

TABLE TALK

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



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The Pastor As Shepherd, And His Flock

by Rev. John Erickson

There are a number of passages that seem to clearly suggest that the image of a shepherd, as used in Scripture, pictures for us the person and work of a pastor (minister of the Gospel). What follows is a sampling of such passages:

Peter 5:2-4 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

John 10:11-15 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know

My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep."



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**Important as to your receiving
subsequent issues of Table Talk.**

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Future Distribution of Table Talk

Issues of *Table Talk* from this point on will not, for the most part, be mailed out. Issues will continue to be uploaded to the LMS-USA website [lmsusa.org]. There you will find new as well as archived issues of the periodical.

Some issues go to institutions, they will continue to be mailed. There may also be some readers who wish to continue receiving hard copies. We can accommodate that. If such is your wish, you may make your request by email or by regular mail.

tabletalksub@gmail.com

or

Rev. John Erickson
LMS Table Talk
P. O. Box 31
Chetek, WI 54728-0031

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At this time the newsletter will continue as a quarterly periodical and in the same format . It is hard to imagine when looking at this issue number, that we are in our 26th year. It is our hope that this change in distribution will not affect our readership. It is just that we need to become more efficient in our use of resources.

1 Peter 2:25 *For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

John 10:1-2 *Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.*

John 10:4-5 *And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.*

John 21:15-17 *So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Feed My lambs.' He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Tend My sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed My sheep.'*

Acts 20:28-29 *Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.*

Numbers 27:16-17 *"May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them*

in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep which have no shepherd."

1 Samuel 17:34-36 *But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep his father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it. Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God."*

Jeremiah 3:15 *And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.*

Zechariah 10:2 *For the idols speak delusion; The diviners envision lies, And tell false dreams; They comfort in vain. Therefore the people wend their way like sheep; They are in trouble because there is no shepherd.*

Matthew 9:36 *But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.*

Matthew 18:12 *"What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying?"*

John 10:9 *I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.*

Ephesians 4:11 *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.*

The New Testament makes clear that there are to be those appointed as leaders in the local church... the local congregations... the local fellowship of believers. This role of

leadership is called by various names, but for the most part we think of it in terms of the pastoral office. And the model we look to in defining the role the pastor is to play is the person and work of Jesus Himself. In so doing it is most helpful to note that in the New Testament, one of the titles given to our Lord, in fact we find Him taking that title for Himself (see John 10:11,14), is that of the Good Shepherd. In this we have a picture that defines for us the work of the pastor.

It is a shepherd's responsibility to watch over his flock. To care for the sheep assigned to him... to lead them... to protect them... to watch for danger... to feed them... to be observant in watching for illness, injury, and nursing such back to health... to watch for strays... to go after the lost. All this pictures so well for us the main responsibility of the pastor. The pastor is the shepherd who is to watch over and lead his flock. And it seems that the main task in this "watching and leading" is the handling of the Word of God... specifically preaching [*Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction*] (2 Timothy 4:2). We remember that the importance of this is something Luther picked up on in his making the preaching of the Word central to the reformation of the church.

This role of the shepherd, the caring for the sheep under his care, was foretold by the prophet of old concerning our Lord. "He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young" (Isaiah 40:11). The 23rd Psalm picks up on this... how the Lord... brings His sheep to "green pastures," to "still waters," and "prepares a table" for them, even "in the presence of the

enemy" We might also think of our Lord's conversation with Peter following the resurrection, when He questioned Peter as to Peter's love for Him. There we recall how Jesus, three times, gave Peter the mandate to feed He sheep (John 21:15-17).

It doesn't take any time at all for sheep who are not provided for to become weak, thin, and sickly. But there is this also... the mere provision of 'food' is not necessarily enough. The food must be good food... quality food. The water must be good... clean water. Sheep if they are not provided with food cannot survive. A powerful picture, is it not? It is the responsibility of the pastor to see to it that the sheep under his care are watered and fed and nourished by the Word of God.

Our Confessions speak of the church (that includes the local congregation) as the place where the Word of God is proclaimed in its truth and purity, and the Sacraments are rightly administered. It is the

The pastor is the shepherd who is to watch over and lead his flock.



role of the pastor to see that this is being accomplished. Law and Gospel... the whole council of the Word of God... the giving of 'milk' to those needing milk, and the 'meat' of the Word to those who are able, and who are in need, of receiving it... pure and unadulterated... all this is the responsibility of the pastor.

Something else that comes into play in all of this, and that we see so clearly in our Chief Shepherd, is that of "knowing." Jesus knows His sheep. "I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me" (John 10:14). "When [Jesus]

saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36).

