

**Katie Langston 00:16**

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**Linda Booth 01:00**

Welcome to another "Coffee Connect" podcast. My name is Linda Booth. I spent 23 years of my life serving as an apostle in Community of Christ, and during those years I've collected stories of how God interacts with ordinary people. Since I was a little girl, I've loved stories, and during this holy season, when we celebrate Jesus's birth, I've been thinking about and reading Luke's Gospel story of Mary's encounter with the angel Gabriel, the shepherds watching their sheep on the hillside, and the angel's message, "I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people. To you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is the Messiah, the Lord." Dwelling on that sacred story has reminded me of two stories that I want to tell you. One is an old story told to me by my Grandmother Timm, and the other is a modern-day story told to me by my friend Laurie, and it's about her son Eric. Every Christmas Eve, my sister, brother and I spent the night with our grandparents, while our mother and father prepared for Christmas morning. At our grandparents' humble home on Forest Street in Independence, Missouri, Grandmother would tell us Christmas stories, and the one I remember is about a little child, and this is, sort of, how I remember it. Once upon a time on Christmas Eve, a long, long time ago, when there were only a few cars and most people walked to stores, a little child wandered all alone through the streets of a city. The streets were filled with people shopping, and laughing, and greeting one another. Many were hurrying home with sacks of presents for family and friends. No one seemed to notice the child dressed in ragged clothes, shivering in the cold. He walked down a street, passing home after home, stopping at each to look longingly into windows, watching children decorate Christmas trees and play together. Surely, the child thought to himself, where there is so much happiness, some of it may be for me. So, with timid steps, he went to the door of a large house. Through the window he could see a tall Christmas tree and lots of presents beneath it. He gently knocked on the door. It was opened by a large man who looked at the suffering child and said, "Go on now. There's no room for you here." The street grew colder and darker as the child passed many houses and thought; Is there someone who will share Christmas with me? Farther and farther down the street he wandered, until he was in the neighborhood with smaller houses. He stopped and looked into a house where children were singing and playing together. A little girl came to the window and looked out into the dark street where the snow had begun to fall, and she saw the child but she frowned and she shook her head saying, "Go away now. Come back another time. We're too busy to take care of you." Again and again, the little child knocked on a door or window pane, and at each place he was refused admission. One mother feared he might have some illness that her children could catch. One father said he only had enough for his own children. And one teenage boy told him to go home where he belonged and not to bother folks. The hours passed and the child grew weary, and up ahead he saw a beam of light shining through a little window. Maybe they will share their Christmas with me, he thought. In this house, a mother was reading the

story of Jesus's birth to her children and when she heard the tap on the door, she said, "Run quickly and open the door. No one must be left out in the cold on Christmas Eve." So, the children ran to the door and they opened it wide, and the mother saw the ragged stranger, and she held out both of her hands and drew him into the warm, bright light. She held him on her lap, wrapped a warm blanket around him and said to her children, "We must love him and share our Christmas too." The mother placed the little boy on a stool by the fire, and as she finished the dinner preparation, she heard her children calling her. "Mother, come, look. Come quick." The room had filled with a warm, beautiful light." She looked where the ragged child had sat, his ragged clothes had changed to garments white, and beautiful. But most glorious of all was his face, which shown with a light so dazzling that they could scarcely look upon it. As they looked at one another in awe, and then back to the child, he had disappeared. The astonished children turned to their mother, and said in a whisper, "Oh, Mother, he must have been the Christ child."

### **Linda Booth 06:19**

I remember that story that Grandmother told, and she always had ended with something like this. Each Christmas Eve and every day of the year, the Christ Child wanders the streets. For those who take him in, it's the best Christmas, the best day ever. I can still hear my grandmother's voice when I think of this story. That old fashioned story reminds me to treat everyone as if they were Jesus Christ. Now the story that my friend Laurie told me teaches me what it means to embody Christ's love for all people, even those we may never meet. During the Advent season, my friend, Laurie, called me one morning in my office to share what her son Eric had done. Lauri was trying to teach her only son the meaning of Christmas. So, she took him to a Walmart in Olathe, Kansas, where a large Christmas tree stood near the entrance. White pieces of paper were attached to the tree with decorative green and red ribbons. On each slip of paper was a number and a description of the child, the child's gender, age, clothing, sizes, grade, etc. Now, Eric spent a long time walking around the tree, deliberately looking for a card that described a boy much like himself, his age, about his size and grade level, and when he was satisfied with his selection, he wanted to go shopping for the boy right away, but Laurie didn't have time, so the shopping expedition was postponed. That night, Eric prayed for the unnamed boy, praying that this Christmas would be the best Christmas ever for him. The next night, he said the same prayer. He also began to ask his mom when they could go shopping. Eric continued to pray for the boy and beg Laurie to go shopping. Finally, the long-anticipated shopping day arrived. And you know what? Laurie wanted to buy clothes for the child and Eric was upset. Clothes won't make this the best Christmas ever. But they compromised. And so, Laurie picked out some jeans and shirts, and Eric was allowed to pick out one inexpensive toy. That night, Eric prayed again for the boy. After prayers, Eric turned to his mom and said, "I want to give him my bicycle." "Oh, no," said Laurie. "You just got that bike for your birthday. And when spring comes, you won't be able to go riding with your friends." But Eric persisted. "All right," Laurie finally said. "You think about it. And if you decide that that's what you want to do, then you can give him your bike." Eric and Laurie wrapped the boy's presents and took them to the car for delivery to the Salvation Army, and Laurie opened the car trunk. They stored the presents and then they lifted Eric's brand new bike and they put it into the trunk. God uses our prayers to transform us. Praying for a little boy whom he would never meet, changed Eric. He wanted the boy to have the best Christmas ever. As he prayed, the boy became his friend, his brother. Eric's generous gift brought him joy. It was the best Christmas present that Eric could ever received. This Christmas season, look for the Christ Child in your neighbor, in your friends, in strangers and even the person you may never meet.

For loving like Jesus is like giving the gift of Jesus, and that's the best Christmas gift ever, and it's the best gift you can give every day of the year.

**Josh Mangelson** 10:37

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