

**ALL SAINTS SUNDAY, YEAR C, NOVEMBER 6, 2022**  
**PROPER 26, PENTECOST 22**

Almost 30 years ago a young woman named Amy Biehl was a typical Southern California kid, a straight-A student and a college diving champion who was passionate about the anti apartheid movement in South Africa. She went to many rallies supporting the end of apartheid and the release of Nelson Mandela. After her graduation from Stanford, it did not surprise her family and friends that when she won a Fulbright scholarship, she opted to go to South Africa and immerse herself in the country's culture and politics.

But her young life abruptly ended in August of 1993 when she was stoned and stabbed to death by a mob of angry, young, black militants. She was killed by the very people whose lives she was trying to improve.

But instead of being angry with her murderers, her parents did something so atypical that it boggles the mind. The Biehls dealt with their grief by doing what they believed their daughter would have wanted: understand the fury that drove the mob. Her parents, Linda and Peter Biehl, decided they had to try and understand their daughter's commitment to the people for whom she had given her life. They read her diaries, in which she wrote about her admiration for those who were suffering under apartheid. The Biehls and their three other children decided that they had to go to South Africa.

Linda attended the trial of Amy's killers. They visited the squatter camps of Guguletu, the black township where Amy's killers had grown up. They saw firsthand the squalid conditions and oppression. Linda went into the home of one of the murderers and met with his mother. She says that after hugging her, "I walked out of that home. There was a rainbow in the sky. My heart was very light. I felt I had come to terms. And if that is forgiveness, I felt it. And I felt--I feel at peace with myself. So to me, that's forgiveness."

When asked about the Biehl's forgiveness, Rhoda Khadalie, one of Amy's professors in South Africa and a close friend said "It is a gift from God that they can forgive the killers of their daughter, meet with the mother, go into the homes of the killers and understand who they are and where they come from."

Not only did they understand, they spent much of their time in Guguletu, passing the very spot where their daughter was killed. What they decided to do to carry on for her was to establish the non-profit Amy Biehl Foundation. With a half million in grants, donations and their own money, they have sponsored 15 programs, including welding classes and after-school programs which involve thousands of young people, all in the very community where their daughter was killed.

What the Biehls did is widely known in South Africa, and even Archbishop Desmond Tutu, like everyone else marveled at it. "The [Biehl's have] turned it all upside down," Tutu said. "It is the victims, in the depth of their own agony and pain, who are saying, 'The community which produced these murderers, we want to help that community be transfigured.'" When the men who killed Amy applied for amnesty after serving four years in jail, Peter and Linda did not object, even though they could have blocked the release. They not only forgave the killers but, in effect, became the patron saints of the village that her very killers came from.

I believe each one of us is also astounded at this story. How does anyone reach a point where they could forgive a person who murdered their child? It seems

incomprehensible. But, in many respects, this is also the message of the beatitudes that we heard this morning. The Beatitudes are read on All Saints Day for a reason. When a Sunday School class was asked what the Beatitudes were a young girl answered "The Beatitudes are the attitudes we should have." How true that statement is but the reality is the Beatitudes seem to be counter intuitive to all that we experience in life and it seems only saintly people can achieve those attitudes.

How can anyone be happy when they mourn, or are poor or hungry? Perhaps this interpretation by JB Phillips who wrote the book "Your God is too Small" will help. He presented the beatitudes in his book by starting off with what most people think and then what Jesus said. It went like this:

Happy are the pushy: for they get on in the world. Happy are those who realize their spiritual poverty: they have already entered the kingdom of Reality.

Happy are the hard-boiled: for they never let life hurt them. Happy are they who bear their share of the world's pain: in the long run they will know more happiness than those who avoid it.

Happy are they who complain: for they get their own way in the end. Happy are those who accept life and their own limitations: they will find more in life than anybody.

Happy are the blase: for they never worry over their transgressions. Happy are those who long to be truly "good": they will fully realize their ambition.

Happy are the drill sergeants, for they get results. Happy are those who are ready to make allowances and to forgive: they will know the love of God.

Happy are the takers of the world: for they know their way around. Happy are those who are real in their thoughts and feelings: in the end they will see the ultimate Reality, God.

Happy are the trouble-makers: for people have to take notice of them. Happy are those who help others to live together: they will be known to be doing God's work.

Jesus' words promote a life style based on giving, caring, and love. This is what life is all about and these are the things that last when everything else is going down the drain. So the beatitudes speak of that joy which seeks us through our pain, that joy which sorrow and loss, pain and grief, are powerless to touch, that joy which shines through tears, and which nothing in life or death can take away. That true joy has to do with knowing God, being a part of God's family, and recognizing we are all children of God and that God is always with us especially when the journey is tough going. It is all about the grace of God. The world can win its joys, and the world can equally well lose its joys. A change in fortune, a collapse in health, the failure of a plan, the disappointment of an ambition, even a change in the weather, can take away the fickle joy the world can give. The greatness of the beatitudes is that they are not wistful glimpses of some future beauty; they are not even promises of some distant glory; they are the reality of permanent joy we find in God in the here and now that nothing in the world can ever take away.

We are called by the Beatitudes to achieve inner peace in our own lives. No matter what challenges face us, we can overcome them and "turn them upside down. The real definition of sin is a separation from our fellow human beings. The Biehls could very easily have let their normal, human feelings of anger, resentment, hatred and bitterness over the loss of their daughter take control of their lives and separate them from the people of Guguletu and her murderers. But they used understanding and forgiveness to transcend

these feelings. Although there is nothing that will ever bring their daughter back to life (and that grief will always be with them), they have used her death to "adopt" many more children in that village and give them the possibility of a prosperous life which would never have been possible before. They have given us a vivid example of what we must do if we are to live our own lives in imitation of the example of Christ. Our lives must be a constant striving to make the Beatitudes the "attitudes that we should have". When you live to serve in this manner, you not only believe the beatitudes you live out the beatitudes. That is living a life that matters! Amen.