

CHRIST THE LORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

PINOLE, CA

THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST AUGUST 30, 2020

“Amish Grace”

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Good morning and welcome back into our beautiful church. I wish I could say the world was back to its beautiful self, but number one, maybe it wasn't as beautiful as we thought, and number two we can only move forward. If you feel bombarded with emotions, you are not alone, things are pretty grim.

Because of the events that happened in Wisconsin, I have Black and Brown social workers who are worried about going into our patients' homes as a person of color, fearing they will be mistaken for criminals. I have family members afraid to call for emergency social services because of the fear of police showing up and being shot. I go to homes throughout Oakland where there are memorials on the walls for sons lost to violence and police actions. And as you know- the list of scary, fearful things happening goes on - on top of health concerns and being isolated, what are we to do? How do we move forward?

Then we come to church for comfort and read scripture that says “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. Never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God.” How do we do that? Is it even possible? And what does taking-up-your-cross look like today? What model should we look for in order to move forward?

I will not discuss politics, and I will not argue about anyone's flavor of Christianity, but there are some models out there that bear a closer looking at. While it is still too early to tell what will happen with this week's incidents and what protests or social structure will or will not change, and while the all too recent issues are all still raw, I offer you some not so distant history of an event in America, that for me – is today's

Epistle, is the following of Jesus (that holy man described last week by non-Biblical references as virtuous.)

Psalm 26

*Give judgment for me, O Lord,
for I have lived with integrity; *
I have trusted in the Lord and have not faltered.*

Psalm 26 would be for me the description of the Amish that are located throughout America, but mainly based in Pennsylvania. The Amish are the American version of what is known as Anabaptists. They live with integrity, trust in the Lord, and whatever you may think about their background, lifestyle, or horse and buggy, the Amish do live with integrity and trust in the Lord for the most part.

On October 2, 2006 in a small Amish schoolhouse near Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, Charles Carl Roberts IV carried his guns and rage into the schoolroom killing five girls and wounding five others. Charles Roberts then committed suicide. Well, if you followed the story on the news, although difficult, the Amish community both individually and collectively forgave Charles. They literally did not repay evil for evil, they gave it to God. The journey was not easy for some, but we will examine their path.

It is not to say that these families, these mothers, fathers, sister and brothers relented and lost touch with the reality of the world, or that they believed in some fantasy heaven without a deeper knowledge of the structure of God's work in the world. They understood the concept of martyr but are not a backwards cult that expects martyrdom as ordinary, especially when considering children. Instead, authors Kraybill, Nolt and Weaver Zercher, all PH D's in religion or theology, offer you a study of lived-out Christianity, tragedy and forgiveness in their book *Amish Grace* with Jesus at the very core.

The first concept down the road of handling tragedy gracefully is developing the habit of forgiveness. It seems that although the Amish are mainly untouched by modern society in a lot of ways, living in community always has its broken rules and unexpected tragedies. Research has found that forgiveness often comes quickly when

Amish were interviewed. A mother forgave a drunk driver who hit and killed her son who was on a scooter at the side of the road. From the work *Amish Grace*, the woman is quoted as saying to the police officer as she pointed to the suspect in the back of the police car, "Take good care of him. We forgive him."

In another incident involving the death of a newly-wed couple in their buggy, following a collision with a speeding auto, the deceased couples' parents went to the auto driver's home to express forgiveness. According to the records, when the driver's family saw them come to the door they feared for their lives, only to find hugs, tears and kind words.

Stories go on and on from petty theft to murder, but the response always seems to be the same. Forgiveness practiced daily is like building a muscle over time. Throughout interviews they would repeat: Jesus gave forgiveness from the cross, we can do no less. The list of scripture quoted to support their way of forgiveness as you know is staggering. And the Amish take it seriously.

Forgiveness is practiced daily, for even just the little things; it becomes a habit. Forgiveness is supported by daily study of scripture around the true teaching and examples of Jesus. Needless to say, within their own community forgiveness is present but so is penance.

This is not to say it is easy. "A mother whose daughter died in the schoolhouse shooting also acknowledged that forgiveness is an ongoing struggle. She said, "Forgiveness stretches out over time, but you have to start out with the will to forgive. But the bitterness may reenter your mind from time to time, and then you have to think about forgiveness again." "

And what about anger? We all know what that's about, most of us are angry right now at how things are in the world. When asked about anger one of the Amish women responded that the emotions of deep hurt and sadness along with the tears of grief snuffed out the feelings of anger. Love was soothing, she said "I tried to look at the struggles of the other through love. I then felt a lot more love than anger." Imagine allowing love to flood you rather than vengeance.

The Amish realize, of course, that anger is natural. Moses and Jesus show us times of anger. But what is not acceptable for the Amish is destructive words and action provoked by anger, not the anger itself. Simply stated, anger begets anger until there is no peace. Wise words, I would say.

I share this story so that if you would like to read the book *Amish Grace* you may. It is an intimate look into the Amish ways of faith and life. It is about a real tragedy, yet it is far enough in our past to be emotionally manageable at this time. Because we need to prepare ourselves to move forward into a new territory of justice, ethics, morality and how we see treating each other in the near future, (because what we have now obviously is not working) I urge you to investigate your spirituality in light of scripture and including other traditions that also struggle.

I don't expect to see you in blue jeans and work shirt, or hopping on the nearest buggy to strengthen your faith. I don't expect you to become an Anabaptist or as you may know them, Amish. But I do give to you a way of looking at the world that is what Jesus taught and is at the core of his message. Whether it is difficult or not, is not the question according to our Gospel today. This is our cross to bear: to love one another, even in this really messed up time. And that doesn't mean to love just the people that are like you.

We may find ourselves in a position of power on whether to forgive or not, I urge you remember today's words. Forgiveness comes out of love, not spite. Forgiveness comes when you love the other person as if you knew them too, because you do. We all contain a darker side. To omit that is to be unaware. Why do you think we constantly pray a confession for things even left undone?

The news will keep rolling out of the media: things that hurt us, scare us, and make us cry. We will feel the empathic burden of those who are suffering; we will feel like we can not do enough to stop the destruction. We will question our past behavior and struggle to find new ways and new words, but it can be done.

I hear all the time that forgiveness at this point is impossible. Well, I offer you hope, I offer you a path as imperfect as following it may be, and I offer you *Amish Grace*.

Amen