



What Sa Matter?

Greetings from Iowa,

It's hard to imagine that the walk started over 8,600 miles and two years ago. So much for "time flies when we're having fun" as this is very seldom fun and time has flown by.

During those 100 plus weeks there have been Sunday mornings when I've arrived unannounced at a Christian church. Most Sundays I'm scheduled at a Church of the Brethren, but sometimes there are hundreds of miles in between stops. Occasionally I'm so far out in the boonies no churches are around, while other Sundays a church building appears at the right moment. The denomination isn't important. What is, is praising God with other Christians.

One Sunday I happened to walk past a new looking church building at 9:15, just as people were arriving. I had thought this was going to be an in-the-boonies Sunday, and praised God.

Rather than walking the quarter mile to the driveway and the same distance back, I hopped the barbed wire fence in between the road and the church parking lot. If I needed some exercise I would have gladly taken the long way.

After crossing the large parking lot I was close to the front door when a well dressed man exited right in front of me. I said "Hi" and asked if this was a Christian church. He replied "Yes," and I knew it was the right place for me.

Upon entering the church building and looking for a good place to deposit my large backpack, I noticed the man was following me. I asked, "Do you have adult Sunday School class?" He replied "Yes," introduced himself as the associate pastor, and told me he taught one of the adult classes. He

pointed upstairs to a corner room and said I'd be welcome in his class.

This felt great because most of the time I'm not welcome anywhere. I took my pack off in the foyer area, removed my Bible and other reading and writing materials, and proceeded upstairs with the pastor.

We were conversing in his room for a few minutes when he excused himself and didn't shut the door completely. I overheard, "I've got him in my room, now what do I do with him?" I'd like to think the conversation revolved around something besides me, but I probably was the topic of discussion.

The pastor quickly returned and we had Sunday School together the next 55 minutes. He exclaimed a few times, "I wonder where the other six to eight adults are that usually attend?" I thought better about wondering out loud, "Does this have anything to do with your conversation in the next room a little while ago?"

Sunday School wasn't like I ever experienced. After awhile I showed him "proof" of the walk across America. He actually started to believe me and I was no longer what he apparently thought I was. You know: bum, drifter, dangerous, damaged goods, a threat to society, whatever. Soon I was a dedicated Christian walking for Jesus. He even showed me the church's thick 48 page book of activities like softball, bowling, and sewing, along with Bible classes, etc.

He asked if I'd like a copy of the church book and I politely declined because it was too heavy for my already overloaded pack. We spent 40 minutes discussing the walk and his church. This



wasn't what I expected, but beggars can't be choosers, at least that is what I was taught as a child.

The last few minutes I shared that there had been times I'd arrived at a Christian church unannounced and had been treated like a loser or threat or something negative. He assured me his congregation was a most welcoming one. I asked if he'd do me a favor and not let anyone know of our conversation so I wouldn't be treated in a special way by being introduced or recognized in some way. The pastor agreed and we shook hands and parted company.

Worship was about to begin and the pews began to fill. Eventually 250 of us pretty much filled the place. That is, except for my pew. I know I hadn't washed up in a week, but I don't mean that kind of pew. I was in the middle of a pew capable of holding at least 12 people. On one end was a man and on the other end was a couple. There was room for at least eight more people with "no sweat". I know I had sweat on me, but that's not what I mean either. The biggest empty spaces in the sanctuary were around me.

During worship greeting time one person greeted me and said, "I haven't seen you before." I replied, "Yes, this is my first time." That was it for the welcoming the pastor told me about.

The congregation was reminded about continuing to pass blankets and food to those in need. It was a great message. The music was good too.

After worship I emptied my pack in order to fill all my water bottles from the drinking fountain that was good and cold. Everyone kept their distance. Then I walked down their long driveway beside the cars full of people, towards my next destination, happy I'd gotten cold water, but sad I'd gotten the cold shoulder.

Easter Sunday eve 2003 I stayed with a family who are spiritual, but not Christian. We had some great discussions concerning spiritual matters.

I looked in the city phone book and the closest Christian church was only six blocks away. Man, I was all spiffed up for Easter services. I'd showered the night before, had been cared for, my clothes were all washed, and I wasn't worn out after only a six block walk. It doesn't get any better than that.

There were about 25 in Sunday School and 150 during worship service. I'm thankful one person said hi during those two hours. I'm thankful I didn't try to get the loving family from the night before to attend church with me. They would have seen why they didn't want to participate. Talking the talk, and not walking the walk on the most holy of Christian days.

I don't want to paint a negative picture of church goers. During unannounced stops about half the congregations have been welcoming and the other half have been like the two just mentioned. Some have talked the talk and walked the walk.

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