There is a big difference between the "knowing of" someone vs "knowing" someone... between "knowing the name" of someone vs "knowing" that individual. Jesus *knew* the people... and had compassion for them. He knew their good and their bad... their strengths as well as their weaknesses... He knew what they had and what they lacked... He knew their needs as well as their longings... He knew their thoughts and the attitudes of their hearts. Scripture informs us that He knew them, and He knows us, to the point that He even knows the number of the hairs on our heads.

I've thought considerable about this over the years... about "knowing the flock," yes, and "knowing the individual members of the flock." I grew up on a farm. We didn't have sheep, but we had cattle. But the same thing applies. I grew up in the time of the family farm. It was quite common for farmers to have few cattle... a few pigs... a few chickens... and maybe a few sheep. It was common for the farmer to give those animals names. With maybe 10 or 12, but even with a few more cows, it was easy to know each by name as well as to know the unique characteristics, habits, weaknesses, likes and dislikes, and whatever of each... and... with each generation... who the parents were... and who the children were.

Frequently today... with herds in the hundreds and even thousands... each animal is known, at best, by a number on a computer screen. There is nothing personal. It is possible that one of the herdsmen might know - I mean really know - something of one or of several animals... but the farmer (owner) knows nothing except that a particular animal is a number in a herd that he owns.

In days past, those few animals

were dear, they were precious, to the farmer. He had concern for each one. In today's world, it is too often the case that that one animal, is one of three hundred, or one of a thousand, and as such has, as an individual, percentage wise, very little real value. Should one of his cows get sick, the owner would never personally "see" that something was wrong. In most cases, he would never learn of the matter. Someone in his employ would see that something was done about it. The animal that is not producing "up to par" is gotten rid of. And that "loss" never personally affects the owner. In fact he sees that "loss" as gain, because he can simply bring a healthier or more productive animal on board. Whereas, on the family farm, the farmer would see that something was wrong with Bessie. He would demonstrate concern and care. He would show compassion. He would take the Bessie aside and do what he was able to remedy the situation, and if necessary call in help. Bessie's condition would affect him personally.

I think about all this with reference to pastors and their churches today... with reference to them as shepherds with their flocks. It happened again quite recently. A fellow I somewhat knew had attended a fairly large church for several years. He died. And when arrangements were being made for his funeral, it was discovered that the pastor didn't even know the fellow. This of course goes even further, because it means this pastor had no idea of the serious health issues this fellow was facing in the last months of his life, or for that matter, anything about this one who was, supposedly, a "sheep" of this pastor's fold.

I recall when at seminary, how various pastors/preachers were lifted up as examples of what we as students should be emulating. These were men who had made a name for themselves. Granted they were persons with dynamic speaking skills, and they had, often times, charis-

matic personalities. But it struck me at the time, and having come from a more rural area where most churches were smaller, and often times dual or even triple parishes, that the ministry that had, and that was still, taking place in those smaller parishes was, it seemed, more in line with the ministry pictured for us in New Testament teaching. The pastors were, more often than not, true shepherds. They knew their sheep. They rejoiced with those who rejoiced... they wept with those who wept (see Romans 12:10-16). They saw the needs of those in their church family, and worked to provide for those needs. They studied, prepared sermons... not concerned with sounding scholarly or profound... but simply in the sharing of law and gospel with their hearers. They knew their listeners, and sought to making Christ relevant in their lives. And these pastors were loved by their parishioners. They know the folks in the pew... and the folks in the pew knew them. Think of it. If a pastor is to "be prepared in season and out of season; [to] correct, rebuke and encourage [the members of his congregation] - with great patience and careful instruction," that pastor will need to know... know personally" those who are given to his care.

And if this is the case... it raises a most important question. How large a flock can a pastor effectively minister? I don't know that there is a set number. I found a Robin Dunbar (an evolutionary anthropologist) and in connection with his understanding of

things, researched some of this. His conclusion: There seems to be a consistent pattern, and it scales roughly by a factor of 3 each time: 5 Intimates, 15 Good Friends, 50 Close Friends, 150 Friends. He supposes that the numbers continue beyond that: 500 acquaintances, and 1500 people who you could put a name to a face. As the circles expand, more people are included, but the quality (or closeness) of the relationship decreases [<http://www.joelhilchey.com/blog/how-many-friends-can-1-person-have>].

