

Editorial: It's safe to say ... or is it?

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In the two weeks since Charlie Kirk was killed, for many it has been safer to communicate support for him and his family than to communicate any kind of disagreement, or to say nothing at all.

I expect the world—understood here in the biblical sense—to be such an unsafe place. I don't expect the church—understood here as the people of God—to be so unsafe. Yet, we are.

Church, we are not a safe place in this historical moment for people to say what they think and feel about prominent political figures or their deaths—unless what people think and feel is in lockstep with the majority around them.

Perhaps most disappointing of all, we are not even safe for our own, for our fellow Christians.

Christians—both inside and outside the church building—we often like to think we are a lighthouse, a beacon warning of danger. We like to think we are pointing people to eternal safety and away from hell.

If we are a lighthouse, too many of us are neglecting our light. We've let it dim to near invisibility, we are shining an indistinct color, or we blind rather than guide. Many of us, with clenched jaws and fists, are doing it now in response to Charlie Kirk's death.

It's safe to say the way in which we Christians have treated Christian and non-Christian alike during the last two weeks is a poor show of who Jesus prayed we would be and an affront to who Jesus commanded us to be.

It's safe to say ... or is it?

Shape of a safe place

As Christians respond to Charlie Kirk's murder, the reactions to it, his funeral and the reactions to that, we are not in lockstep agreement about the kind of person he was or the rightness of things he said. The church ought to be a safe place to communicate that disagreement. But it hasn't been.

To be a safe place means we keep at the forefront of our mind what I have stated before—as recently as [last week](#)—that every one of us is created by God in God's image.

Being a safe place means we don't forget [Paul's exhortation](#): In Christ, we don't live for ourselves anymore, but for Christ; in Christ, we are new creations; in Christ, we are reconciled to God and are given the ministry and message of reconciliation.

It also means we embody Paul's teachings about [loving one another](#), teachings in line with [Jesus' command](#) that we [love one another](#).

It's safe to say we are not in perfect obedience to Jesus' command or Paul's teaching, both of which we proclaim to be the word of God.

It's safe to say ... or is it?

Criticism of 'safe' talk

Some will mock the whole idea of Christians and the church being "a safe place." What follows are not straw man arguments. They are responses I have encountered.

Some will say: “That ship has sailed. After #MeToo, #ChurchToo and all the other harm churches have caused, *now* you want to talk about being ‘a safe place?’”

This is a legitimate charge we must not deride or evade ... even if *we* or *our* church didn’t hurt anyone ... so far as we know ... or want to admit. The ship may have sailed, but that’s no reason not to make amends.

Others will say: “Oh, brother. Here we go again with this namby-pamby. Jesus never said we had to be safe, or nice.”

Maybe not in those words, but Jesus did command us to love, and not in any namby-pamby kind of way. He commands us to *agapate* one another, to choose to seek one another’s welfare as Jesus did for us.

And still others will say, “If we’re always trying to be safe in what we say and do, we’ll never say or do anything at all,” which is a different form of namby-pamby.

This is a confusion of such things as consideration, honor and kindness for weakness and impotence. It is possible to be assertive and firm while also not being a danger.

Responses like those above often are the reactions of people who have been hurt themselves, who themselves have not been afforded safety when they needed it.

It’s safe to say we’ve let the hurt go on too long.

It’s safe to say ... or is it?

A safe place to start

Because we’ve let the hurt go on too long, we’re not sure we can see a way

back. It seems too complicated. The stakes seem too high. The hurt is too deep.

But there is a safe place to start. That place is to listen ... to each other.

To listen to each other, we must set aside the idea that those who disagree with us are our enemies simply because they disagree with us. To listen, we must turn off our tendency to prejudge others, and we must not think we are smarter, better or more Christian than them.

In short, to listen, we must have [the mindset of Christ](#), who didn't use God to his own advantage, who made himself nothing and served others, who even obeyed death.

That ought to be safe to say, but I'm not sure it is.

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