

TABLE TALK

Official Publication of the LMS-USA

*...these words... shall be upon your heart; you shall
teach them... and talk of them... Deut. 6:6,7*



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This coming August is the twentieth anniversary of the incorporation of the LMS-USA. It has been an interesting 20 years. Not everything has gone as it may have been envisioned 20 years ago, but being a part of the LMS has been a greater blessing than one could ever have imagined. God has not called us to success as the world understands success, but He has called us to be faithful to Him and to our calling. That is what the LMS has sought to be and what it continues to seek to be, as well as a home for those of like mind.

Dear Heavenly Father, Give us grace to be, and to continue faithful to the end. Amen.

An Easter Message from LMS President, Rev. Dr. Ralph Spears

Resurrection makes Christianity unique among all Religions, be it Buddhist, Hindu, Shinto, Islam (especially) or even Judaism. Jesus clarifies those Religions from Christianity. **Christianity came by His Resurrection.**

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The reason **is**, the Resurrection. The essence of Easter is the living truth that life is eternal and available to all, by Faith! Others systems may suggest this, but Jesus demonstrates it and shows it in dramatic form by being Resurrected. This Life is dynamic and living not just the continuation of existence (life with a small 'l').

There is at least one additional thing that makes Christianity unique. It is best described as radical forgiveness as a part of ready Grace. Who, but Jesus, would grant Paradise to 'the enemy on the right' as our Holy Week narrative reveals - just for the asking? This quality of open Grace becomes the pattern of His Apostles, characterizes the early Church Fathers and martyrs, and colors Christianity to this day. Christians are a forgiving lot like no other.

This is both a strength and perhaps a weakness, because it makes Christians an easy mark. I'll never forget the desperate lady who came into the office with an unproven need saying, "You've got to help me - you're a Christian!" This was not unique. Many in desperate personal situations find it prudent to bang on the door of Grace. Didn't Jesus say, "Knock and it shall be opened," or James who added, "feed the hungry" in the pattern of Jesus who said to simply give to those in need? The love of God constrains us so that we as Christians become easy targets almost as though we have a bull's eye on our back. Yes, we readily forgive!

Jesus in His last teaching to the Apostles on His last night with them warned that, "In the world you will have trouble" as an introduction (John 14-16) to this free Grace and forgiveness that would be a mark of His Church.

For this reason I have never wondered at the propensity of Christians



around the world and throughout time - to be persecuted - even and **especially**, today! Christians are an easy mark. Twenty-one Coptic Christians beheaded shamelessly. Syrian Christians, the oldest branch of Christianity, hunted down and eliminated. Christian pastors and officials are often the easiest marks of unquestioned horrible treatment and imprisonment.

So when Jesus said, "In the world you will have trouble", it was not just a truism, but also a certain mark for those who would follow Him. The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:10&11) warns all hearers that persecution is coming and that those so persecuted are "Blessed"!

GRACE is the mark of the Cross! Like the Lenten hymn of St. Gregory: "In Thy blest cross a grace is found. It flows from every streaming wound" and another saying directly from Revelation says, "If you don't bear the Cross, then you can't wear the Crown."

And this Grace is the road to Life Eternal, Resurrection. That is the avenue and the secret to the great Resurrection Gift of Christianity! No other religious system comes close to this even in the fine print.

Muslims, we are told, are promised 72 virgins as a reward for being a martyr by taking the life of as many of the enemies as possible, while Christians, the world's mark, are promised paradise when being beheaded and persecuted. This is why Jesus spent so much time (and many verses) telling us of the nature of persecution "for His sake". This is His answer - if you will - to Jihad.

Muslims become martyrs by senselessly killing as many as they can while Christian martyrs lay down their lives that others might live. "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against

you falsely on My account" says Jesus, then he adds, "Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven" (Matt 5: 11&12).

We are horrified at the treatment that so many are given for their Faith for no other than the reason that they are Christian: the Pastor in Iran to name one currently! But

this is nothing new as Jesus mentions in the remainder of verse 12, "for so they treated the Prophets who were before you."

