

**SAFE SPACES.** I've been reading/hearing a lot about safe spaces. Mostly associated with school campuses but not entirely so — this has also become an issue related to use of public/municipal spaces. The more I read about safe spaces, the more concerned I become that humankind has stumbled into a massive rabbit hole.

What is a "safe space?" Kevin Gannon writes that "Safe spaces are a specific place where people of certain groups — racial, religious, and so on — can go temporarily to talk to and hang out with peers in a similar place without having to do the kind of cultural translation that a more diverse crowd might require." Wikipedia states that safe places are "a place where anyone can relax and be fully self-expressed, without fear of being made to feel uncomfortable, unwelcome or challenged on account of biological sex, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, cultural background, age, or physical or mental ability; a place where the rules guard each person's self-respect, dignity and feelings and strongly encourage everyone to respect others."

To my straightforward way of thinking, "safe space" sounds like an echo chamber, a place a person can go and feel confident that everyone else in the safe space will either agree with their opinions/ideas/choices or at least be prevented from voicing any disagreement. Gadzooks!! Really? Safe spaces are like a modern take on Hans Christian Anderson's fairy tale The Emperor's New Clothes where a person wants to be the naked Emperor but without the possibility of somebody blurting out "But you're not wearing any clothes!" I feel like if you're strutting around naked while pretending you're on a fashion runway, compassion demands that somebody needs to (gracefully) call you out. For all our sakes...

Safe spaces seem to be an over-reaction to the grievances suffered by people who have been offended by the adversity of what Kevin Gannon (above) called cultural translation - which is simply a euphemism for real life! What does it say about the condition of our society when we say to someone whose feelings have been hurt, "Enter this bubble, a safe space, where you can hang out and the rules of this bubble dictate that no one is allowed to disagree with you while you are inhabiting the safe space."

I've been offended in the course of my life; you have, too. My feelings have been hurt over serious matters and not-so-serious issues. I still remember when a high school acquaintance told me I was fickle. My personal faith in Jesus was severely ridiculed during my first summer working on the line crew at Georgia Power Company. I recall the sting of my sophomore year Homecoming date telling me she had a better offer. I've had people reject my sincere entreaty for forgiveness. People sleep during my sermons. I'm a GT fan living in the midst of Dawg Nation...I've had my feelings hurt! But I am not going to withdraw from real life and seek a friendlier alternate non-reality.

When I get offended? When I get my feelings hurt? I go to my safe space, which happens to be anywhere that I can escape the noise of life in order to center my heart and mind in the bond I have with my heavenly Father. An intimate chat room with God is the only authentic "safe space." Walking through the woods, visiting a monastery, sitting on the bank of a pond, laying in the grass while gazing at the sky, kneeling in a prayer closet, or staring down the waves on a windy beach...these are all safe spaces when my heart is calling out to Jesus. God tells me in 1 Peter 5:6-7 to humble myself under His mighty hand (*SAFE SPACE ALERT!!*) so that at the proper time He may exalt me, casting all my anxieties on Him, because He cares for me. If indeed Christ is our safe space then the gathered church must strive to be a safe space, too; a place of unconditional love and acceptance but also a place where we speak, in love, truth to one another.

Grace, peace, & Merry Christmas!! Love you, PK.