

Sometimes You Have to be a Karen—August 16, 2020
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Matthew 15: 21-28

²¹Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²²Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.” ²³But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” ²⁴He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” ²⁵But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” ²⁶He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” ²⁷She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” ²⁸Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

Titles for sermons don’t always come to me. I once had a call where the senior pastor liked to send out a “teaser” for the Sunday sermon in email on Fridays. He always wanted the title of my sermon with a “quote” for the Friday email. My titles were always so lame and generic because I often didn’t have my sermon done by Friday afternoon, but also, I just kind of suck at naming sermons. But the title for this sermon came to me right after reading the passage a few weeks ago.

So prepare for a sermon titled: “Sometimes you Have to be a Karen”
Our Karen, I know your name has been co-opted, and your name now has some negative thoughts attached to it. Know that we love you and appreciate you. I could also say “sometimes you have to be Pastor Meagan” because more often than not, I am the Karen that we read about in today’s gospel reading.

I appreciate this gospel reading because it really shows Jesus’ humanity. For days Jesus has been trying to find time to himself, time to pray, time to mourn the loss of his cousin John. Jesus has a heavy heart, and he needs alone time and time with God. He gets bits and pieces here and there, but he is always interrupted. He is trying again to have alone time, and this Karen (or Pastor Meagan) comes up to him wanting something. He is tired; we know that. He feels drained, and we know that too. He kept

reaching past his tiredness, and he kept giving, kept preaching, kept healing, kept feeding. Now he needs a moment, and here is this woman coming up to him, and of course she wants something from him. Jesus is tired, and like most tired humans, he snapped at her. And he snapped hard. He shamed her - calling her a dog. Jesus was quite mean here, and it is shocking. Here is a woman with a hungry child at home. She heard stories about how Jesus does healings and helps people, and my goodness, that Jesus man is in her neighborhood. So she took a risk, and she did something women were not supposed to do. She advocated for herself, and she asked Jesus for help. Then the exact opposite of what she expected happened. Jesus told her no. Jesus called her names. Jesus was mean to her. What a shock. This is not how we know Jesus to behave, and worst, this is not what she was expecting in her moment of desperation. She was at her physical breaking point, her daughter would starve, and she wasn't taking no, even from the messiah, for an answer.

This unnamed woman is a Karen. Or at least the way the name is being used - as a way to belittle a woman for speaking up. My kids will often call me Karen. I know my son has conversations with his twin best friends comparing their moms' Karen moments during the week. My kids have a doozy of a story to tell this week when a local business owner didn't like a non-political post I made on a neighborhood page, and he took it upon himself to help me understand by calling me out through a private message to me. He needed to educate me on his view while being very rude in the process. I asked him to stop, sharing that it felt like harassment because I did not ask for the private messages, and he just kept sending the messages. So I walked to his business to have a face-to-face conversation with him. When he wasn't at his business, I sent him a very kind message introducing myself, giving my background, and kindly asking him to no longer send me messages. I also said that I would like to have a face-to-face meeting with him this week so that he can at least say the things to the face of the person. When I acted like a Karen and told him that I am a person and not just an image on the computer his behavior changed. He apologized, and he wished me a happy birthday. He is still not happy to have the face-to-face meeting with me later today, but I am holding his feet to the fire and making him see me as a person. And ... my hope is that we can become supportive neighbors despite some different views once we sit down and have a conversation.

The world needs Karens. But the world also doesn't like strong women, and that is why they had to create a mocking name for strong women. But strong women can soften hearts.

The Karen in this gospel passage reminded Jesus that even she, a poor woman, deserves grace. And right now, we have a lot of strong women and a lot of tired people of color raising their voices and saying that everyone deserves respect, understanding, and grace. And those in power don't like to hear it, so they mock and call the women Karens and the people of color animals and criminals. Living under oppression has a way of keeping you quiet and knowing your place, and now people are not following the rules. The pattern of behavior is changing, and those with the privilege are tired of the crying and whining. We are tired of the Karens, and we want to be like Jesus, so we tell those crying for justice that they don't deserve it.

This is being like Jesus. Jesus got tired. Jesus got grumpy. Jesus got mean and hard hearted. But then a Karen softened his heart and helped him see her humanity and that even she, a dog, deserves the crumbs from the table. She sounded like a Karen, but in that moment, she was the mouth of God speaking to him telling him to get out of his self-pity and look at the person standing in front of him. See her for the beautiful creation she is and shower her with love and grace.

Guys, even Jesus got tired and grumpy. It happens to the best of us. We start to hear everything being said to us as an attack or a personal assault. We are tired; we are exhausted; we keep making these impossible decisions day after day; we keep reading about unimaginable situations happening in the news. Our souls are weary, and we are exhausted. And there will be times that we act like Jesus in this gospel, and we snap at someone. But I pray those are rare and that when we do, we have a Karen in our life who reminds us of how Jesus ended up responding to his Karen. He showed her compassion. He allowed his heart to be softened. He showed her love, respect, and grace. He gave that to her, and he gives it to us. Let us share it with others.

Amen.