The pattern of Life Eternal and the hope of Resurrection, not only makes us targets at times – but makes us bold and in effect –

unafraid! Look at the Apostles who emerged from hiding in the upper room to living like there was always a tomorrow of hope and unbridled joy, the Easter promise of Resurrection!

So we say, "Joyous Resurrection Day!" And also, "Be Not Ever Afraid!"

**The essence of Easter
is the living truth
that life is eternal
and available to all,
by Faith!**

The 2015 Conference and Convention of the LMS-USA

Christ Lutheran Church
Chetek, WI

June 19 - Ministerial Meeting
June 20 & 21 - Conference and Convention

A celebration of the 20th anniversary of the LMS-USA

under the theme

The Four Reformation Solas of the LMS-USA

- Grace Alone
- Faith Alone
- Christ Alone
- Scripture Alone

Opening Service of Holy Communion, Sat., June 20 at 9:00 a.m.

Festival Worship Service, Sun., June 21 at 10:30 a.m.

For further information
Contact Christ Lutheran at 715-924-2552
or
LMS-USA President - revralphs@sbcglobal.net

by

LMS President Rev. Dr. Ralph Spears

Twenty years ago The Lutheran Ministerium and Synod made its first *foot prints* on the sands of time, some Nineteen Hundred Sixty Five years after the Christian Church and nearly Five Hundred years after the Lutheran Church first made impressions on those same sands.

Establishing a *Church body* is a rather daunting task especially in a world and at a time when there are so many even in the Lutheran column. The question for us was: **Why one more?** Why indeed?

No, it was not an attempt to reinvent The Church. How could we? Rather it was a movement of Faith in *good Faith* – towards the highest of ideals – being a part of the Body Of Christ.

It was a matter of drawing a new line in the sand, standing with Joshua to set a standard for “Me and my house” for the purpose of serving the living God. As we know, drawing a line in the sand, no matter how resolutely done – soon shows blur-red lines and challenges.

[Joshua as much as predicts that his followers would not be resolute enough to follow up on their stated promised convictions. He even requested that they should be ‘witnesses against themselves’ knowing that they would lack the resolve for follow-through!]

Hedges against wandering *away too easily are found in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, the foundation of Rock*. Although the line is first drawn in the sand, the geometry of the foundation of the structure must be firmly set on the Rock, that same rock which concludes the Sermon on the Mount which affirms that sand cannot bear the weight. As most Sunday School children can tell you, sand is nothing more than rock that has been compromised - ground down by the ravages of time.

We build new church organizations for much the same reason that we build houses – so that we might

safely *live* together in them and with them. We build knowing that we must build to a typical 10+ (engineering) advantage so that the structure can withstand all of the unforeseen stresses and contingencies. The structure is described as a *house* (Beth) in the Original Testament even though the early Church used a ship as the descriptive symbol bowing to the Ark of Noah as the structure that can float on the uncertain seas and weather the storms. But whether *house* or *ship* the same contingencies of safety and resilience of design are stipulated and necessary.

So twenty years ago, four of us met to consider a brand new structure. Dubbed the "Four-um" or "Forum," we met initially in a rest stop flyover above an Interstate in Chicago. We had parted ways with the AALC because they had not held to principle after adequate urging on our part. Their errors were both in a loose and uncertain theology and a polity with a weak understanding of the gifts of the Spirit which allowed an aggressive charismatic expression with all of the trimmings.

These matters showed no consensus for remedy-only some derision from some after patient rejoinder on our part. Furthermore, there was no consistent leadership for discussion and direction in these matters. Rather there were enough loose cannons among the pastors operating on their own to sink even a much larger *ship*. After a rather auspicious start, conditions within the body had become intolerable.