This speaks volumes, does it not? It seems to me that the New Testament model is one shepherd for a flock... and that shepherd knowing his sheep personally. It does not seem that it is in any way ideal to have one shepherd over any number of other shepherds, who are then responsible for some aspect of the ministry of that church. In other words it does not seem to be the New Testament model that there be no direct and personal contact between the main shepherd and the sheep. Beyond a certain number, it cannot but be the case, that anything the main shepherd might learn of the sheep under his care, will be, at the best, secondary information. The main shepherd does not directly tend the flock... he tends the under shepherd or shepherds, who in turn tend to some aspect pertaining to that flock.

I do want to be careful here that I do not suggest that there cannot be a large church where the gospel is rightly preached and the sacraments



Which congregation's members are likely to really "know" their Shepherd and to be "known" by him.

are rightly administered. However, as I think we all know, if the family gets too big, it will make a huge difference as to how that family operates... as to how that family experiences family life. Does the family all sit around one table? Or, is there not enough room at the table? The family is so large that it means the members of family have to eat at different settings or, maybe, in two or more different rooms... or maybe it is that the older folks eat first and then the children... or rather than being served at the table, food is served buffet style. My point being, the size of family makes a difference, a big difference, and the intimacy experienced by one family may be vastly different from that of another family. And yes, a small family too can sorely lack something of what should constitute family living. But this only points to the fact that we should always be alert to, and be working toward, that which can make a family experience all that that experience can be.

I do want to address a little further what I believe to be the central responsibility given to the shepherd/pastor, namely that of feeding. Although this is an area in which, I am afraid, many pastors and churches are failing today, as already mentioned, this is one of the foremost contributions of Reformation to the Church... namely the placing of a renewed stress on the Word. The gathering of God's people for worship should be centered in the Word... the Sermon. Exposition of the Word... on the pure Word... is to be given primary focus. Luther in one of his sermons draws our attention to what

we read in First Corinthians 5:6 where Paul speaks of leaven. Luther comments "faithful guard [must] be maintained against the infusion or introduction into doctrine of what is false, whether it pertains to works or faith. The Word of God, faith and conscience are very delicate things.. Just as good wine or precious medicines corrupted by a single drop of poison bother impurity, and the purer



Luther preaching

they are, the more radially defiled and poisoned; so, also, God's Word and his cause will bear absolutely no alloy. God's truth must be perfectly pure and clear, or else, it is corrupt and unprofitable. And the worst feature of the matter is, the sway and entrenchment of evil is so strong that it cannot be removed; just as leaven, however small the quantity, added to the lump of

dough, soon penetrates and sours the whole lump, while it is impossible to arrest its influence or once more to sweeten the dough."

Luther then brings things into focus in connection with one of the issues facing the church in his day. "The proposal of certain wise minds to mediate, and effect a compromise, between us and our opponents of the Papacy, is wrong and useless. They would permit preaching of the Gospel but at the same time retain the Papistical abuses, advocating that these errors be not all censured and rejected, because of the weak; and that for the same of peace and unity we should somehow moderate and restrict our demands, each party being ready to yield to the other and patiently bear with it. While in such case no perfect purity can be claimed to exist, the situation can be made enduring if discretion is used and

trouble is taken to explain.

Nay, not so! For, as you hear, Paul would not mix even a small quantity of leaven with the pure lump, and God Himself has urgently forbidden it. The slight alloy would thoroughly penetrate and corrupt the whole. Where human additions are made to the Gospel doctrine in but a single point, the injury is done; truth is obscured and souls are led astray. Therefore, such mixture, such patchwork, in doctrine is not to be tolerated. As Christ teaches (Matthew 9:16), 'We must not put new cloth upon an old garment.'

Think of the importance of Luther's admonition to the preachers/shepherds of our day. What has effected the bringing in of the world's philosophy and lack of morality into so much of the church in our day? What has happened so that in many cases, the majority of persons in the pews of so-called Christian churches today, see little if any difference not only between Christian denominations, but between Christianity and many of the world's major religions? Many do not have any understanding of the necessity of the Son of God as the only way of salvation. Is not the answer very likely this... that the pure Word has/is not being preached?

It is the Lutheran understanding that the true church is where the Word of God is being preached *in its truth and purity* and Sacraments are being *rightly administered*. There is a need for pastors who "know" by personal experience the transforming power of the Gospel, and who then, as shepherds, truly "know" the sheep in the fold entrusted to their care, and being constantly watchful of those sheep, and then responding to what they perceive to be the needs of each of the sheep in their flock... tending, caring for, nourishing, encouraging, training, for each.

