

The Park Road Pulpit
Sermons from Park Road Baptist Church
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Eulogy for Mike Poole
May 4, 2002
Russ Dean

Gordon Michael Poole was a “*true and sturdy friend.*” I love those words. Spoken by one who knew him best, I believe they summarize Mike’s character. *True*: “consistent with reality; real; authentic; reliable; accurate; faithful; unswerving.” Does that sound like Mike? *Sturdy*: “Showing rugged physical strength; substantially made; resolute; determined; firm; robust.” Mike was a “true and sturdy friend.”

What better words could ever be spoken about anyone?

Mike loved the outdoors. Gordon reflected that as a child he was “all boy” – frequently coming home with a toad in one pocket and a handful of snails in the other. And until his final trip to the hospital, he still loved the woods. He loved hunting, communing with nature, walking the woods and observing its life.

Mike was an athlete. Betty, he must have spent his entire childhood running! He was a two-sport letterman from junior high days through his college career in Cross Country and Track. He set 10 high school records in Titusville, Florida. I’ve never had a “runner’s high,” but Mike must have known it well. He specialized in the mile and the 440. The 440 yard dash is the longest sprint race there is. Beyond that distance, runners begin more slowly, pacing themselves, accelerating gradually before the all-out sprint down the homestretch. But the 440 is a gut-wrenching, long-distance, all-out sprint. It is not a race for the faint of heart. The 440 requires a

good set of legs. But more than that, it requires a great set of lungs. Oxygen. Breath. Lots of wind. Sounds like Mike, doesn't it?

Mike had a good mind. He was an avid reader. A chess player. A Civil War buff. After a degree in biology and a long first-career related to medical sales, Mike found himself in a helping profession. I don't mean Mike "*found himself*," to mean this was an accident, something he just happened upon. I mean that Mike found *himself* -- his own center, his soul -- in helping others. Or maybe Mike *was found* in doing so. His sister, Susan says, "Mike just had a healing touch." Everyone with whom I spoke used the word "compassionate" to describe him. After receiving a degree in Respiratory Care, Mike worked long hours with patients whose lungs just weren't quite able to cope. Whose recovery required a careful, gentle lift. Whose healing needed a sturdy friend with a compassionate touch. Anyone who can work with infants in Neo-Natal Intensive Care must be both sturdy and compassionate. Sounds like Mike, doesn't it?

So in those last few days, there was more than a touch of irony as Mike labored under the watchful rising and falling of a mechanical respirator. But it was not to be. He had given his instructions -- "I don't want that." You see, God's children -- all of God's children -- were made to breathe free. But *some*, more than others. I think Mike Poole was one of those free spirits who could not live with the confinement of a regulated life. One of those wonderful souls whose spirit needed the wide open space of air that is fresh, full, and free.

The poet, Kahlil Gibran, asks:

For what is it to die but to stand naked in the wind and to melt into the sun? And what is it to cease breathing, but to free the breath from its *restless tides* that it might *rise* and *expand* and *seek God*, unencumbered (*The Prophet*, 91).

Death is not a final, defeated breath. Death is freedom from the confining need to exhale. Death is new life -- breathing in, taking in, *inhaling*, forever, the breath of freedom that is the life of God. Sounds like Mike, doesn't it?

In my first meeting with Mike, just a day after his heart surgery, he told me he was ready -- ready for *anything* that might come. I knew from the look in his eye what he meant. And I believe that the Spirit of God is free, broad, wide-open space. And in the love of that wide-open space, Mike breathed free.

Christian hope, centered in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, tells us that he still does.

Some souls are meant to sail, to soar, to breathe free. Mike was one of those souls. He was always too free for a paint-by-number life. Too free for a life of mechanical breathing. Too free for organized religion. So I was not surprised when I asked his family to tell me about his faith, and Susan said, "Well, Mike was... non-traditional. But he had a deep sense of spirituality." Mike had seen the world. He had tested his freedom. He had known his tribulation. "In the world, you *will have* tribulation," said Jesus, "but be of good cheer. For I have overcome the world."

Maybe most of all, Mike Poole, who breathed so deeply the fresh breath of God's freedom, knew the invigorating power of that Spirit in overcoming...

God, grant me
The serenity to accept the things that I cannot change.
The courage to change the things I can.
And the wisdom to know the difference.

Mike knew these words well. I believe he prayed them frequently in the last few weeks. It takes a *sturdy* friend, to change what can be changed. Mike overcame. It takes a *true* friend to

accept what cannot be changed. Mike accepted, reluctantly, but resolutely. And on Thursday, May 2nd, at 10 minutes to 7 in the evening, Mike gained this world's greatest wisdom.

It is a lesson only for true, sturdy friends.

Gordon Michael Poole was such a friend. He was our friend. He was God's friend.

Mike -- breathe free. Breathe free.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

This day, O God
we give you thanks for Gordon Michael Poole,
your child and our friend,
our child and your friend.

Give us his courage to change;
Give us his serenity to accept;
Give us his wisdom to know.

And in the strength of his memory
empower us to breathe free and live abundantly
in the grace and mercy
of a God who is slow to anger
and abounding in steadfast love.

For his life, make us thankful.
In his death, make us mindful
that whatever comes --
we might be true.

We pray in the name of Christ,
who is our resurrection and life...

Amen!