The ELCA the largest Lutheran body by number, had been ground down so that it was compromising

several rock solid truths (and in the intervening years has continued to do so in an alarming manner). We had first agreed not to openly criticize this group by changing the letters of its name to what we considered more appropriate labels even though there was a cynical temptation to do so. Another large existing body, The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, was a near fit theologically but off the chart with polity problems (the manner in which a body manages its operation). This second in size group, was so rigid from their beginning that it was nearly as distasteful as bad theology. Our concerns would easily be swept aside in their almost continuous internal battles and debates. Some of their members were much more concerned with the finer points of Reformers a hundred years after Luther and Melancthon that most Lutherans had not even heard about. Their battles were (and are) fierce.

Yet another smaller Lutheran body presented with such a fundamentally unforgiving nature as a result of their battle scars, that their church concept was quite stiff and even petty on some points. This group sent observers to our early Conventions with an attempt to steer us in their direction. They could not even participate in our communion liturgy but rather sat in the Service reading and acting in a way that made them instantly unattractive. Reasonable attempts at discussion with them directly about this, produced in them an attitude totally unyielding and ugly. We asked them please not to sit in the service if they were constrained to non-participation, which they thought was unreasonable on our part.

The four of us were unanimous that we should be centrist Lutherans in following as nearly as possible the thought and purpose of Martin Luther. The reason was simple, Luther's whole effort was not to further divide the Church but to unify it; not to overlay it with further sanctions but to return to first principle.

We were not trying to be a late 20th Century knock-off copy of Luther's Church. Rather we considered that Luther was unerringly correct in steering the ship of the Christian Church back on course to a unity of purpose; that this was his genius. The Apostles and Martyrs emulating Christ's passion, had gladly laid down their lives for this Church. The model we wished to follow was won by the blood of our Fathers of the Faith.

Following this course was and is quite simple. The four Gospels leave a clear and distinct record of teaching, practice and behavior. The Creeds defined all of this in complete uncomplicated form. True Christians in each age sifted through the developing historical record and literature of the Church maintaining the Faith by separating out the error and unnecessary duplication in theology, practice and liturgy. They were not redefining the Faith of the Christian Church – they were restating elements of the Faith in their own terms and times in a combined form which is not difficult to follow. Always, Christ is understood as the head and cornerstone; yet at the same time, the genius of succeeding ages of Christians is observed in hymns and teachings, lives and interpretations of behavior in a stream marked by great creativity and originality. Yet all of this is consistent, informative, and true to the Christ, the head of the Church.

Originally we were called the Lutheran Synod and Ministerium with the initials of LSM. This put the Synod – the laymen - before the Ministerium (the list of approved Pastors). However, we received an urgent call from the Lutheran Student Movement that the LSM acronym belonged to them. When we suggested that it was only a matter of initials, the Lutheran Student Movement in all Christian charity threatened to sue. Thus, the LMS we became!

At least three things began to

shape our thinking:

- We had noted a statement by Luther that if there was an agreement among parties on the first thirteen or so of the Augsburg Confessions - that they should be accepted as brothers.

In other words, underlying doctrine comes from teachings which are straight forward and uncomplicated. Much complicated theology is unnecessary and could be avoided. Of course that was five hundred years ago before the day of *contemporary liturgy*, for instance. Because that can include all manner of worship forms which may be questionable, we affirm the historic liturgies (and not one liturgical form) which have the undergirding theological form which has always defined acceptable worship. Here we note that when the emphasis is on entertainment and/or performance rather than worship, that a line in the sand has been crossed in the wrong direction.

- By consensus, among the four of us, we agreed that if we could no longer maintain that consensus on any or all matters, that we would part ways amicably. Before we were completely organized however, one of our number left, to serve an office in the AALC; and Pastor Stewart who had done some of our writing, chose much later to go his own way with somewhat the same idea in Pennsylvania. Since that time Pastor John S. Erickson D.D. has served efficiently and well as President of the Synod, which represents the whole Church, lay and clergy, while the Ministerium indicates the role of acceptable clergy. The Synod, for instance, must approve all actions - even the actions of the Ministerium.

