

United We Stand, Divided We Fall

By Karen Mains

Karen Mains

Ken, I love you so much. I just want to tell you that. Lord, I would ask that you would anoint me today. I give myself to you as a vehicle, a human human vehicle for your expression, and help me to teach the things that you have been teaching me in a way that they can be learned. Pray this in the name of your son, my Lord Christ, amen. For ten years, God took me on that God Hunt that search. It was a wilderness of the soul of sorts.

The Church fathers teach us about desert spirituality. Well, we can learn desert spirituality in places that are not the desert. That is essentially a place where he takes us. And we are to meet with Him alone in Him only. And through death, through separation, through disease that almost took two of my children's life, through loneliness. He said to me, I am the Lord your God. I am the one who you shall serve. Only look to me, look to no other human. And so I learned that lesson that he was the ultimate relationship, that he would be father lover friend, that he would be caretaker, that he would be creative associate.

And I learned that lesson well, so that when I had need, like the handmaiden to her mistress, my eyes would be turned toward him. And then one morning, at the Communion rail, as I was kneeling to lift my hands to take Communion, I realized I was taking the bread from the hand of a man and that I could not serve myself Communion. I could not give myself that bread. I could not take that cup of wine unless it was served to me. There was a human vehicle that God used to give me those precious elements.

And I began another lesson, just as Ken has to learn another lesson. Just as Ken has sung to you, I began to see that God was teaching me that I needed to learn how to accept His love in the

midst of community, Christian community. And that's what I would like to talk to you about this morning. Let me read some scriptures to you. It may be helpful to you to explain that you have two excellent Biblicist, two classic expositional teachers teaching you this week. You are so fortunate to sit at their feet.

I am a communicator, not a theologian. And in fact, I'm a little iconoclastic. I sort of head into things by way of the back door, maybe to give you a fresh, different approach. And if you can make that distinction and accept our differences, I think the Lord has put a fabulous team together. This scripture comes to me over and over again. Ephesians 2:19. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and soul-journeys but fellow citizens with the Saints and of the household of God. And you are built upon the foundation of the Apostles in prophets.

Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone in whom all the building fitly framed together, grows unto a Holy temple in the Lord, in whom you are also built together for a fit habitation of God through the Spirit. Now all I want you to see in that scripture is its corporate nature. I want you to see that the writer is saying that we are not solo entities living unto ourselves, living out our Christian faith alone. Individualistic John Wayne running around in the Church. We are a corporate structure.

Now therefore, you are no longer strangers and that you is plural, plural, pronoun, no longer soul-journeys soul-journeys but fellow citizens with the Saints and of the household of God. And you are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets. In this faith community stretches back throughout history. It stretches back and around. It has breath and it has depth in whom all the building fitly framed together together grows. And then in the last verse in whom you are also built together for a fit habitation of God through the Spirit.

Now this is the corporate nature of the Scripture. We are called into a community of faith. You see, the Church is not a person. The Church is a people, the people of God. Do you know what Christ's major teaching theme was throughout the entire New Testament? Strangely enough, it wasn't getting people saved. Now, that was a major teaching thing, but it wasn't his major teaching thing. If you will go through the Scriptures as I have done and pick out the topics about which he preached, I think you will discover that his major preaching thing was the Kingdom of God.

Now we became Christians through an individual born again experience of an active birth of the soul so that we could live in the Kingdom. What is the Kingdom? It again is a corporate entity. A people called out to live out together. This life, this God life so the whole watching world can see in Christ says things like this. He says, the Kingdom is among you. The Kingdom is near. The Kingdom is close. The Kingdom is like a mustard seed. The Kingdom is like ten virgins. On and on.

He teaches about the Kingdom of God. There's a scripture that says he went about the cities and villages teaching and preaching about what that's right out of Scripture. What was he teaching about? He was teaching about the Kingdom of God after his resurrection, when he began to appear to his disciples. They still caught with their doubt in their grief. Acts tells us to whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs being seen of them for 40 days and speaking to them of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.

