

My family and I went for a walk one evening. We headed north on 4<sup>th</sup> Street NE and enjoyed the evening air. I was keenly aware of the beautiful corn field to my right. Quite a change from my former scenery in the Pacific Northwest. We used to live in the shadow of Mount Rainier in the Tacoma/Puyallup area. We had many scenic evening walks there, but this walk here was going to be different – a good different. As we headed north, we could tell that it was going to be a gorgeous sunset. We got to 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and we had to turn west toward the setting sun. We arrived near AG Performance and there it was – the sun setting over the fields. I wanted to stare but that would not have been good for the eyes. So, I took glimpses through my shielding fingers and snapped a picture on my phone. Staring at that will not hurt my eyes but it definitely does not do the scene justice. We proceeded to head south and work our way home. It was a school night and shower night for the kiddos, so there was no time to waste, but as I said earlier, this walk was going to be a good different.

You see, during our walk we encountered something to which we were not accustomed: Friendly people smiling and wanting to greet us and talk. No, they did not know I was the new guy in town, they were just friendly, down to earth people. One woman was walking her dog and let my kids pet it. Pretty soon my son was talking to her about the pines cones he had just found. Other people we encountered did not try to divert their glance but made a point to make eye contact with us in order to say “hi”. I passed by the home of a church member who came out to talk with us. This school night walk took longer than anticipated but I have no complaints. It was a good different.

Do not get me wrong, people in Western Washington are not rude. There are many kind people there that we grew to love dearly, but the culture is just different. It is not small-town Midwest. Maybe you have not noticed but after living away from the Midwest for five years, we definitely noticed. Walking around town here in Buffalo Center is almost like walking around your yard filled with family. I feel safe and I feel comfortable letting my kids go outside to play without me right there.

So, who is this “new guy” writing in the Buffalo Center Tribune? I am the new pastor at Bethlehem Lutheran Church. I am a western central Minnesota kid who was called to Western Washington for five years and now back, called by God to return to the homeland, the Midwest. There is definitely more to me than that, but gauging by our beautiful evening walk, you will probably learn much more about me and my family very soon. Thank you for the warm welcome to the Midwest. Praise be to God and Amen.