

**The Memorial of Karen Keller:
August 9, 2026**

In the beginning
There was nothing.

The earth was formless and void.
Empty.

And God said.
Let there be light.
And so it began.
Then God created all things...
Out of the nothing. Absolutely nothing.

The way we say it is... Ex nihilo.

But not everything...
Was created out of nothing.

Not the pinnacle of creation.
Not the apple of his eye.
Not the culmination of God's work.

For that he used dirt... from the ground.

And just so you know...
It wasn't clean dirt.
Not perfect dirt.
Just plain old dirty dirt.

God moved the dirt into...
A human shaped pile...

And then.
Breathed life into the dirt.
And made us.

God took something mundane and ordinary...
And declared it beautiful.
Actually God MADE it beautiful.

Ecclesiastes 3:11... says...
God has made everything beautiful...
In its own time.

And you know what else...
The bible teaches us...

That you and I...
But especially on this day...
I want to point out...

That our good friend...
Your grandma...
Your Mee Maw...
Your mom...
Your wife... Karen...
Was created...
In the image of God.

And that doesn't mean...
That God looks like us...
Two arms... two legs...
Goofy faces.

It means... that she...
Was like God in some significant way.

She liked to do...
What God likes to do.

She created...
Beautiful things...

She reflected...
Love and goodness...
In the world around her.

She loved to laugh...
She loved to care...
She loved to love...
Just like her Father in heaven.

It was inside of her...
To create.
To bring order out of chaos.
To make things beautiful.

So never in my 33 years of ministry...
Have I had a request...
Like Karen made...
Of me.

One day... when I was out visiting...
She looked at me... and said...
Pastor I want you to do the sermon...
And if you could...
Can you come...
And preach it to me...
Before my service.

I didn't know what to say.
She caught me totally off guard.
But eventually I wrapped my mind...
Around the idea...

If Karen wants me to preach for her... by God...
I will preach for her... a congregation of one...

But unfortunately... I ran out of time.

So she will just have to listen today.
And I hope... I sincerely hope...
That the words of my mouth...
Will make her heart sing...

AND listen... I know the truth...
I know that I'm not the greatest preacher...
Who ever walked God's green earth.

But... you wouldn't know it.
The way Karen talked... about me...
The way she reacted...
After church... most Saturday nights...
The way she built me up...

You would have thought...
I was Billy Graham.
I'm not.

But she saw me...
Trying to do good...
And even if that night's sermon...
Was a steaming pile of mess...

She made me feel...
Like it was something significant... and beautiful.

She had a way... just like her God...
Of making the ordinary...
Beautiful.

And she did that to everyone.
She was so genuinely thankful...
For who people were...
And what people did...
For the common good.

Janet and I were talking about Karen...
And Janet said...
She always...
Lifted her up..
For singing.

She bragged on Jim and Linda...
About what they had to offer...

And when it came to her family...
Forget about it.
Her grandchildren.

The sun rose and set...
On those kids.

You know that right???

And then... when I was out visiting...
With the family...
I said to Karen...
Indicating her family...
And the chaos that was happening...
Around her at that moment...

I said... well... this is quite a mess...
You have created... Karen.

And Kris said...
Yeah... but it's a beautiful mess.

That's right.
Beautiful... because that's what Karen saw.
In each one of us.

With all of our flaws...
And our shortcomings...
And our humanness...

She saw us as beautiful...
What a tremendous gift.

But there is something else...
To point out about Karen...
She was beautiful...
AND she was bossy.

I don't know if she was always bossy...
But in these last days...
Whew boy howdy!

But you all know the truth.
It was bossiness...
That was born out of love.

She was worried...
About her good friend Caroline...
And how the church...
Was going to be decorated.

And who was going to step up...
Because she and Caroline had a vision...
Of how to make this place... beautiful.

She was worried about her grandkids...
And how they might make her a priority...
Instead of going to school...

And doing what they needed to do...
To live a wonderful productive life.