He is calling you to live out your life of faith amongst a people. Now let me tell you about this lesson that I have learned. I am learning and let me go into my life because I think that's the best way I can explain this lesson to you by telling you the stories of my life and let me relate it to the

fact of me being a writer, a writer. Who that's all she's ever wanted to do. Ever since she was a little girl, I had a mother who said to me, Not, how are you doing, Karen?

But what are you writing? She identified something in me and she encouraged it. My mother was an excellent poet and she knew that I had a longing in my heart. I had a teacher who said to me in school, Karen, if you don't write, you will always be unhappy. She was right. I am neurotic enough to be truly neurotic without writing. Don't laugh, Ken, but it's true. Had I not had that kind of expression, it would damn all up. And if I'm not writing, it dams up on the inside of me and I become very disturbed.

Well, to write, however, was a difficult journey for me because I am by nature, the most undisciplined woman that the Lord has ever created. And writing is a discipline. It is first and foremost a discipline, a discipline of the soul and of the mind and of the work itself, of the thinking process. But I did write and God helped me to become disciplined. And it's been a terrible struggle for me. In 1980, I was invited to travel around the world to the refugee camps of the world and write about the refugees.

And so I did. I left my family and Trek for seven weeks through Asia and Hong Kong and India and Pakistan, and I have been since that time in many of the trouble spots of the world. That's all I generally get to see. I don't stay often in the Hyatt. I stay in missionary homes or in little run down hotels and motels outside of missionary camps which are placed pardon me, refugee camps, which are places of despair. I came back thinking that I, of all the Christian writers, could probably only write this book, that I was very gifted.

And when I got into the project and the research, I realized that I was so human, I really could not present the despair of those people to a reading public that could care less about their despair. I wrote the book. It found its way into the world. It was never very successful. In fact, it's out of

print, but it won a prize. The Christophers gave it an award and I was notified of the award, a national award for my book, *The Fragile Curtain*, about the Refugees of the World.

On the day of my mother's funeral, my father had taken four long years to die, and then, two years after he died of the brain damage encephalitis, my mother died of a heart attack. On the day of her funeral, I was notified that I had won this award and that I would be invited to go to the St. Regis Hotel in New York City and receive my award. And frankly, I thought, oh, that's the last thing I care about. It was the day of my mother's funeral.

A little bit later, I began to realize that I would be on the East Coast and speaking events, and I would be close to New York. And it was probably the only prize I would ever win in my entire life. And so I thought I would go. And so I little housewife from West Chicago, Illinois, went to the region St. Regis Hotel, New York City and found myself amongst many luminaries, all of whom knew one another. There was the writer of *Chariots of Fire*. He's an Englishman.

He won the award that year, the head of the hockey team that had won the Olympics. Remember when the American hockey team won against the Russians? Jane Polly, was there just a whole gamut of folk from the entertainment world and the writing community, the man who had written *Asking for Trouble*, the book that was made into the cry freedom. Donald Woods, a journalist from South Africa who had been incarcerated house arrest for his work about Steve Bikel, was one of the winners of the prizes, and I was the only writer out of the evangelical community.

There are some 40,000 books that are printed every year. And my book about the message of the refugees and the fact that Christ is the refugee for each human heart, that we are all refugees won a prize. And it was like the Lord said to me, Karen, Just keep on with your work, do the work unto me, and I will use it in the world where I see fit. But I went away thinking all of these people knew one another. I didn't know a soul there.

And there is something about the creative community and collaboration that I am not experiencing. In fact, what I was experiencing in my writing was the utter loneliness. Because I'm an intuitive writer, not a trained writer. I don't know what I'm doing half the time. I just do it. And I began to take my little tin cup as publishers would come to me and ask me to do work for them. Evangelical publishers. And I would say there are many writers out there fine Christian writers who need one another.

And why don't you support a group of those pulling them together, letting them begin to help one another be as good as they possibly can be. And they all said, That's a wonderful idea, Karen. When you pull this together, please invite us. But I wanted them to underwrite it. And finally, Word Publishers gave me \$10,000 and the first writers group was pulled together. We called it the Criticisms Society, which is hard to say. I can't believe a bunch of writers chose that name for themselves, and we have met yearly.

