

Tuesday Reflection 25 August 2020

Eddie's Story - Part II

Eddie meets PIP

So there is Eddie, socially isolated, unable to work because of his chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), but fortunately our society does look after people like him. Apart from Universal Credit there are special payments for those with chronic illness; there used to be a Disability Support Allowance (DSA), which has now been superseded by the Personal Independence Payment (PIP). PIP is designed to 'help you with some of the extra costs if you have a long-term ill-health or disability'. Eddie qualified, and in fact the PIP payments helped him buy his mobility scooter (which, you will remember, was then stolen).

In an attempt to regain some of his mobility, Eddie decided to ask for an increase in his PIP, although he found the forms very difficult to fill in. Imagine his surprise on being informed that not only would he not get an increase, but that his total PIP was being withdrawn, leaving him even worse off than he was before. Part of the reason given was that he did not require help with his daily living needs or his mobility needs; the criterion for thus assessing his mobility needs was that he 'can stand and then move more than 200 metres either aided or unaided'. The assessor also conducted a 'mental state examination' deciding that he was not 'anxious, agitated or tense'. There is something of a 'Catch 22' situation here; get to the assessment interview at whatever cost and present yourself as well as possible, and they decide that you are obviously mobile and 'normal' enough to get there, so do not need a PIP. Don't go to the interview - for whatever reason, e.g. incapacity or you can't afford the fare -, and you don't get the benefit because you didn't attend the interview.

Eddie's situation reminds me of Matthew 7:9 "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone?" Eddie has been given a stone.

None of this, of course is new to anyone who has seen the film "I Daniel Blake", but what disturbs me about the whole story is that the treatment meted out to benefit claimants seems predicated on finding reasons not to help, rather than to help, and that all of this is being done in my name. The level of justice in a society can be judged by the way we treat the poorest and most disadvantaged - the people whose cause Jesus took up. Are we today really following His example?

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