

A Good Word for Emil Mialik

It's difficult to spend just three minutes talking about someone like Emil Mialik. Someone of his diverse skills and deep goodness. Someone with such a devoted intellect and dependable friendship. It would be easier to talk for three hours, but this exercise has been interesting. To spend only three minutes one would have to find perhaps one story that summarized a relationship. In my case... a simple story that could synopsise a full decade of fulfilling dialogue, and sometimes sharp disagreement. An event that could capture two lives with common commitments and shared convictions. A conversation that could convey the deep respect of a student to his teacher, and, simultaneously, the support and appreciation of an elder member to his much younger pastor. It would have been easier to write the whole Eulogy, but this experience has given me the opportunity to scan that decade of deepening relationship and to distill a priceless gift into one caricature of the man and his incalculable, if unorthodox, influence.

April 14, 2010, I visited Emil at Sardis Oaks. When I walked down that very same hall just yesterday the moment came back to me, vividly. Emil had recently suffered the stroke. His speech was affected, and I must admit feeling some anxious uncertainty as to my friend's mental acuity. But quickly that worry abated, because in a few moments we had dispensed with the niceties of chit chat, my obligatory pastoral inquiries into his state of affairs, and the conversation turned to theology. In that moment I knew that behind the façade of a failing body was the strong spirit of the man I had come to so greatly admire.

“What’s the sermon about, Sunday?” he asked. When I told him I would be dealing with Thomas, the infamous, so-called doubter of our religious ancestry, I thought Emil was going to come out of the bed. His eyes brightened, his posture quickened, and his halted speech reclaimed the strength of a bygone day in the pulpit, and Dr. Emil Mialik declared, “He is to be praised!”

Many folks would not understand a retired Baptist minister praising the hesitant faith of this much-maligned disciple of the risen Lord. I understood, implicitly, and delighted that even there, in that condition, to paraphrase the praise of Old Moses, “*his eye [for complex truth] was undimmed and... [the] vigor [of his faith] was unabated*” (Deuteronomy 34.7).

Life is complex. Truth is seen through a prism of experience and culture and ability and opportunity. Reality is ambiguous. So a faith that presents itself as an overlay of trite platitudes will fail any who dare to live with their eyes wide open. But for all who dare, faith is a crucible of lived convictions, framed in the fire of doubt, confirmed in the humility of hope.

And I concur. He is to be praised. Thomas, the doubter. And Emil, his disciple.

His was not an easy faith. But is there really any such thing? So as his pastor, I am confident to claim the words of Jesus, and declare them with boldness on this good day, “Emil Alexander Mialik ... *Your faith has made you whole.*”

Today. Tomorrow. Forever.

For Emil Mialik... Doubter. Disciple... May it be So!

Chris Ayers

Rev. Dr. Emil Mailik was the Senior Minister at Wedgewood Baptist from 1971 to 1987. Current Wedgewoodians are keenly aware Wedgewood would not be what it is today without the foresight, leadership, and ministry of Emil and Joan, two great people, two wonderful spirits, two wordsmiths, two intellectual giants, but more importantly, two people aware that one must never, as Emil put it, one must never put a period at the end of a theological sentence.

When I accepted the call to Wedgewood I was informed part of the ministerial package was a thousand dollar annual allowance for continuing education called the Emil Mialik Continuing Education fund. The fund was established on July 19, 1981 as a way of honoring Emil for 10 years of service to the congregation. What an appropriate action for a church to take to honor a pastor/scholar/theologian such as Dr. Mialik.

I and the Wedgewoodians want the Mialik family to know how important Emil's blessing on the current congregation meant to us. In the 50th chapter of Genesis Jacob gathers his sons around his deathbed. Some receive a blessing. And sadly, some don't. There is power in being blessed and we treasure Emil's blessing of us.

