

Mike Middleton Memorial Service Meditation

Feb. 2, 2013

Caldwell Presbyterian Church

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I did not know Mike nearly as long as many of you. That is my loss and I consider it profound. But what I may have lost in terms of the length of our friendship was made up in the richness and intensity of his personality. A little bit of Mike went a long way. Thanks be to God for that. Mike opened his soul to me, not because I was his pastor but because that was who Mike was. If you knew Mike, you *knew* Mike.

I want to make three brief points about this brother who was broken and healed and who lived out of that healing in selfless-service to others.

First, Mike practiced tough love – but he did so lovingly. Last November, I preached a sermon based on the story in the Gospel of John about the paralyzed man whom Jesus found laying by a pool of healing waters. Day after day, the man lay there, never making it into the pool. The man complained that others always got there before he did.

When Jesus came along, he asked the man, “Do you want to be healed?”

“Rise, take up your pallet and walk.”

I said in that sermon that the Jesus we find in that story seems to have skipped the class in seminary on pastoral care, at least the kind of pastoral care that focused mostly on empathy and patience. Jesus showed compassion for the man that day. It just wasn't the touch-feely kind of compassion. But, indeed, the man was healed. He picked up his mat and he went and told others what Jesus had done.

Mike brought that sermon up to me later with a kind word. Something obviously resonated. Mike Middleton knew both ends of that kind of tough love. He knew when he needed it. He knew it saved his life and he knew when he needed to show it someone else. Of course, he expressed all of that in a different way. He openly joked that he would, quite readily, be a “bitch” to someone he loved if that's what it took. Excuse my French.

As someone in the recovery community said to me just the other day, when you are dealing with the disease of addiction, tough love is the only way to go and Mike knew that. When friends located his Bible in his apartment there beside his bed, the one

passage that was most obviously marked was John 5:2-9, the story of the man who was paralyzed but who was healed.

The second truth of Mike Middleton's life was that he loved inclusively. He came to that place by way of his own brokenness and humility. He recently wrote these words to his friends on Facebook:

"I discovered many years ago that every day God let's me wake up is an opportunity for growth and service to others. I wish I could say that with all my heart every day, but I don't. I am human and wander off course from time to time."

When you have truly hit rock bottom, you are in a place where you can let judgment go. You know that you have no right to exclude another person. You are, in that sense, equipped to love inclusively. Mike was drawn to the wounded, the broken and the hurting of this world and the legacies of his inclusive love are the dozens – if not hundreds - of lives that he helped change and redirect.

The third truth of Mike's life was that he loved sacrificially. Yes, Mike had his faults just like the rest of us. In fact, as one of his friends said, what Mike would love about our being here today is that it is "all about him." Mike liked things that way. He liked things his way and he was easily miffed otherwise. But, deep down, who among us is not the same?

All of that was really just on the surface of Mike's being and place in this world. Mike could be selfish. But he was that much more self-less. The person Mike became was the friend you needed, whatever the hour, whatever the circumstance, always steady, always strong, always seeking to serve, always seeking the face of Christ in others. Whatever your flaws may have been, however recently you may have failed, Mike was there to help you get back on track and to walk with you for as long as it took.

The last time the church was this full was the day we gave thanks for the life of one of Mike's brothers in recovery, Mitchell Marcotte. On the day that Mike died, Mitchell's dad said he was sure that Mitchell was there at heaven's gate to give Mike a big bear hug. I loved that image, and I am sure Mitchell wasn't alone.

In closing, let me say only this. As a pastor, I stand here on Sundays and point to Jesus Christ as the model for our lives. Pastors don't keep statistics like batting averages, because few, including us, ever really live up to Christ's example. But in the end, in how he loved others – toughly, inclusively and, ultimately, sacrificially – I truly believe Mike Middleton lived and died as Christ would have it.

Amen.