But we have to fund ourselves. So the first year pulling together, someone came up with an idea fellow who'd been a McMillan editor of doing a serial murder mystery where you just received the chapters ahead of you. There was no plot and you wrote tagging it on the end of what you received. And so we did that. And we did it as a Lark. I didn't think any publisher would be dumb enough to pick it up. And first, we killed off the publishers. It was called Carnage at Christ Haven and Calvin Miller that stayed Baptist Southern Baptist preacher in his chapter. He has one of the bodies floating in the pool, bare butt up. Pardon me, this is a Christian College, but he did it. So it was just a Lark. We took slams at one another. We took slams at the pretentiousness of Christian writers and evangelical publishing. And as I said, we killed the publishers off right away Harper androe picked that book up for a \$20,000 advance on royalty

and an option on whatever else we would do after that was done. I think they're crazy, but it did fund our meetings for the next year.

In the second meeting, we went into manuscript evaluations, and I had a friend who had said to me, I would like to take the fragile curtain and put it into major feature length film. And I said, you're crazy. It would only be a documentary. It needs a storyline. So we met in various places and she and I collaborated and we put a narrative, a story on that film. And then she did the script writing. She's from the acting community. And she wants to be a scriptwriter is a fine scriptwriter.

And then we took it into manuscript evaluation. I had a group of people out of the Criticisms Society. Five of us, Steven Lawhead, some of you may know his work. Walt Wongren, who is American Book Award winner Lucy Shaw. Fine. Maybe one of the finest Christian poets in our country. Myself and Philip Yancy, excellent, excellent writer. His book Disappointment with God, just sold 60,000 copies in the first two months. It was released. It's a fine book, but we began to see in that manuscript evaluation that our work, as we submitted it to one another, would be much better submitting it to that community that trusted community than we ever could be on our own.

A little bit later, I got a call from my script writer, my collaborator, my friend Gwen Mansfield. And she said to me, Karen, the script is won a place in the New Harmony Project, and I was aware a bit of the New Harmony project. Let me divert a little bit. In Evansville, Indiana. There is a University, and it is called University of Indiana. Gary, Evansville. Why don't you come up? I'm going to introduce you, Gary Bayer, who is an actor here in Hollyweird. He calls it Hollyweird.

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And Gary is a part of the New Harmony Project. And on the board of the New Harmony Project. I'm trying to give you the story in full. So you have a concept of the community of God and how it works. Tell us about Evansville University and what happened there in the Theatre Department years ago.

Gary Bayer

I've been up all night long. Just.

Karen Mains

Act like you won't be mad at me for calling you up here. Okay?

Gary Bayer

All right. I wrapped up a recording session at 05:00 a.m.

I think what happened a number of years ago in the theater Department at the University of Evansville is that one or two are a group of community. We're praying for kids that were kind of wild and crazy that were in the theater Department. I was one. I did not know the Lord then. And years later, one of this group of people decided they got a burden. They'd become a believer and they got a burden to find out where all these people had scattered, to know that a number of them were in the entertainment industry.

So he tracked some of us down. Some of us on the East Coast, some of us on the West Coast brought us all together, got a little grant, didn't write a book like that, but got a little grant, brought us all together. And we spent about two days in a hotel. By this time, some were writers. One was a writer, producer of the Cosby show, and another one was a writer of plays. A few of us were out here as actors on the West Coast brought us together for two days.

We shared and just spent time together. The fascinating thing was that most of us had become believers by this point in our lives, all in separate directions, but had become believers. And what came out of it was a common desire to see the Lord glorified in the mainstream of the entertainment industry.

And. The question came up first is, let's run this by the Lord and see what the Lord wants. And out of it surfaced a verse that we have held onto. And I thought about this in relation to community. Thought a lot about it when you were singing Ken, is that when community functions at its very best, we are so attentive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. And the verse was and it is constantly shaped this now three year old New Harmony Project. Unless the Lord build the house, the builders labor in vain.

