



Dear Friends in Christ,

As I surf the internet, I have found some excellent Christian content. It is absolutely wonderful how easily we can access insightful and helpful Christian thought online. But at the same time, there is a lot of misguided and pseudo-Christian junk online. Even worse, there is a lot of anger and hatred posing as Christian thought on the internet.

In the wake of the tragic assassination of Charlie Kirk, it is quite disheartening to see so much anger and hatred being spewed and shared. It used to be that tragedy brought people together in solidarity and support. Now because of social media -- which always spread the most provocative and angry stuff -- people react with hatred and suspicion. It used to be that tragedies would tear down walls and build bridges between people. Now social media platforms use tragedies to build walls and to encourage people to fire hatred at each other.

Charlie Kirk was a Christian who shared the gospel of Jesus with people. And he was a political activist who pushed a political agenda. He was a husband and a father. He was also a social media star who enjoyed making his opponents look foolish. He was a brilliant thinker and speaker who spoke the truth with boldness. He was also a sinner who said harsh and insensitive things. Like Martin Luther, he was never boring. As Lutherans we should not be surprised that Charlie Kirk was both saint and sinner at the same time. But social media posters want you to think that Charlie was either the devil incarnate or the perfect saint. Don't buy into the lies.

The murder of Charlie Kirk was a terrible injustice and a shocking public display of the hatred and anger poisoning our society. It follows the assassinations of a House Speaker and her husband in Minnesota in June. And the same day brought another school shooting. This should be a moment to pull together and weep for the kind of nation we have become. The problem is not liberal or conservative, Democrat or Republican. Both sides have been demonizing each other for over 30 years. Our country seems to be locked in a vicious cycle.

Jesus spoke the truth with boldness but also with a compassion that attracted sinners rather than repelled them. We are called by Jesus to speak the truth boldly, but also to love people boldly. Anybody can talk. Lots of people do it today. But Jesus also calls us to listen, to share compassion, and to show understanding. That should be our prayer.

Yours in Christ, Phil Nielsen