a bit of theme...but I love the exegetical classes and Dr. Penhallegon might be my favorite professor (don't tell the others until final grades are in! 😊). It's very demanding, but worth the effort. This course got started in mid-October. So far, we've covered the Books of Joel, Jonah, and we're about two-thirds of the way through Isaiah. We're also working through small pieces of Amos in the original Hebrew every morning. Every single day I see new things in the text. Isaiah is truly the "first Gospel"; the entire book is saturated in Christ. In a few weeks, I'll be presenting on the book of Obadiah, so I'm working on that. And I've been able to leverage my studies in Jonah for adult Bible class content at my field church.

**Systematics I** – this is the most far-ranging course that I have covering LCMS systematic doctrine on various issues from the Trinity, Creation, anthropology, and now the doctrine of salvation, justification, and sanctification. I'm

especially enjoying the readings from Francis Pieper that we regularly do on each topic. Systematics classes are hard. Learning to talk and write about theology with precision and accuracy just is not easy. But again, it's worth the effort. If you've ever wondered why we believe, teach, or confess something in particular...this would be the class for you!

**Teaching the Faith** – this course prepares us to be an effective teacher of the Word. Much of the focus is on creative strategies for Bible studies to all ages and especially Confirmation classes. Recognizing the importance of catechesis and the concerns we all have with retention of our young people, this is pretty vital and a lot of information to cram into a single class. Very thought-provoking.

**Worship and the Word** – this is an introduction to the worship of the church. This class is a bit of an extreme mix of the theoretical and the practical. The most useful parts have been learning to preside at certain portions of the liturgy and other rites. This practice is especially important even though I'm not able to do many of these things prior to ordination. Having the chance to practice and receive written feedback is very valuable.

**Greek and Hebrew Labs** – I still spend two hours per week in Greek and Hebrew language labs to maintain and continue to build my language skills. Hebrew feels like it's going well; but Greek is a bit more of a struggle, perhaps since it's been longer since I took the language intensive.

**Formation Group** – once a week, I meet in a small group *Winkel* with other second year

seminarians. This group covers various topics but also is there for support and prayer. We are mentored by President Emeritus, Dr. Dale Meyer.

**Vicarage Update** – soon we will have our placement interview for vicarage. It’s hard to believe the time is here already. This will be a challenging year for the placement office because my class is the largest class currently at the seminary. There are currently more of us than there are congregations in the vicarage program. It is possible that some of us may need to defer our vicarages for another year. When this happens, we proceed with completing the typical fourth year post-vicarage academic work during the third year and then go on vicarage. Our situation is a bit unique since next year will be Nathan’s senior year in high school. We’re understandably reluctant to move him during

that period of time. We would be grateful for your prayers as we wait, and we wonder what the Lord has planned for us.



**This statue is a replica of the original Luther statue in Worms, Germany, where Luther made his famous “Here I Stand” speech. The bronze statue is more than 9 ft. tall, and the granite base is more than 12 ft. tall. The statue depicts Luther holding the Bible. His right hand rests upon the Bible to signify that all of his teachings are based on Scripture alone.**

*Note: As this month's devotion I'm sharing the manuscript of a sermon I preached last summer at my field work congregation. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul encourages them to live in a manner pleasing to God by reminding them of the transition from their fallen bodies to their resurrected bodies. The eternal shelter awaits them in heaven, but here and now they possess the Holy Spirit as a guarantee or down payment of the life to come. And so today we can live confidently in light of our baptismal identity secure in the knowledge that God has given His promised Holy Spirit as evidence of our salvation and as a guarantee of our future resurrection and eternal life in heaven.*

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## **“A Temporary Tent and A Heavenly House”**

by Aaron Levenhagen

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*“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.” (Psalm 19:14, ESV)*

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My first, and at least to this date, *last* camping trip took place nearly twenty years ago. The occasion was our first wedding anniversary. You can already see the red warning flags heading up the flagpole before I go any further with the story. But stay with me. You see, a year earlier, we had spent our honeymoon in Colorado, and we wanted to go back to celebrate our anniversary. But time off was tight and money was tighter, so we had come up with a can't miss plan for this little romantic commemoration. Instead of paying to fly and staying in a hotel, we would drive, and we would camp. And we knew this would work because of all the great times each of us had spent camping previously, right? *Wrong!* But stay with me.