In other words the Scripture, the three Historic creeds, and the Unaltered Augsburg Confessions are the sole basis of our common Faith. Brothers might still find honest disagreement but it should be discussed on those basic documents and if we should agree to disagree and if separation is in order it should be carried

out amicably and not in bitterness or rancor. The same is true for Congregations if they wish to go their own way. Much angry confrontation with locked Church buildings has made headlines in ELCA congregations in several states. Likewise, although rather rare, members of LC-MS have been sued by the national body for thousands of dollars over ownership rights of property.

- As a side-light considering the gravity of some Church organizations, we stated and affirmed that we would not take ourselves too seriously, but that we would take our calling and our job(s) in this world and the Kingdom - very seriously. For this reason we have steered completely away from titles such as bishop; not because of their historic and original meanings, but because of more contemporary implications and misapplications. This can also help us to pursue more seriously the deeper nature of work of the Church in preaching, teaching, and ministering.

We noted that much questionable effort has been expended in theological debate over issues that for all intents and purposes have already been well determined. Often this results in hotly debated issues over adiaphora (matters of at least secondary importance), and this has been primarily in the LC-MS. What happens is, effort that should go into ministry is siphoned off and leads to an attitude of efforts turned within rather than without. Also, in a related matter, many smaller congregations that are primed for service, and in neighborhoods that need the presence of the Church, are ignored, having to go without ministry and eventually are closed. Often in some areas, these are congregations in less than affluent neighborhoods.

The ELCA, on the other hand, has shown every inclination to go the way of the world and compromise the Word. Some would point out that this was a problem with the antecede-

ent bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, well back into the Nineteenth Century. As a result lately, many members have left and formed similar bodies although the names and initials have changed.

As more grains of sand dropped routinely through our sundial, and several were added to our number, somewhere along the line the four 'Solas' of Luther came into use as our stationary header along with the Luther symbol - probably by initiative of Pastors Richard Horn and John Erickson.

It dawned on us that with this logo of Solas placed about the iconic seal of Martin Luther - we had it. This not only had the look of stunning simplicity but it was indeed the summary and substance of the Lutheran Ministerium & Synod - USA as well. As Luther was known to say "Believe and you have it!" In this symbology we "had it" also.



Christ alone means that there is no other authority, no other source of all that there is; He who from the foundation of the world was co-creator of all. "No one comes to the Father than by means of Christ in Jesus."

And, Christ through Faith alone. Not long ago the previous Pope - the former Cardinal Ratzinger reaffirmed the precept - 'by Faith alone'. From Luther's personal experience of seeking a resounding righteousness, this phrase from the Epistle of Romans held the answer for him. He was prompt to add "by Grace alone" to the Faith alone to demonstrate that this mechanism stood entirely on its own with no possible link to the Law or the possibility of earning any of that Faith. Otherwise, of course, the whole matter is subject to status of a legalism.

The world was soon to discover that the Cardinal and personal aide to Pope John Paul II (whom he succeeded as Pope), didn't really agree

with the word 'sola' (alone and complete in itself). He went on in a manner not unlike the typical Roman Catholic approach to suggest that holy pilgrimages like a trip to view the Shroud of Turin, for instance, might have its own helping of Grace to be of a further boost to Faith. And here we are citing an actual premise used during the jubilee year proclaimed by Rome - in which the Shroud was made available for viewing in Turin, Italy. So you see that 'Faith alone through Grace alone' was not *alone* at all, in the thinking of Rome.

[We might add that Cardinal Ratzinger also was willing to throw into question the status of other 'Churches' - perhaps even our own - by labeling them mere *ecclesiastical bodies* and perhaps not real or legitimate Churches.]

In instances such as this from scant years ago, we can see the simple and profound beauty in "***Faith alone by Grace alone through Christ alone***". And to this we add ***through Scripture alone***. Scripture is the source - the complete and authoritative source - which stands as the inspired standard by which we know Jesus Christ! This is stated as a matter of simple clarity and if you will - humble authority - to establish that standard.

We feel it is necessary and important to state the solidness of these truths at a time and in a world where the Christian witness is thrown increasingly into question - where Christians are killed wholesale because of their precious Faith.

