

The Killing of Our Children:
 Things to Forget , Things to Remember.
 Pentecost XVIII/Proper 22B

“Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.” Hebrews 2:18

A Prayer for Comfort

Gentle, Compassionate,
 Forgiving God,
 we come to you now with heavy hearts
 and in deep sorrow.
 Our hearts go to those Amish families and community who have lost
 so much in the past few days.
 Their pain and numbness must be great
 beyond words and thoughts.

We cry out and ask WHY God,
 WHY? Bailey, CO
 We do not understand.
 Why Lord? Why Cazenovia, WI?
 We plead with you for answers.
 Why?
 Until we hear from you O God, answers to
 why, please remind us that You weep with us.

In the weeping and mourning, may we feel Your always Eternal
 Presence, and may we know Your Comforting Spirit covering us as a
 warm blanket of peace.

In the name of Jesus Christ, who suffers with us.
 Amen.

Terry Mattingly, syndicated religion columnist describes the scene
 last week really well in a recent column.

"The helicopters kept making circles in the air so that the cameramen
 could keep showing the dairy farms and country roads, the bonnets
 and wide-brimmed straw hats, the horse-drawn buggies and the one-
 room schoolhouse framed in yellow police tape. Soon the facts

started going in circles as police recited a litany about 600 rounds of ammunition, a shotgun, a semiautomatic pistol, a stun gun, explosives and, later, the killer's sick collection of chains, clamps, hardware and sexual aids.

Witnesses said Charles Carl Roberts IV was angry with God, angry with himself, haunted by guilt, fed up with life and driven by a hellish grudge. Then journalists began asking questions that went in circles, the questions that nag clergy as well as state troopers. Why? Why the Amish? How could God let this happen? How can justice be done now that the killer is dead?"

The writer of Hebrews gives us comforting words in the midst of this chaos and the killing of America's children: "But we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone." (2:9)

No one ever expects children to die let alone suffer. No one ever expects to outlive their children. But it happens when tragedy strikes and when it does we seek the compassion of our God who lost his son to suffering and death.

How do we reckon with such evil? The scripture teaches us that we can resist evil and the evil one. Yet, it is clear we cannot defeat evil in our mortal flesh. Only by the relationship we have with our brother Jesus Christ. Though Jesus was made lower than that of angels he is exalted and we with him because he stood the test of suffering and by his sufferings was made perfect. Evil wounded our Savior like it has the families and fellow students of those children who were murdered these last weeks. Jesus' willingness to taste their death and the sin that caused it for all people has given him power to free us from the fear of death. In Jesus death is not the end of love. In Jesus death has only power to kill the flesh. In Jesus death is not the end of healing but the beginning.

And so it's time to forget some things and to remember some things.

Things to Forget

1. Forget that holding on to a Grudge has any redeeming Social Value. There's nothing good we can say about a grudge. Grudges are destructive. Revenge is not sweet; it's really sour, and in this case its effects have caused a nation to retch and puke. Mattingly again on the Amish approach: "To grasp the Amish point of view, it's crucial to

understand that they truly believe God desires justice, but also shows mercy and they believe that these are not contradictory things," said Johann Christoph Arnold, senior elder of the Bruderhof communes. "They know that God said, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay.' The Amish certainly believe that this killer will not go without punishment, but they also believe that his punishment is in God's hands."

2. Forget that Guilt is something we can't get rid of. Yes we can. We think of guilt like it's got Velcro hooks that glom on to our fuzzy souls and we just can't tear it off. Yes we can.

Killer Charles Carl Roberts IV killer confessed that he had molested two children and had recently had dreams of molesting again. He feared the evil and corruption that existed within himself. And yet getting it off of his chest by writing a suicide note doesn't make him a better person and it doesn't do anything to relieve his guilt and make him feel forgiven; he's dead and can't experience these things beyond the momentary shallowness of penning a confession.

Christian faith provides a remedy against this kind of cowardice: "Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed" James 5:16. Christian confession as forgiveness of sin and guilt...much different than a suicide note.

Guilt for sins not only can be removed - it WAS removed at the cross. But to lay hold of the forgiveness of God is the only means of removing guilt. And if we are honest, forgiveness can be quite scandalous...after all, it is offered to thieves on crosses, death row killers, school shooters, and even blue-white-or no collar sinners like us.

So guilt IS something we can get rid of, but we also need to remember that both horrific AND mundane sins are guilt-worthy and forgiveness-requiring.

3. Forget that Life is Absurd and Meaningless. No it isn't. And if life has no meaning or purpose it may be because we've forgotten a few things. here are some things to remember.

Things to Remember:

1. Remember forgiveness works. The Amish have a tradition of pacifism and forgiveness. Reports have suggested that Roberts wife was welcomed at the funeral of 13 year old Marian Fisher, whose sister was critically injured. Dwight Lefever, a Roberts family spokesman, said an Amish neighbor had comforted Marie Roberts and her three children hours after the shooting and extended forgiveness. The Mennonite Disaster Society will also be giving financial help to the Roberts family.

2. Remember Goodness abounds. We're horrified because, in part, there is so much good in the world. Evil is the aberration, not goodness. Desmond Tutu was quoted in *The Christian Century* recently as saying: "The media tend to inundate us with rather unpleasant news. We have the impression that evil is on the rampage, is about to take over the world. We need to keep being reminded that there is a great deal of good happening in the world. Ultimately, good prevails." Remember what Jesus said about God's Kingdom breaking into to transform THIS world and doing so THROUGH us. The issue isn't us escaping this sinful world, but transforming it through God's grace.

3. Remember Moral Education is important. Think that Sunday school, Bible study, worship and religious instruction aren't important for our kids? Wrong! When a mom says to me in the grocery store that, 'Well, we haven't been in worship or Sunday School because Jimmy has had soccer practice and it's the only day he gets to sleep in and, well, he's 11 now and can make his own decisions and yada, yada, yada' I am more inclined to respond now by asking whether she cuts Jimmy the same slack on a weekday morning for school. Which education is more important: academic or moral?. Plus, when this kid grows up and is faced with moral issues, a failing marriage, an addiction, depression or a whole host of other results of sin, won't you and he both be glad that he spent all that time at soccer practice? Personally, I take my profession as seriously as anyone else. The fact is faith isn't a hobby, and unless I tell you I'm not doing my job very well. Faith is not a choir rehearsal for the real performance the real performance is now.

4. Remember The Second Commandment. "Love your neighbor as yourself" is a command. The one thing we often lack is a personal commitment to live what we have learned. The girls' families, Amish neighbors and friends are coping with the slayings by looking inward, relying on themselves and their faith, just as they have for centuries, to get them through what one Amish bishop called "our 9/11."

"They know their children are going to heaven. They know their children are innocent ... and they know that they will join them in death," said Gertrude Huntington, a Michigan researcher who has written a book about children in Amish society.

"The hurt is very great," Huntington said. "But they don't balance the hurt with hate."

Songwriter and recording artist, Michael W. Smith, sang a couple nights ago at a large gathering of people grieving and suffering in the aftermath of these shootings. His song, "Healing Rain" is apropos as we continue to remember and pray for one another :

Healing rain is coming down
It's coming nearer to this old town
Rich and poor, weak and strong
It's bringing mercy, it won't be long .
Lift your heads, let us return
To the mercy seat where time began
And in your eyes, I see the pain
Come soak this dry heart with healing rain.

May we all experience this healing rain. AMEN