That's right, we were going to load up the little Chevrolet covered wagon and like two brave pioneers, we were going to set out 1,200 miles due west across the prairies. And we were going to accomplish this feat leaving immediately after getting off work and driving straight through without stopping overnight. That's right, sleep was for city slickers, and we were pioneers, after all. After completing this trek, we would arrive at Rocky Mountain National Park, where awaited the pristine grandeur of Glacier Basin Campground. *Glacier Basin*...you might want to file that name away for future reference. And there we would pitch our never-before-used Eddie Bauer tent that we had purchased from the greatest of all outdoor outfitters – Target. Yes, there in Glacier Basin we would stay for three nights, commemorating our year of marital bliss and soaking up the beautiful for spacious skies and purple mountains' majesty. And then we would head back home to Indiana—again without stopping—ready to return to work the next day, refreshed and restored from our whirlwind western adventure. Solid plan, right?

The first chinks in the armor of our plan were exposed a few hours into the western drive. We had made it as far as Colombia, Missouri thinking we were a latter-day Lewis and Clark before we realized that we were the sort of pioneers who needed sleep. After all, it was just one night, we could afford that. So, we

did what every rugged explorer and pioneer for the last two hundred years has done in such a circumstance. We pulled off at a Hampton Inn.

But the next morning we were once again westward bound. Early in the evening, we finally rolled into Glacier Basin, got our assigned campsite, and set about pitching our tent. This was it...our big moment. We got a fire going, but it was so windy that the wind was constantly blowing the fire out. This began a couple of hours of back-to-back-*Survivor*-style fire making challenges just in order to get dinner. But we persevered and eventually produced two barely edible hot dogs. Next, we thought we might sit by the fire and talk, but the wind was creating a vortex of smoke from the fire that somehow seemed to be defying the laws of nature by blowing in every direction at once. So, we gave up and decided to turn in for the night. Luckily, we brought our trusty air mattress to ensure a perfect night's sleep...

This is probably a good time to return to the name *Glacier Basin*. Glacier Basin was just off the northern slope of Long's Peak. Beautiful spot. Elevation was right about 9,000 feet. The crisp, cool September evening that we expected, with the help of the wind was slowly turning into a something a lot colder. Then the snow fell. At this point we were sure that God was looking down on us and really enjoying Himself.

Back to the air mattress. A little-known fact: the air in an air mattress generally will be roughly the same as the ambient air temperature in the tent. So, we were lying on a vinyl mattress filled with air that was a special kind of cold. You'll note that I said *lying* on the mattress; not *sleeping* on the mattress. There wasn't going to be much sleep that night.

When morning at last arrived, we decided against building another fire and instead headed down to a nearby town for breakfast. While we sat in the restaurant, the rain mixed with snow started again. We looked at each other, with the wisdom that one year of marriage brings, and saw something in each other's eyes. It wasn't love. It was hatred. Hatred for that tent. Hatred for that mattress. And hatred for that campfire. I don't remember who buckled first, but it didn't take long to agree that the camping adventure was over. It was time for something more permanent. We spent the next two nights in a Marriott.

During the long drive back to Indiana we had time to consider our feelings about camping and specifically about the tent. So, when we got home, we did what any couple in our shoes would have done: we gave the tent away to another young couple who had always dreamed of going camping.

Why do I tell you that story? In our text when the apostle Paul says "...in this tent we groan," I think I know what he means. Tents are for "roughing it." Tents are temporary. They lack the comforts of home. Few of us would choose to live our lives in a tent. But that's exactly what Paul says we are doing. Living our lives in a tent. And Paul knew a thing or two about tents—he was a tentmaker after all. Paul says we are living every day of our lives in a tent. Something that is even being destroyed bit-by-bit, day-by-day. The tent that Paul refers to is our outer person, our outer self, our body. And things are not as they should be with this body.