The Church is a House (beth), an Ark (ship and a container) that acts as a place where our Faith is safe, where we ourselves might dwell with our family in safety upon the Rock. Here all wise men build in the sands of all times.

Besides all of this, we cherish the fellowship *in the Word* with like-minded friends *in Christ our Lord* where by *Grace we are saved through Faith!*

You will be my witnesses . . .

by Rev. Dr. John Erickson

The last issue of Table Talk was given over to the topic of Apologetics, i.e, the defense and proofs of Christianity... being able to give a defense to any who might ask for the reason of hope that is in you (2 Peter 3:15). And this certainly ties in with the commission given to the apostles of our Lord and in turn to each believer, as well as the Church, today. "You will be my witnesses..." (Acts 1:8). This means... witnesses in our homes, our communities, and "to the ends of the earth."

What are we to give witness to? We are to give witness to the saving work of Jesus Christ. Why? Because God created humankind to live forever in fellowship with Himself. The most important thing in this world is the eternal well-being of one's soul. We were created for fellowship, but as a result of the fall of our first parents, each and every person enters this world separated from God. But God sent his Son into this world to make possible the forgiveness of the sin which separates us from Him, and to enable us to live not only this life, but also for eternity; a life in union and fellowship with our Father in heaven as well as with all who place their hope and trust in His Savior.

This message of Jesus, the Savior of the world, is the Gospel... the Good News of salvation from sin, death, and the devil, that Christians and the Church, are called upon to share with all the world. God Himself has revealed to us the story of Salvation... of all that He has done for us in the sending of his Son into this world... and of the hope we can have in Him. It is all in the book we call the Bible. This message is not of human origin; rather "Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (1 Peter 1:21). And what we find included in Scripture is all that we need to know as far

as our salvation is concerned. What the Apostle John writes under inspiration of the Holy Spirit concerning his Gospel account, is true of all of Scripture. All has been "written so that [we] may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing [we] may have life in His Name (John 20:31).

How are we, as individuals and as a church, to go about this sharing of the Good News of salvation? It seems the churches are busy. Pastors and teachers are actively engaged in ministry. Many Christians live as 'lights' in their communities. But there doesn't seem to be much 'harvesting' of souls. Many churches are growing in numbers, but genuine Christianity among the people seems to be on the wane. This can be said because clearly Christianity is having less and less influence on society. Consider the social issues, condemned by Scripture, that are rapidly gaining strength today that were considered not only inappropriate, but even 'evil', only a generation or two ago.

So what is wrong?

There is a most interesting and informative video that sheds considerable light on this subject. The video is titled "Revealing the unknown God" from the "Foundations Series" by Ken Ham.

In his two-part hour long presentation, Mr. Ham turns our attention to the book of Acts... and there... to chapters two and seventeen. In chapter two we find the Apostle Peter giving his great sermon on Pentecost Sunday. In Acts seventeen we find the Apostle Paul giving witness in the city of Athens. Mr. Ham points out that we have here, two different approaches to the sharing of the Gospel. What does he mean?

Well, in the one (Acts 2) we have Peter ministering to the Jews. In the

other (Acts 17) we have Paul ministering to the Greeks.

In Acts two, Peter begins by drawing the attention of the crowds to the prophet Joel (vs. 16ff). He speaks to them of Jesus who was "attested to them by God" and who they crucified "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God." He also draws their attention to David who "foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of Christ." He concludes by informing them, "know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (v, 36).

The effectiveness of Peter's sermon was most remarkable. The listeners that day were "cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what must we do?'" To which Peter answered, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (vss 37-39). Many did just that. About 3000 souls were brought into the church that day (vs. 41).

Now consider what we see in Paul as we find it in the seventeenth chapter. Paul found himself in Athens... a city full of idols (vs. 16). He went around the city and 'reasoned' and 'conversed' in the synagogue with some Jews and devout persons... and then, daily, in the marketplace with *whoever* happened to be there. He made contact with some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. In all this, many of the people found him to be a mere "babbler" and "a preacher of foreign divinities" (vs. 19). Paul was not getting through to them, his audience.