There is something else that I think of in connection with the size of a congregation/flock. And that is

involvement of its members. I attended a small school in my youth. All twelve grades (there was no kindergarten) were in one building. The class of which I was a part, was one of the larger classes - there were 24 of us. A class two years ahead of ours had only 8 members. But what I remember was how everyone had to be involved. In sports, it was necessary that a very high percentage of the students were involved in order to make up the various teams. Likewise, the band, the choir, even class officers, made up a goodly proportion of the student body, especially in comparison to what was the case in a school where class size averaged around a hundred students, or to that of a large neighboring city with class sizes of closer to 300 students.

Over the years I have thought about the learning, the training, the practical experience gained by a large percentage of students in the smaller school - training in leadership... training and experience in working and cooperating in groups. Even in the classroom... it was somewhat difficult for a student to be just a number. Everyone would be called upon... everyone was expected to participate.

And the same thing I have found to be the case in the church. I have served on a staff of three pastors in a large, almost 2000 member congregation, and as a single pastor in a couple of very small congregations. In the large congregation, as can be expected, there were many members of that congregation who had never served, and likely never would, serve in any kind of leadership role, or on any committee, or be involved in any kind of serving (usher, altar guild, choir/music, decorating, church cleaning, etc.). I have found that in not so few cases, it appears that there are those who want to be a part of a large congregation so they can be little more than a number. They want to be sheep. But they would just as soon not be known. Whereas

in the small churches, I found... in fact I found it very interesting, that it seemed there was always someone willing serve in the various offices of the church. They were needed, and they were willing, and they grew to become very effective in their serving. It seems there are always those willing to jump in to help with most anything that is needed to be done.

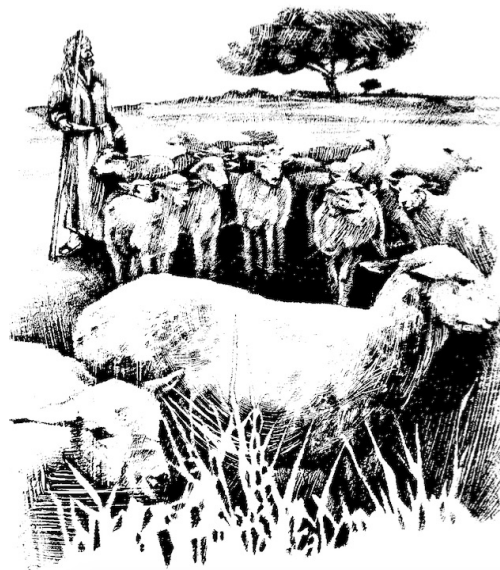
I've thought also of how many pastors there are who have never had the privilege to experience what seems to be the New Testament picture of the role of the shepherd/pastor. In a large congregation, a pastor cannot do all for the flock that is expected of a shepherd. If he is the preaching pastor... and especially now with the expected power-point presentations and all... just sermon preparation, and then maybe as the "face" of the pastoral staff in the community... and overseeing the other team members... all this can be a full time job. Then there is one or more other pastors, or team members, who are in charge of the youth. There are one or more visitation pastors. There is a pastor who oversees the Bible Study or other class opportunities of the education department. In other words... no 'one' is shepherding in the true sense of the term. Whereas, the shepherd as pictured for us in Scripture... should be able to experience involvement in all the various areas of ministry.

I have known pastors in these larger settings. And I have heard expressed, how this one misses regular sermon preparation and preaching, another misses leading Bible Studies, another misses working with the youth, and another misses getting to know parishioners 'one-on-one' through visitation, etc.

I don't know how best, in every area of ministry, the church can emulate the New Testament model, but I do believe the most effective ministry will take place in those settings where that model is given serious thought.

And, I might mention this in closing... it appears to me, that the New Testament model is going to be seen more and more in the coming years. Government interference, concern for pure doctrine, and concern for living out the Christian Faith in day to day life... these things and more, as I now see it, are going to bring about the advancement of the house church (much as we see in the first century of the church). The church "Synod" as we know it will take on a different shape, but that larger fellowship of those of like mind, will serve a most important role in leadership, and training and camaraderie among believers.

The good news in all of this is that the true Church - it will be a remnant Church - but it will continue on until the Lord returns to receive that Church up to Himself. May we be faithful, even as He is faithful. Amen.



The Apostles' Creed

A Little Background The Apostles' Creed got its name from a legend that it has been composed by the twelve apostles. This legend has no historical foundation. Rather the creed was derived from the baptismal formula and was from time to time expanded until we find it in its present form. The creed's earliest form is a Latin version from about 250 A.D. The earliest Greek form dates from about 338 A.D. It seems likely that the present form of this creed dates back to the sixth century and from a version used in Southern Gaul.