At some point in the near future Wedgewood will gather during a Sunday morning and Give thanks to God for the life and ministry for Dr. Emil Mialik. Then, as he wished, we will scatter

Emil's ashes in our flower gardens, which will symbolize among others things that Emil will always be with the church he did so much to build.

Barbara Fisher

This past year has been a blessing in disguise. I know, along with Debbie and Richard, and my mother, that having to say our good byes to my father has been a work of sorrow, yet seeing his unflappable love of life and love for us, has pushed us to greater depths in our own life journey. Well aware of life's inherent ambiguity, my father never lived his life with ambiguity. I am reminded of Dylan Thomas' closing words in his poem Fern Hill:

Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,

Time held me green and dying

Though I sang from my chains like the sea.

My father was a man fully engaged in the rhythm of life, in its infinite depth. His life was a richly

woven tapestry, textured and vibrant, smartly dressed, just like him on any Sunday morning.

One of six children, the son of a Russian immigrant father who had fled his native country during the Bolshevik Revolution and a mother of Czech descent, my father was born into hard times, yet integrity and all the good life has to offer were born into him.

I'll never forget my delight as a child, upon seeing the sheer pleasure on my Dad's face as he bit into a big, ripe, juicy tomato, eaten out of hand like an apple.

Wrestling matches on the floor. We kids piled on top and became a tangle of limbs and giggles. Trips to the beach, whereupon he would immerse us in the water in the name of the father, the son, and the holy ghost, again and again, as the waves washed over and dragged us down. It was not a baptism for the faint of heart.

Dad working summers as an umpire, not only for the love of the game, but to raise enough cash to purchase our first color tv set.

Runs to the Williamsburg Bakery on Saturday morning for sweet buns. Dad always kept a close tally on how many each of us had eaten in order to make sure he had a bun saved for himself the next morning.

Dad clad in tee-shirt and boxer shorts, did his best to wake up grumpy teens for school by crooning and doing a jig to whatever music was piped in through the intercom. It may be the only time he got booed.

My Dad was a forerunner in the virtual sports bar with surround sound. It was Not unusual for him to have two tvs and the radio tuned into anything and everything simultaneously. Church service ended promptly in order to make it home in time to catch kick off. His love of sports could not be contained. Those of you who golfed with him certainly knew that side of my Dad.

Dad was a modern-day man. He was not shy about running the vacuum and he could pack a dishwasher like nobodies' business. From him, I learned to make a bed Navy style, tight and smooth, with mitered corners. He loved to cook and we sure loved his coleslaw, and his huloupki, a Russian dish of stuffed cabbage. He never minded the drives across town to drop me off for flute lessons or Debbie for dance and he absolutely thrived on catching the tail end of Richard's football practice.

He was a man, largely, self-taught. He loved working with his hands and we all marvelled at how he taught himself to draw and paint, before woodworking became his passion. He taught himself dressmaking and upholstery. I have vivid memories of the suits and dresses he made for me, my sister, and my mother. Then he took up rebuilding car engines and I would find him in the den tinkering with a carburetor. For years, with 3 teenage drivers, he kept us in a fleet of old junkers. He loved his garden and became the ultimate green thumb, always beaming with pride when the first green shoots pushed through and then as the harvest made its way to our table.

So you see a man who really held life in his hands and in his heart. In his own words, he proclaimed, "Life is my theology". I will never forget my father looking me square in the face a couple of years ago and saying with great passion, "I love Life." Time stood still and a voice inside my head said you need to pay attention. He was Paul Tillich's Man of courage. Even as time makes life a finite proposition, everyday my father said 'yes' to life. He gave us all that was alive within himself. This was my father's greatest gift.