She was worried about her own kids...
That they were giving up too much...
Of their life...
In these last days...

And I know... that is something...
That you... Kris and Chad...
Will NEVER EVER regret.
Spending these days...
With your mom.

Because in the midst of the ugliness...
You were right there with her.
Making her laugh.
Helping her live...
Taking care of her broken body.
And allowing her...
Giving her the opportunity...
To love YOU.

And Rick.
She was so worried about you...
I think... just living from day to day.
That you wouldn't know what to do...
If she weren't there to tell you...
What to do.

And maybe there is some truth... in that.

But you understand...
What she was really saying... right?

The reason she worried about you...
Is because she loved you...
In the depth of her soul...
With all of her heart...
With all of her strength...

And yes... I know...
It was mutual...
You loved her too.

But I also know...
Because she said it...
In front of me... so many times...
She loved you.
MORE.

But. Even when we see...
All the beauty and love... of this world.
It's still ends up... broken sometimes.

Sometimes things don't go...
The way we want them to go.

Sometimes... these fleshy bodies...
Don't do what we want them to do.

And sometimes...
Because of the brokenness...
Of our bodies...
And this world...

The goodness can become bad
The beauty can become ugly.
The life can become death.

Which breaks our hearts.
And makes us wonder...

O God... why did you make things so beautiful?
Why did you make me love so deeply?
Why did you make this life... so good...
So that I would miss it...
When it is gone.

And we think...
We have nothing.
Nothing left.
Nothing good.
No life.
No hope.
Nothing.

But as I already said...
It is in God's nature...
The essential being of God...
To create out of nothing.

To create...
Life out of nothing.

To create...
Hope out of nothing.

To create beauty.
Out of nothing.

And as you know...
Death is nothing.
It is just... empty and void...

Or at least... it was.
Until God created again.
And death was defeated...
And hope was reborn.

That's why I picked... John chapter 1...
For the gospel lesson today.

Let me read the first part again.

In the beginning was the Word,
And the Word was with God,
And the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God.
All things came into being through him,
And without him not one thing came into being.
What has come into being in him was LIFE,
And the LIFE was the light of all people.
The light shines in the darkness,
And the darkness did not overcome it.

See. The temptation is to believe...
That there is nothing...
After this life.

That it will continue to be...
Formless and void...
And empty.

But that's where God stepped in... again.
And just like in the beginning...
When God's voice...
Echoed and resonated...
Into the emptiness...
Of nothing.

Again... the Word of God...
The power of God.
The voice of God.

Echoes and resonates...
Into the darkness and the void...
Of death.
Of hopelessness...
Of despair.

And God creates LIFE.

The voice says...
I am not done.
My creation is not done.

Death does not get the last word.
I get the last word.

You do not live as someone who has no hope.
Because I create hope...

And the Voice...
Goes into that place of death...
Goes into the place of our fear...
And commands and comforts...

And says... Karen.
You are not done.
You are not alone.
You are not forgotten.
You are not lost.
You are mine.
So wake up.
Get up my child.
And come home.
Come home... to me.

You are mine.
And I am yours.

And nothing...
Nothing... that empty and void...
Cannot change that.

And then... today...
While we all... watch and wait.
While we look for some hope.
While we pray for God...
To give us something...

In this present darkness.
In our deep heart-broken void.
Into this emptiness...

God is speaking again.
The Word is here.
And God is creating again.

Light has broken into the darkness.
Life has come into this world.
Jesus has won.
And he leads the way.

Now... everything has changed.
The rules of life and death... have changed.
The physics of how things work... have changed.
Creation itself... has changed...

And Karen... she has changed.
She has been marked with...
The cross of Christ.

And Karen... has been sealed...
By the Holy Spirit.

And Karen has been claimed...
By Jesus himself.

Jesus...
The one who brings...
Life out of death.
Hope out to despair.
And creates something out of nothing.

He is the Living Word of God.

Karen.
Belongs to him...
And that's just the way it is...
Now and forever.

Amen.