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“Laaaadieees and Gentlemen! We welcome you to the Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus! Three rings of non-stop action, death-defying stunts, marvels for children of all ages!” Or was it the United States of America that the announcer said? Hard to remember now. Ah well. It pretty well describes our travels and our reaction to America anyway—especially Chicago O’Hare Airport. But don’t take my word for it. A few quotes from the kids:

- Abigail gawking at the parking facilities at Chicago O’Hare: “Mama, are all those cars for sale?”
- Abigail in the parking lot of Christ’s Church of Oronogo: “Mama, do they have bathrooms at the church that aren’t all plugged up?” (We frequently have to do a marathon of holding it when in PNG because most town bathrooms are either inoperable or . . . disgusting).
- Andrew and Samuel in unison, “Do we *have* to go to Wal-Mart again? We *hate* shopping!” (Of course, they sang a different tune on the way to Toys-R-Us.)
- Hannah sitting at an intersection in our van, “Papa, I’m scared. Let’s go home.” (The noise and proximity of large trucks scares her.)

We have been home for a week and are doing well, after Hannah and I recovered from a bout of intestinal *something* that we endured en route to the U.S. One of the greatest things in our initial experience happened when we arrived in Joplin from Tulsa International Airport. We walked into our house and it was cleaned, furniture (which had been donated) was arranged, the cupboards were full to overflowing, milk was in the refrigerator, the beds were made and ready to sleep in, and a plate of cookies from our new neighbors was on the counter. Angela: “This is just like Christmas! This is so wonderful!” And, of course, it was. Julie Brouwer headed a crew of volunteers who cleaned, moved, donated, prayed, and waited. A very deeply heartfelt thanks to each of you who were part of our welcome home. You cannot imagine the difference you made in our return!

The center ring of our circus over the last week has been shopping, unpacking, sorting, pitching—things left over from last furlough that never quite got taken out to the curbside. The other rings? Joplin traffic in a 15-passenger van. Teenage drivers flying the bird at the previously-mentioned 15 passenger van. The billion or so people in the 15th street Wal-Mart Supercenter. The billion or so varieties non-nutritional cereal-varnished breakfast products (known to the indigenous people of America as cereal). The billion or so billboards. 7 cousins plus our 4 in 1100 square feet—all age 9 and under.

Prayers? But of course. Please pray for our adjustments to the Land of Plenty. We are not quite overwhelmed—but not far from it. Pray for Angela’s pregnancy. She’s doing very well, by the way. Pray that we’ll get settled soon and into our new routine. Thank God for infinite kindness and mercy both in travel and arrival. Thank God for the church, his bride, who have unreservedly loved him through kindness shown to us.

Many thanks and much love to you,  
Todd for Angela, Andrew, Samuel, Abigail, Hannah and the mystery child due to arrive 27 January 2004