My father was a practical man in how he lived but he never stopped asking the Big questions. His beliefs were complex and at times unsettling. It was this search for meaning that pushed him to pursue a Masters in Theology and a Doctorate of Ministry. He always held that we must open ourselves to all the truth we can get. But his search for meaning often found expression in his connections with people; his truly unconditional love for family and friends; his excitement

and pride as each grandchild came into the world and then as he watched them come into their own; his ability to reach out to anyone, including the Caribbean aide at Sardis Oaks who

greeted him with “Hey Papa” to which he would casually reply, “Hey Mama”. He was a gentle man and to the end, his kind eyes expressed gratitude for all the care given. I will never forget those eyes.

When I was a little girl, drop off at school in the morning became a ritual between Dad and me, an expectation on my part, when he would say with a parting smile, “See you later alligator,” and I, on cue, responded, “After while crocodile,” and then strangely I heard him murmur those same words to me just weeks ago as I was taking care of him. So now I’m left with saying to the best of the best of the best “After while crocodile”.

Gray Clark

I’m Gray Clark, and I am honored to speak today about my friend, Emil Mialik.

Since Emil joined Park Road in 2001 we have had many lunches together, been to hear great speakers together, and shared many books and discussions.

Emil was a truly humble and gracious man. He was one of the most well-read, intelligent people I have had the privilege of knowing. And although it seems almost oxymoronic, I would describe Emil as having “simple depth”---he was brilliant but very approachable, and always ready for a good discussion.

I learned many things from Emil, but two of the most important are to **never stop learning** and to **always be present**.

Learn

Emil told me many times to “never stop learning and questioning, no matter how old you are.”

Emil always had a book that he wanted me to read, and he taught me much about process theology—this being the idea that God is vulnerable and loving, suffers when we suffer, and feels joy when we feel joy. In Emil’s view of theology, God calls the world toward certain *possibilities*, but in the end the actions of the world are our OWN—whether we choose to use them for good or for evil.

In this way, he believed that life is a **CREATIVE PROCESS**—that WE create WITH God -- and he believed that WE have a significant part to play in bringing God’s will here on Earth ‘as it is in Heaven.’ With his crooked index finger he would often say that we should ‘EM-BRACE CRE-A-TIV-I-TY,’ carefully enunciating every single syllable.

Be Present

And Emil engaged mindfully in the present moment. When you had a talk with Emil, he was *completely there*, not just hearing you, but really **LISTENING**. Not long before Emil’s stroke last year, my brother-in-law (who is a pastor in Richmond) and I had lunch with Emil. Among many topics, we discussed the racial issues that he faced back in the 1960’s at Leigh Street Baptist in Richmond. He told us about the pressures and the threats he and his family received. Emil’s own words were that we are quote “part of each other—a force of transformation within a needy world.”

And I believe that in the 1960’s and today in 2011, our world needs a voice like Emil Mialik’s—preaching unconditional love of ALL people, regardless of skin color, sexual orientation, nationality, or personal religion.

Ted and I had a great conversation with Emil that day and he brought me yet another book to read. As we left, he graciously told us that our sharing time with him was a gift and a blessing in

HIS life. Emil always made you feel like YOU were the one giving when it was in fact HIS presence that was the gift.

Emil showed us all much about living abundantly and that life is about **ACTION**:

Be creative. Share a meal. Be present. Read. Question.

LISTEN.

Finally, I'd like to share a short poem by one my favorite writers, Danna Faulds, called "Ten Thousand Things":

The Big Bang is still happening.

From nothing springs ten thousand things—

starlings and eagles,

mitochondria and mountain breezes,

gallows and galaxies.

When I am open,

Uninterrupted creativity flows through me,

Shaping life

at the speed of light

Or inviting me

to rest

in silence.

Thank you, God, for the life and lessons of Emil Mialik. Amen.

Gray Clark

March 26, 2011

Zac Cates

Granddaddy's Eulogy:

Granddaddy was a great man. His personality was a testament to life. He loved all living things down to the smallest ant. He loved himself. He believed his body was his temple. He proudly had no tattoos, nor piercings.

He was active in many pursuits: art, music, sports, woodwork, writing, the elusive computer.