The Question Should we be still using the Apostles' Creed? At least in the Lutheran Church (but in many others also) it was, in the past, a familiar part of the worship service. But is it just another archaic part of the worship service that no longer serves any real purpose, but continues to be held onto by some of the old diehards? This is the question raised by Jade Poole. Her article is found on a blog page - <http://www.rekindle.co.za/content/should-we-still-say-the-apostles-creed/> It can also be found copied in several periodicals and on a number of web pages. The author is a wife, mother, and youth and children's pastor.

Should We Still Say The Apostles' Creed?

I grew up in a confessional church, but that is not to say that we were familiar with our confessions. They were those documents that were only made available on request. In such cases, I have little faith in the inquiry of adults, much less children. I left my childhood not being able to express with clarity what it was that I truly believed. But perhaps even worse than poor articulation, was not knowing the indispensable truths about the gospel. My confession then was simple: I am a Christian. And while that was true, it was self-centered and scant. Compared to my immature confession, we find one far superior in Romans 10:9, "Jesus is Lord." It was perhaps the simplest and earliest creed used in the early church and is one which does not merely point away from self to the only true savior, but it pierces beyond religion into culture, politics and every area of life. This was not a cheap phrase indicating denominational preference. On the contrary, this creed could cost you your life.

There is another creed which has been universally accepted as a declaration of Christian belief – the Apostles' Creed. Before the New Testament writings were readily accessible, such a concise presentation of Christian beliefs would have been a useful servant to evangelism and was used as a confessional interrogation at baptism. But should we still be using it today?

Indisputably True

When you recite a creed you are setting yourself apart from those who do not. However, across the broad spectrum of churches and denominations, the Apostles' Creed has always united. While I have used the terms freely up until now, a creed is in fact distinct from a confession. A 'confession' dives deeper into the specific doctrines that divide groups while a 'creed' expresses precisely what all the associated groups have in common. When we say the Apostles' Creed we are speaking with one voice across all Christian groups,

throughout time, declaring the irrefutable truth of Scripture. As believers we must, with confidence, be able to say it.

But what about the virgin birth? Is it really such an essential doctrine? Is Jesus coming back in judgement, or will just love win? Do I need to believe in the church as well or is Jesus enough? These are not minor open-handed issues. The virgin birth, the death, resurrection and return of Christ, even the holy universal Church, are essential to the faith and have been throughout the ages. Let's not be foolish to think that our latest church experience, some new trendy philosophy or societies fluctuating tolerance levels could ever shake that.

Indiscriminately Authentic

While we declare these beautiful truths found in the Apostles' Creed, we might not always feel very passionately about them. In fact, we may not even be reflecting on the truth we are saying at all. Unfortunately, our culture has pressed us to value sincerity and authenticity above all things. In fact, it unashamedly denies truth every day for the sake of 'feelings,' and not only as it combats religion but has even turned to deny the science it has so long sponged off. Science and religion must now make way for authentic feelings. What rubbish! I digress.

In response to this I want to first say how much I do value feelings. Feelings are a blessing and a grace, especially when they prompt us to align ourselves with God's Word. They are a reminder that God is concerned with all of man and not just our minds. In fact, I have found that when information has been accompanied by the appropriate feelings, together they have been a far greater teacher than had the truth come alone. But our feelings are not always faithful. Truth however is always true and the inauthenticity of our delivery cannot touch the authenticity of the truth we declare. We believe the Gospel because it is true, and we declare the Creed because it expresses that truth. While we should always challenge ourselves to be thinking deeply on the words we say, we do not stop saying them if we feel otherwise today, because our feelings do not determine whether the words are worth saying or not.

Indispensably Vocal

My final point is brief. The Gospel must be said. Truth must be said. The Creed must be said. "Jesus is Lord" is not something just to be believed in the secret places of your heart. You must also confess with your mouth. *"For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved"* (Romans 10:10). Words are not the things we only 'use when necessary.' Spoken words are indispensable both in salvation and evangelism. Just four verses on in Romans we read *"How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?"* (10:14). You see, audible words of truth being declared individually or together with the congregation is a tradition we have not just received from church history, but from God's Word itself – *"proclaim it from the rooftops"* (Matthew 10:27).

Table Talk
P. O. Box 31
Chetek, WI 54728

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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For information or to make
comment write:

President/Pastor, LMS-USA
12233 Waterview Circle
Indianapolis, IN 46229

Internet Contact:
revralphs@sglobal.net

To: