

Bless Those That Murder Your Child

A brutal act was answered with a radical act of forgiveness by a grieving Christian community

From time to time we hear a story that reminds us there really are people who dare to live the life of radical forgiveness. The Amish are such a people.

On a sunny fall morning in October 2006, a 32-year-old dairy-truck driver named Charles Roberts entered a one-room Amish schoolhouse in Nickel Mines, Pa., armed with a 9 mm handgun, a .30-06-caliber rifle, a 12-gauge shotgun, two knives and 600 rounds of ammunition.

Charles and his wife, Amy, had three young children. The family attended church. But Charles Roberts was a deeply embittered man.

Nine years earlier, the couple's firstborn child, a daughter, had died only 20 minutes after her birth. Driven by the unforgiveness he held against God for her death, Roberts had morphed into a monster by the time October 2006 came around.

Inside the schoolhouse were a teacher and 26 students. Roberts told the teacher and the boys to leave. He kept the 10 girls of the class, who ranged from age 6 to 13, and announced: "I'm going to make you pay for my daughter."

At 11:05 a.m., three shotgun blasts were followed by rapid-fire pistol shots. Roberts had shot all 10 girls in the head. Five died, five survived. Roberts completed his descent into the abyss by turning a gun on himself.

That could have been the end of the story—the horror of a madman and his massacre. But even as the world shuddered from

the news, it soon was also stunned by a demonstration of forgiveness that transcended tragedy.

Within hours of the killings, a group of men from the Amish community went to Amy Roberts' house to express ... forgiveness!

They brought gifts of food to Amy and her children, telling Amy they had forgiven her husband and held no animosity toward her. They promised to help her in the future by providing what she might need.

Five days later when the Roberts family gathered to bury Charles, more than half the 75 mourners were from the Amish community, some of them parents who just days earlier had buried their children.

The funeral director who witnessed the kindness of the Amish community at Charles Roberts' burial said: "That is something I'll never forget, not ever. I knew that I was witnessing a miracle."

The Amish act of forgiveness was so radical it changed the national media's storyline coming out of the town from the Nickel Mines "tragedy" to the Nickel Mines "miracle" of forgiveness.

The Amish community didn't have to weigh the merits of forgiveness versus retaliation. They didn't talk about reprisal, revenge, getting even or making someone pay.

They knew they were to be active practitioners of the same kind of costly forgiveness that Jesus demonstrated when He carried His cross to Golgotha and there extended forgiveness to His murderers.

They took up their cross by responding with only forgiveness. They lived the Sermon on the Mount by demonstrating only forgiveness. They understood there was only one way to bring

healing—with forgiveness.

That does not mean that they (or other Christian victims of injustice) somehow didn't mind. As New Testament scholar N.T. Wright observes: "I did mind and it did matter; otherwise there wouldn't be anything to forgive at all."

Ever since Cain killed Abel, the way of the world has been for shed blood to cry out for more shed blood.

But the Amish in Nickel Mines, Pa., are an example of what Heb. 12:24 tells us: In coming to Christ we have come to "the ... blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."