Then after taking in what he saw as he made his way around the city, we find him in the "midst of the Aræopagus." There he spoke to them about "the God," they seemingly knew nothing about. He tried to explain to them the uniqueness of the one true God... the Creator God... of the sovereignty of God... of the one

true God's desire to have a relationship with those He created. He spoke the need of repentance of sins... of a coming day of judgment... and of the hope of the resurrection.

The result? Some mocked him. Others, it appears, wanted to hear more. A *few*... joined with him and believed. (see verses 22-34).

There are those who see Paul as a failure in this visit to Athens. Only a few, believed. Quite a contrast to the 3000 souls brought into the fold on Pentecost Sunday. But wait a minute...

Consider the audiences. On the day of Pentecost Peter spoke to the Jews. The Jews had the foundation in place that could help them make some sense of what Peter was saying to them. They knew - for the most part they knew - the Old Testament Scriptures. Clearly they had not understood them. But they knew them. They knew of the one true God... the Maker of earth and heaven. They knew the story of Adam and Eve and the fall. They knew of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They knew of Moses and the Exodus. They knew of David and the glories of the kingdom under his rule. They knew of many of the prophecies concerning the Messiah.

So, when Peter spoke to them, and brought to their attention the fact that this Jesus - whom they had crucified - was in fact the Messiah God had promised. And that this One whom they put to death, God had raised up from the dead... and He was now ascended up to heaven to sit at the right hand of God. This resurrected Jesus... God has made Lord and Christ. They could somewhat connect with all this.

Further, they know what sin was... so after hearing what Peter had to say... they were convicted and repented of their sins, and put their faith in the crucified and risen Christ... the Lamb of God who came to this earth to take away their sin

and the sin of the whole world.

In the case of Paul we have something entirely different. Those to whom Paul addressed himself at the Areopagus had none of the background/foundation of the Jews. The Jews believed in one God. The Greeks of Athens believed in many gods. They believed in gods who evolved... even as they themselves were evolved. They had no clue as to what sin was.

If you examine Acts 17:22-30, you will discover that Paul started with these people from 'scratch.' They had no idea of Paul's God. "You don't know who God is... I will tell you who God is" (vs. 23). He explained the idea of the Creator God... the God who made everything and Who alone gives breath and everything to all who live on the earth. This one true God is sovereign over all. This is the God all should seek... for He is near to each and every one. This God is not like us in any way... even far beyond our imagination. One day the world will be judged... and God has given assurance of this One who will judge by "raising Him from the dead."

To the Jews, Peter's words were at first offensive... a stumbling block (see 1 Cor. 1:23). But as they listened to him, he brought to bear on their thinking, their history as God's chosen people. Not so few, we can be sure, continued to be offended and shut their ears to what Peter had to say. But many sought repentance and forgiveness.

The Greeks, as they listened to Paul, for the most part, thought his words nonsense (foolishness, 1 Cor. 1:23) and had little to do with him. However after his giving them a foundation for his message, there were a few who "some joined him and believed."

There are those who believe that Paul was a failure in his approach to things in Athens. And, with regard to what we often think of as success, it would appear that he was a failure.

But was he? "Some" were converted. And we read in Scripture that there is much joy in heaven over just "one sinner who repents" (Lk. 15:7). Without question, Paul was a success. If you think about it, Paul had a tough challenge. Among those Greeks he had to lay a foundation for belief that the Jews to whom Peter preached already had in place.

The Relevance Of This For Today

The efforts of evangelism today often fall short because the church seems to be locked into using the Acts 2 approach to reaching the lost, as over against giving consideration to the appropriateness, even necessity, of the Acts 17 approach. The message is, "You are a sinner. Jesus saves. Accept Jesus as your Savior." But such a message is pure nonsense... mere foolishness... to the vast majority of people in today's culture.

Some few generations ago, prayer and Bible reading, the posting of the 10 Commandments, the singing of hymns, Christian themed Christmas programs, Creation as the origin of the universe... all these things and more were an accepted part of the school system in America. When one spoke of God... everyone knew it was the God of the Bible, and the history of the Bible... at least to some degree... was understood by a good percentage of the people.