And so in that little time, when we all came together and God started putting together community, we decided how best if he wants us to move ahead, can we affect the entertainment industry? And the first thing that came out was writers. You cannot do anything unless you've got people writing material. So we chewed. And a lot of Wangarn's input was, what are we looking for? For writers to reflect the community of Christ into the greater community of mankind. And it was trying to find writers who were birthing out things of moral vision, things that challenged the very values a man lives by daily that were supportive of faith, family and society.

And so we started finding writers like that. And then we created a professional environment in New Harmony, Indiana. And there's Christian and nonchristian. They come into this little community now and we bring them in. We give them camera crew. We give them professional actors. We fly about 40 or 50 people from both coasts into this little tiny town in Southern Indiana. And we try to till the soil. And we watch what God does.

It's been a phenomenal three years.

Karen Mains

Thank you, Gary. Very kind to come up like this. Now, let me tell you here, you had a theater Department in Louisville, in Evansville, Indiana. Someone prayed. Those people went out and graduated from school. Many of them became Christians. Some of those people were involved in the writing of Roseanne The Cosby Show. They are now involved in producing dramas, and God did a work in their life and then called them back together to encourage the writing process. And I had a script that my friend had collaborated with me on, and she was a script writer.

But I got plunked into that process with my little book, The Fragile Curtain that had begun ten years, probably before, and won a prize, a national prize. And as I was there, I began to realize that this is what God is calling us to folk. He is calling us to be the household of God in whatever arena you find yourself, you will never be able to do alone before God. What you can do in covenantal relationships in Christian community, you must take the bread from the hand of your fellow man, and you in this dark world will not be able to do what he has called you to do unless you understand that that is the nature of the Church.

The Church is the people of God. And on our broadcast, we encourage people to find Christians in their work community and to pray together and to give their lives to one another in these relationships of Covenant. And so I would encourage you to do that here. At this time, God did a deep work in my heart in New Harmony. I was sort of an accessory after the fact. But as I sat there and heard people like Gary Bayer, who is a professional, fine actor, read lines that I had something to do with.

God began to stir it in my heart and say to me, Karen Mains, I gifted you. You mustn't waste your gift, do the best that you can do on whatever level it is and send it out into the world. And I

also felt as though I had come home. We creative types are really odd. I had a friend who said to me, Karen, you look like you've got it together on the outside. But on the inside. You is weird as I am. And she'd have lots of psychiatric institutionalization.

And she was bright. And sometimes I feel alone with my creative aconocasm. And when I was at New Harmony for that little bit of time, I realized that we were all speaking the same language in most of my life. I spoke in my second tongue, and I did it pretty well. But when I was there, we were all from the same country speaking the same language. And I had a place on this Earth amongst those people. Now I didn't need to be amongst it all the time.

Actually, all that creative stimulation would blow my circuits very quickly. I just needed to know that it was there and that I belonged. And then I had come home, come back. And that is what God has for you somewhere in the Church, a place where you fit, where you belong, where you're not alienated, where people give to you that human touch of love. And in that you experience Christ, surprisingly and amazingly, let me give you three suggestions. I want you, first of all, to change your attitude from the individualistic mindset that says, I will do it alone. I want you to begin thinking we, when we were in the inner city of Chicago, the Blacks during the 60s and 70s taught us many things. And one of the things I realized that when black people at that time said, I they meant we because they thought corporately. When I heard a black person say, I they were bringing with them the whole force of their community. They meant we. And that's what I would like for you to experience. Begin changing that think Kingdom, corporate. The Church of people find a Covenant relationship, begin to create it.

Ask yourself, who do I have that I can go to, to whom I can show the best of my soul, its beauty, its glory and its pain, the worst of it. It's messiness and then form either a one to one relationship or a small group of you who Covenant that you will be more than God before God is a people

than you could possibly be alone. And then go about meeting, make a regular commitment to one another and a minimal. Pray for one another every time you meet and search the scripture.