Optimism was his hallmark and his winning smile acquired many friends. He had a way of befriending everyone, he was very personable. Every stranger was a close friend of his.

He was a lover of philosophy and ideas. He drank knowledge like water with an unquenchable thirst. He was interested in the truth.

Granddaddy loved his family. He was a very proud father and an embarrassingly proud

Grandfather. I'll never forget the stories of him showing my picture to checkout ladies at the grocery store.

He was a champion of civil rights. He always believed people should be treated with inherent worth and dignity regardless of their race, sexuality, or creed. He acted on this in the 1960s when his church hosted a vaccination clinic for African Americans. His forward thinking was not appreciated by everyone, but he was brave and he was stubborn

He was a hard worker. Perhaps this was a testament to his upbringing, the son of immigrants during the Great Depression. There was something special about this man though; he was not just a product of his environment. He lived life with an open mind and was always interested in bettering himself.

We shared many great memories together. Hornets games at the Coliseum, talking about life and philosophy. Hot summer days at the Carmel driving range and traditional family vacation weeks at the beach. Several movies: the Perfect Storm, X-men. He taught me much about living a meaningful life and I am forever grateful for his love.

I've always been fascinated by the story of Granddaddy's spiritual metamorphosis. Brought up with a strict faith, then becoming a liberal Southern Baptist minister, an eternal student of human psychology, and eventual student of philosophy until an arrival at agnostic notions few could comprehend. It was a very Emil thing to say out of the blue, "one must strive to kill the ego!" I'm still trying to figure that one out.

He was a great thinker and being so inclined, his mind was a testament to death. He was no stranger to it in his years in the ministry. He no doubt thought about it during the Second World War, when faced with the sound of enemy planes. . I'd like to think he's in a better place now and in the spirit of philosophy I'll quote Socrates, who said in Plato's text Phaedo:

I want to make my argument before you, my judges, as to why I think that a man who has truly spent his life in philosophy is probably right to be of good cheer in the face of death and to be very hopeful that after death he will attain the greatest blessings yonder.

And again:

There is likely to be something such as a path to guide us out of our confusion, because as long as we have a body and our soul is fused with such an evil we shall

never adequately attain what we desire, which we affirm to be **the truth**.

Emil had a lot to say, he had a lot of joy to give, we'll miss him. I'd like to close my eulogy by quoting lyrics to the song Lateralus by Tool. I've always believed they embodied the spirit of my Grandfather's wisdom. So here they are:

*Black then white are all I see in my infancy.
red and yellow then came to be, reaching out to me.
lets me see.*

*As below, so above and beyond, I imagine
drawn beyond the lines of reason.
Push the envelope. Watch it bend.*

*Over thinking, over analyzing separates the body from the mind.
Withering my intuition, missing opportunities and I must
Feed my will to feel my moment drawing way outside the lines.*

*Black then white are all I see in my infancy.
red and yellow then came to be, reaching out to me.
lets me see there is so much more
and beckons me to look through to these infinite possibilities.*

*As below, so above and beyond, I imagine
drawn outside the lines of reason.
Push the envelope. Watch it bend.*

*Over thinking, over analyzing separates the body from the mind.
Withering my intuition leaving all these opportunities behind.
Feed my will to feel this moment urging me to cross the line.
Reaching out to embrace the random.
Reaching out to embrace whatever may come.*

*I embrace my desire to
feel the rhythm, to feel connected
enough to step aside and weep like a widow
to feel inspired, to fathom the power,
to witness the beauty, to bathe in the fountain,
to swing on the spiral
of our divinity and still be a human.*

*With my feet upon the ground I lose myself
between the sounds and open wide to suck it in,
I feel it move across my skin.*

I'm reaching up and reaching out,

I'm reaching for the random or whatever will bewilder me.

And following our will and wind we may just go where no one's been.

We'll ride the spiral to the end and may just go where no one's been.

Spiral out. Keep going,. Spiral out. keepgoing...