Earlier in the letter, Paul has been explaining to the Corinthians why he does not give up despite extremely negative circumstances. Early on in the letter he tells them about his experience during his travels: "We were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death" (1:8-9). Later he writes of being "afflicted...perplexed...persecuted...struck

down...and carrying death in his body” (4:8-10). That is life in Paul’s earthly tent. The tent could be destroyed at any moment. And even if it is not, life in the tent is difficult. Painful. Cause for groaning.

And isn’t the same thing true for us? And we don’t need anyone to tell us that our bodies are wasting away. Just a glance in the mirror will tell us things aren’t as they should be. A few extra pounds. Knees and joints that creak a bit too much. Too few hairs on the head. And then there’s all the other things that attack our bodies and minds that are harder to spot: illness, loneliness, loss, depression, guilt...and all the other trials, temptations, and sins that plague us.

No, things are definitely not as they should be in this tent. But it’s not only the physical or mental flaws that really make life in the tent so hard. Ever since Adam and Eve believed Satan’s lie, doubted God’s goodness, and tasted the forbidden fruit, our tents have been pitched in the desert, under attack by the elements, buffeted by the winds of our sin, and ultimately blown down and left lifeless in the wages of that sin—death.

Life in this tent is too hard. Impossible. And there are days when I don’t want to do it anymore. I groan. I want something better, undamaged, more permanent. And so do you. Somewhere we can feel confident, secure, and safe.

In our text Paul wanted to give the Corinthians a hope they could hold onto in the face of every trial of life, even death. He has taught them that their earthly body is like a tent, but now he wants their attention on the eternal. If the tent that is the earthly body is destroyed—and one day it certainly will be—there is a better, permanent eternal resurrection body, a building from God, not made by human hands, that awaits in heaven. This isn’t a new promise. Jesus Himself had already made this promise, recorded in John’s Gospel: “In My Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:2-3).

The apostle John returned to this hope at the very climax of his vision of Jesus’ return in the book of Revelation. This is the climax of the entire Bible: “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” In the original language, this dwelling place of God is yet another tent, a tabernacle, a perfect dwelling place for God among his people. When John looked, He saw clearly with his own eyes the eternal city, the permanent dwelling of God’s people, and then their God coming to literally pitch *His tent...His tabernacle...and live among them.*

So, if they groan, Paul wants the Corinthians to groan with a longing for the life to come. But not an empty, hopeless longing. Paul is trying to instill a longing that is rooted in a confident, courageous hope for something that is certain and real and permanent.

Paul uses the word that means “confident” or “courageous” twice in our passage—once in verse 6 and then again in verse 8. But I think we can agree that confidence is hard to come by some days. Paul gives the reason for his confidence in verse 5. Paul’s confidence, his hope, rests not only upon the knowledge that



God is preparing a future for him, but also upon the fact that God has already given the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of the promise.

As a seal and promise of our salvation, God has given us the precious gift of His Holy Spirit. And how do we know that we have the Holy Spirit? Because of our Baptism. In our Baptism, God reaches down from eternity into time, takes each of us into His arms and says, "This one is *mine*. This one is redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ and is an heir of all the treasures of heaven." The Spirit has come to me and to you. To live in us. And that is true not only in eternity, but in that instant. This is not a wish for the future. The Holy Spirit makes his personal dwelling within us. Sustaining us. Reminding us. Helping us to hold on to what we know is true. That we may be convinced. That we may be, as Paul says, *confident...of good courage*.

That is why in verse 1, Paul doesn't write: "We will have a building from God." No! He says, "We have a building from God." We have it now. Today. In our Baptism, this future possession is so real, so assured, so guaranteed that he writes of it in the present tense. We have it now. We can live today trusting heaven is real because the Holy Spirit lives inside us, constantly speaking the words that Jesus is who He says He is, that He loves us, He forgives us, and more than anything wants to dwell with us. Even when I don't feel like it. Even when the cold winds of life and death and everything in between buffet and tear at the fabric of this tent in which I now live. We can grab onto to what we *know* to be true and hold on for dear life, confident that we are held secure in the hands of God. So, we do not lose heart. As Paul writes, "we walk by faith, not by sight" held secure in that faith by the precious Holy Spirit and the promises of our Heavenly Father in Christ. Amen.

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***"And [may] the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding...guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [Amen]" (Philippians 4:7, ESV)***

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