As far as how God is teaching you and talking to you, let me finish with this little story. And then I'll be done. I was in Memphis, Tennessee, and the women who picked me up from the airport. We had a little time said, oh, we're going to rush you down to the Peabody Hotel because there's something special that happens at 10:00. Well, we rushed from the airport down to the Peabody Hotel. It's a Memphis landmark and very elegant. It had just been remodeled, sort of a reclamation project in the middle of the city.

And there was as we stood in this room with the dark Pamela and the Oriental rugs and the gorgeous flowers and vases. All around. All of a sudden there was sort of a blair on the loudspeaker and music, and an announcer came on and said, we welcome you to the Peabody Hotel. And they gave us the history of the hotel and pointed out the marble fountain in the middle of the hotel and told about it and then said, we would like to welcome you to a 50 year tradition, the parade of the Peabody Ducks.

Well, I noticed that up to the fountain there was a red carpet that came from the elevator. And all of a sudden, after this announcement was made, there was March music that came on. Everyone looked toward the elevator, and all of a sudden the elevator doors opened. I couldn't see anything because of the crowd. And then I realized that three Ducks were waddling out of the elevator down the red carpet and they jumped them into the marble fountain in the middle of the lobby. Now this happens twice a day.

They have a duck master who takes care of the ducks. He brings them down in the elevators from the 12th floor. He points his little stick and they waddle out. And then at the end of the day, the duck master comes down and they waddle back, always on this red carpet. And we laughed

about this all day. It was absolutely absurd. In fact, the pastor in the evening of the Church where I was speaking said, It's so absurd. You have to take it seriously. The truth is this.

I want you to listen to me. We Christians are unafraid in the world before watching eyes before children who watch us before our spouses, if we have them before friends, before the community here, and we have it within our power to become a Holy people, men and women who command respect because our lives are significantly different from those of the world around us. Or if we choose, we can be waddling Ducks on parade. Absurd. In the 14th century Europe, a parade of another kind took place.

It was called the Dance Macabre, the Dance of Death. There were frescoes painted with skeletons dancing their death with all kinds of people, commoners lawyers, gribners, women, children. And the reason the focus of the minds of that century was on death because was the Black Plague was sweeping through Europe. It swept through Europe on very many occasions, returned for the fourth round in 1388 to 1390, reducing Europe's population by 40% to 50%. People would go to bed and they would die before they had a chance to wake up.

It was just incredible what happened during that time. The decimation of the population death was dancing. They were living in the midst of the Das Macabre. The 20th century folk faces its own dance of death. We live in a world tipping on the edge of nuclear destruction, where drought and starvation. Roman checked in countries whose names we scarcely know where AIDS threatens to be the next lethal disease. The plague of our time. How can we settle for being Ducks on parade? Superficial Christians eating meager fear waddling out of little red carpets and jumping into the fountains.

Nonsensically. We need Holy people a Holy people. The church, don't abandon the church because it disappoints you get in there and work with the church. We need spiritual men and

women. We need to commit ourselves to lives of saintliness together. But you are a chosen generation. A Royal priesthood. Notice the corporate quality of this from one Peter two nine. A Holy nation, a peculiar people that you should show forth the praises of Him, who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light in time past.

You were not a people. But now you are the people of God. And I call you to Christian community. I call you to the sacrifice and the Covenant and the work that it takes to become a people who say we will make a difference. We will make a difference in the entertainment community. We will make a difference in the medical community. We will make a difference in the world and the world will look at us and they will not see Ducks waddling on parade. They will see people marching marching marching to the drumbeat of the drummer Christ. Marching to a different tune a Holy people holding hands advancing into the world infiltrating taking the gospel of Christ behind the drummer Christ do you hear the marching?

Do you hear the marching? I hear it. I hear it coming. It is not a dance of death. It is the people of God joining together Walking into the world marching behind the drummer Christ and the drum beats and the drum beats and the drum beats and they are a Holy people chosen a priesthood who takes into this dark world the light of Christ. Let it be so let it be I pray Amen. God go with you. You were dismissed. But don't forget what I have said.