But things have changed in the post World War II world. Evolution is now the accepted approach to how things came to be. We, humans, are nothing that special... just a little higher order from other species in the animal kingdom. There is no longer *a* God or *The* God... but many gods. There are a multitude of legitimate religions, and we are told that for the most part, all lead to the same place. Whichever fits you... that is the religion for you. And sin? Well... what might be sin for you need not be sin for me. If I don't hurt anyone... I should feel free to do what I want. If society decides something is good

and right.... then it is.

All this and more is a description of Greek culture. And this culture is built on a foundation that knows nothing of the God of the Bible. To such the Bible and its God and its message is foolishness, its teachings are ridiculously old-fashioned, out of step with the times... first century at best.

So... when persons in this culture are challenged to trust in Jesus... the question becomes what Jesus? After all, Jesus is just another of many teachers/gurus/shamans that have come on the scene. But there is this also... if it *is* 'Jesus'... what Jesus is it? The Jesus of Oprah? The Jesus that the Muslims talk about? The Jesus of some fundamentalist cult? The Jesus of one of the mainline churches... or maybe of one of the fast growing mega churches? Or, how about the Jesus of those who call themselves Lutheran? Should it be the Jesus of a Lutheran body that gives little credence to the authority of Scripture? Should it be the Jesus of a Lutheran body that claims to be more "evangelical... and in tune with the times"? Should it be the Jesus of those who claim to be "Confessional" Lutherans?

And what does it mean to believe/trust in Jesus? Does it just mean that I sign my name on a church membership list? Does it mean that I need to commit myself to regular church attendance, to Bible reading, and to prayer? Does it mean that my life needs to bear fruit... that the fruits of the spirit should be evident in what I think, say, and do? Do I "just decide" for Jesus and that's it... or does it involve a continuing commitment to Christ as my Savior, to Scripture, and to growth in my spiritual life both in knowledge and love for my Lord and a reliance on Him in all things?

Unless there is some understanding of the Bible... some understanding of its message... and that includes the history it contains... there can be

no understanding of the true God... no understanding of sin... of the evil of sin as well as its pervasiveness... no understanding of the exclusiveness of the salvation God has made possible for sinners in Jesus alone... no understanding of the hope that God has made possible for the lost and condemned sinner... hope for this life as well as for the life to come... no understanding of the kind of faith that is called for. Our culture today is that of the Greeks.

And sadly, it isn't only our culture in general... it is also true in so far as the culture in much of the Church. I am afraid it is true also in the case of a great many of the preachers and teachers in our churches. It is true of the majority of the professors of our church colleges and seminaries. The result? In the majority of the churches of today we have Greek preachers preaching to Greek parishioners.

It is far worse than mere foolishness that too often after a brief exchange with someone who is being witnessed to... that individual is asked, "Do you want to be a Christian?" Or, "Do you want to invite Jesus into your heart?" And that is it! Little thought is given as to whether or not the individual has any real idea of who Jesus is... or any understanding of sin, mercy, grace, true forgiveness, sanctification, or of the cost of true commitment... of what it means to take up one's cross and follow Jesus.

In our carrying out of the Great Commission we need to follow the example of our Lord as we consider his conversation with the two travelers on the Road to Emmaus (see Acts 24:27), or that of Philip with the Ethiopian Eunuch (see Acts 8:35). As well as that of Paul in Acts 17. We need to be careful not to assume anything in the preaching and teaching of the Gospel. Rather that we proclaim the whole story, beginning to end... Genesis through Revelation... to the glory of God and the furtherance of His kingdom.

Table Talk
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The LMS-USA is Lutheran Church body describing itself as *Biblical, Confessional, Evangelical, Liturgical and Congregational*. It is a Forum in which there is an on going discussion of theological issues and concerns among clergy and lay alike. The LMS-USA meets annually for a Theological Conference and this publication, besides carrying news of the Ministerium and Synod, functions also as a vehicle for this continuing dialogue.

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