

*“Mike and Eddie and Patience”
December 7, 2014
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*Isaiah 40:1-11; II Peter 3:8-15a
Mary Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church
Milford, Connecticut*

Today’s message that I’ve titled “Mike and Eddie and Patience” is a story adapted from one told by George Pasley, a Presbyterian pastor in Kansas.

Mike never liked telling his kids goodbye, but especially this time. It was the Sunday after Thanksgiving, and when he waved goodbye to his three kids in the Pizza Hut parking lot, it felt like the end of the world.

Mike was divorced. He had the kids for Thanksgiving. Now the holiday was over and he had delivered them back to their mom. But when he watched them drive away his heart went “thud.”

This year was worse. The kids were older now. There was more to miss. He was going back to an empty house that wouldn’t seem like home, even with their magic marker drawing on his fridge, the tree they’d helped decorate, and their Christmas lists typed into his computer.

By the time he got on the ramp to the interstate, he was crying. The Christmas song on the radio just made him mad, so he cursed at it, turned it off and almost ran into another car.

He made an effort Monday with e-mails to the kids; and Tuesday when he shopped for them; but by Wednesday he was out of effort. There was another suicide bomber and he snapped off the television, muttering, “What kind of world is this, anyway?” Thursday and Friday and Saturday were just long days.

Mike never so much liked that glitzy part of Christmas as he did the church part, especially the songs. They made him look up, to the stars and to signs of glory. But this Sunday even the songs didn’t excite him. Just another thing to do. But he promised to help with coffee hour, so he went.

He heard the reading from Isaiah: “*He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and gently carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.*” He heard it three years ago when they were still a family; and two years ago when they were going through the divorce; and last year when they were apart for the first time. On the way home he thought to himself, “*We’re always saying, ‘God will do this, God will do that.’ But I’m tired of waiting.*” He felt like it was blasphemy to say it, but he did, again.

After he said it, the thought about the people that had helped him: neighbors with the kids, the divorce recovery workshop, folks inviting him to dinner, the boss with flexible hours. But by the time he got home, he said to himself, “*They just don’t cut it. They’re not the same as ‘Comfort, comfort.’*”

So Mike was particularly annoyed by the question the minister had asked at the end of the sermon “*What sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God?*” Obviously, it was not a peaceful Sunday afternoon!

Then, Monday, something totally unexpected happened. Sometimes, on the way to McDonald’s for lunch, Mike would pass crazy Eddie. No one knew if Eddie was his real name or not. He wasn’t exactly homeless—sometimes family would take him in, sometimes he’d have an odd job. But he had problems, for sure, and always a story that got bigger in the telling that everyone would laugh at in the office.

But for some reason Mike didn’t know, *this* Monday when he saw Eddie, he looked him in the eyes. And when he walked into McDonalds, he bought an extra Big Mac value meal, and gave it to Eddie on the way back to work. When he gave the food to Eddie, Eddie looked Mike in the eyes and said, “*I can see the Kingdom coming.*” And Mike, trying to contain his laughter, thought, “*Is the Kingdom a Big Mac?*”

But he couldn't shake Eddie's words: "I can see *the Kingdom coming*." He tried to shake it with humor: "Is *the Kingdom a Big Gulp?*"; with sarcasm: "Does *crazy Eddie know the mind of God?*"; with logic: "Crazy Eddie is crazy!" None of it worked. "I can see *the Kingdom coming!*" Mike couldn't shake it.

So he quit trying. Instead, he thought about the sermon and the reading from Isaiah again, how the minister said people are eager to share good news, whatever it might be. He remembered a woman, a woman he knew just had news about a grandchild on the way, who laughed out loud and said to the preacher, "Yes, sir!"

But still...Isaiah *did* have the mind of God, even if crazy Eddie didn't, and he looked out at the same gloomy world Mike was looking at and said, "All the people are grass, the grass withers, the flower fades." Where is the comfort? The preacher then turned to Second Peter and pointed out that this New Testament writer addressed a similar situation. The people looked for comfort and the writer cautioned patience. And there were Eddie's words in his head again "I can see *the Kingdom coming*."

It suddenly occurred to Mike that both he and Eddie yearned for something they couldn't achieve on their own. But Mike couldn't figure out what PATIENCE had to do with it.

He thought about others, worse off than him, maybe. Parents with severely disabled kids...elders in nursing homes...the neighborhood business that failed. "Why should any of them be patient?" Mike asked out loud, just in case God was listening. Then he thought of the survivalist charged with killing two Pennsylvania state troopers...and the 26 children and administrators killed at Sandy Hook two years ago...and the unindicted police officers who used deadly force against unarmed civilians in Ferguson, Missouri and New York City. "Why should you be patient with us, Lord?"

Then Mike thought of Sarah. She never missed Mike's study group. And in church every week: remarkable because Sarah's husband was killed up on the highway near Christmas about a decade ago. Yet Sarah and her kids never missed. Now THAT was patience!

How could Sarah have patience like that? How could she hear those words sung:

“Comfort, comfort ye my people, saith our God, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished and her iniquity is pardoned.”

Mike supposed it had to do with belief, with faith which trusts God to do what we cannot and to do what God says.

Then Mike thought of Eddie again. Did he know what patience was? Probably not. But Eddie’s faith recognized the comfort of God even in a hamburger. Maybe proclaiming a Kingdom that was still far off brought it a bit closer. And maybe Mike, through no reason of his own, had unwittingly brought it closer by giving a meal to an emotionally disturbed homeless man.

Mike couldn’t stop chewing on this. When he went home, he looked up the passages again. Yes, Isaiah’s words insisted God’s word was good and that the shepherd would gather the lambs.

Then Mike looked again at Second Peter and verses 13 and 14: *“But, in accordance with his promise, we WAIT for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. Therefore, beloved, while you are WAITING for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish.”*

It dawned on Mike that it is about faith and about living differently. He thought, *“If righteousness will be at home in the new heaven and the new earth, maybe it can make its home in this old earth while we WAIT.”*

That evening, Mike found one of the sleeping bags he used every summer when he took the kids camping. When he left the house, he took along a thermos of soup, just in case Eddie needed some comfort.

There was repentance that evening. Not that Mike noticed. But you would have, if you had seen the look of hope on Mike’s face.