

Last spring one of the first call candidates assigned to our synod told us about an interesting encounter she had with a waitress. The waitress admired our candidate's Luther Rose pendant and asked what it was. "It's Lutheran" replied the candidate. "Where's *Lutheran*?" asked the waitress. We chuckled that the waitress imagined a place of beauty and mystery called *Lutheran* and were a little rueful that she had never heard of Lutherans before. Her question "Where's *Lutheran*?" has stayed with me ever since.

*Lutheran* does not coincide with Lake Woebegone. It is not found only in Philadelphia or Minneapolis or South Dakota. The cuisine of *Lutheran* is not limited to green bean casserole and jello. It is not populated exclusively by the descendants of northern Europe, though there does tend to be a lot of those folks. It is not a place of rigid conformity nor is it a place where anything goes. *Lutheran* would never be confused with utopia; its citizens have too realistic a view of disobedience, sin and brokenness to believe that any human habitation can claim goodness and righteousness for itself. But *Lutheran* is also a place of great hope. *Lutheran* is a place where the incessant human struggle for self-righteousness and self-justification is left at the border and, free of the burden of making themselves holy and acceptable to God, its people cling to the cross of Christ as the true assurance of life. It's a place where people can get over themselves and having been set free can now spend their lives in service to God and neighbor.

Lately people have been taking a closer look at *Lutheran* and some have been arguing where real *Lutheran* is. This is both bad news and good news. The bad news is that the people of *Lutheran* are separating themselves from each other, not, I believe, over the gospel, not over a matter of salvation, not even over the Lutheran understanding of the Word of God - incarnate in Jesus Christ, Law and Gospel, and the written Word of God - but over a matter of morals and ethics which belongs to God's left hand kingdom. David Preus, former bishop of the American Lutheran Church who strongly opposes the ordination of persons in committed same gender relationships recently wrote: "I do not consider (churchwide assembly actions on sexuality) to be of such confessional import that it should lead me or anyone else to separate ourselves from our fellow members who disagree with us...It is my conviction that a distinction must be made between issues that bear directly on the heart of the Christian faith and issues that are comparatively peripheral. I do not believe that the issue at hand threatens the gospel of God. The Lutheran Confessions do not explicitly address the issue. That is not to say that comparatively peripheral matters are unimportant. It is to say that there is room for disagreement on various issues that are important but not all-important."

The good news is that the people of *Lutheran* have been shaken out of their slumber.