

February 23 2014

Scripture Lessons ~ *I Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23*

*Matthew 5:38-48*

Sermon *For the Wisdom of This World Is Foolishness with God*

Many of us will remember watching with a great deal of shock and sadness, on our television sets, the events of October 2, 2006 surrounding the hostage standoff and the subsequent shooting by Charles Carl Roberts IV, of 10 Amish school girls at Nickle Mines, Pennsylvania. As you will remember 5 of the girls were killed outright and 5 were seriously wounded and the peaceful and idealic existence of this community of Amish farm families, seemed shattered forever. But was it, in his book *Amish Grace*, a man by the name of Donald Kraybill who is quite a scholar the Amish, attempts to make sense for us a broader audience of the Amish communities response to this tragedy. Starting with actions that are foreign to many of us as we are used to having every single newsworthy phrase dissected to death in the public eye as part of our 24 hour news cycle. First of all the members of that Amish community and the girls families in particular shunned the hype of the media coverage choosing to grieve very quietly and very privately after the tragedy. Second, the members banded together to support each other both materially as well as emotionally through the tragedy and long afterwards. And third, the group, rather than preserving that school as some ill-fated memorial, some sort of pilgrimage site, had the building almost secretly and unceremoniously torn down and bulldozed and then planted corn over the top of it, symbolic of putting that tragedy in the past and moving forward with a fresh new start.

What, I wonder, was behind this response so unlike the dozens that we see on TV every week to similarly tragic events. Well Kraybill in his book which he calls *Amish Grace*, a simple following as he puts it of Jesus commands. Jesus commands to love, Jesus commands to bless, Jesus commands to forgive enemies which he sees to be at the very heart of what the Amish consider to be their Christian faith and their Christian practice. Kraybill observes that taking Jesus' word seriously for the Amish means active forgiveness.

And let me tell you what he means by that. First, truly giving up my desire for revenge against the person who has hurt me, secondly, committing in my life to overcome any bitterness that I might carry against the one who has wronged me, and finally third taking that second mile step that the Sermon on the Mount talks about of extending gracious and loving thoughts, feelings, actions and even towards the ones who wronged me as far as that is possible to do. I can just hear a lot of us now, I am in symphony with you too, that's all well and good Pastor Russ,

for those other worldly Amish but real people like us could never do stuff like that, or I can't even believe that they even do that or just be covering that anger up with a smile or justice has to be done and something like this cannot just be swept under the rug, and so a hard line has to be an only line be taken in situations like this.

As it so happens one of the texts from our gospels from this morning is part of the simple basis that the Amish practice this strange kind of grace. And I use the word strange, because many of us are willing to take almost every other passage of scripture in a literal way from soup to nuts, but when it comes to something as central to Jesus teachings as Matthews 5: 43-48 all we can sometimes say is that it is entirely impractical. It is even impossible to follow those tenants that Jesus gives to us that passage, "Love your enemies as well as your friends" says Jesus. Pray for those that persecute you as well as praying for your own family members. And Jesus reasoning is really interesting, I will paraphrase- so what is the big deal if you show love to those who show love to you? Even the jerks in the world around you do that kind of stuff, and if you speak warmly to your friends and relatives what is so special about that? And Christians all around the world do the same thing, and they are not constantly bragging about how loving and caring they are. Which leaves us in sort of a stew – Jesus not only calling us to live daily with this sense of Amish Grace but even demonstrating it himself, in his live and in his ministry, as much as in the advance leading up to his passion and his death. Which doesn't seem very encouraging to us sometimes, does it.

So how are we to respond? How are WE to respond? Well obviously there will be degrees of response depending on where you are and how you interpret the scripture in your faith. Some argue that this passage and others like it were never meant to be taken literally. If we did as a culture would mean the collapse of law and order in the society as we know it. Others at the opposite extreme like the Amish would say of all the things Jesus said, this sayings on love, his sayings on forgiveness, are central they are even essential and should of course be taken as literally as possible.

Well most of aren't so foolish to think that in the world as we know it Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount or sort of an exact blueprint for ordering western society. But I do agree on Kraybill's take on the Amish that Jesus' words on love and forgiveness are central, they are essential to us as followers of Jesus in the world. And quite honestly they are a scarcely tried plan for number one, putting the past in the past, number two, ridding ourselves of the baggage of hatred and bitterness in our daily lives, number three, somehow influencing the larger world around us that salt of light, and leaven of love, that Jesus calls upon each of us to share in our Christian walk. I am certainly the last person to be flip about the

act of forgiveness because I am not immune because I have been hurt in my life as well, I know that forgiving one that has hurt us is one of the most difficult things we will ever face, I am convinced of all of that. Neither would I ever be so naive to think that forgiveness doesn't take time because forgiveness can take a long time sometimes. But just because it is hard, and just because it takes a lot of time doesn't mean as the world around us sometimes thinks that Amish Grace is foolish, that Amish Grace is totally impractical or as St. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 3, the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. The wisdom of this world is foolishness to God! Amen.