

Katie Langston 00:16

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Linda Booth 00:59

Welcome to another episode of Coffee Connect. My name is Linda Booth and I'm a storyteller. I heard and collected stories of God's interactions with ordinary people as I served as a Community of Christ Apostle for nearly 22 years. I believe each story is a modern day scripture. These stories are holy and they're inspiring and I believe they're also transforming. Just as the Bible speaks in many voices, and tries to capture in words people's divine encounters with God, people today also attempt to articulate their divine experiences. And some of their stories are complex, but others simply reveal God was there. The story I want to share with you started in 1998, two days after I was ordained to serve as one of the first two women Apostles in Community of Christ. The story's about my unusual friendship with a group of Restorationist Elders. Now, if you don't know who a, Restoration is, Restorationists are a group of people who separated from Community of Christ around 1984 when Prophet President Wallace B. Smith, brought inspired council to the International Conference which allowed for the ordination of women. This council was approved and included as Section 156 of Community of Christ's Doctrine and Covenants. And, so, let me tell you of that story.

Linda Booth 02:37

So, as I said, in 1998, two days after I was ordained to serve as an Apostle, I was driving home one evening after a World Conference worship service. Unexpectedly, I pulled into the dark parking lot of a Restoration Branch, parked the car and began to pray for this group of people I didn't know and seemingly had few beliefs in common with. I remember thinking how strange this impulse was. No one from a Restoration Branch would accept my ministry as a woman. They certainly wouldn't acknowledge my ordination as an Apostle. I didn't think much about this unusual experience until, uh, two months later when Diane Kyser called and asked if I would meet with a group of Restoration Elders. One was her cousin, Bob. I agreed and on a Sunday afternoon date was set. I prayerfully drove the Park Hill Congregation in Blue Springs, Missouri, with a lot of trepidation. We gathered in a typical church classroom with the worn table and metal chairs. And around the table were Diane, Bob, who was the pastor of a Restoration Branch, his two counselors, and four pastors of congregations that had remained in Community of Christ even though they did not ordain women. Other than Diane and myself, of course, all were men. The meeting began with several prayers followed by a cordial conversation to get to know each other. At the end of the meeting, Bob looked at me and said, I like you. I replied, Well, I like you, too. And we all agreed to meet again in a month. Those monthly meetings expanded to nearly 30 Restoration men, myself and Diane. Interestingly, they asked me to lead all the meetings. We always began with several prayers. Our agenda was simply listening to the painful stories of the many men who were silenced when they disagreed with and protested the call of women to priesthood. Some legally were prohibited from visiting family graves near a Community of

Christ congregation because of a restraining order. Many talked about the stress on relationships when they left the church while family and friends chose to stay with Community of Christ. They said they couldn't talk about church with these loved ones. They didn't attend family weddings or funerals that weren't in their chosen Restorationist congregations. They yearned to be able to worship together again. I began to call the group of Restoration group, men, the Restoration Reconciliation Committee because that seemed to describe what God was doing in our midst, bringing peace, reconciliation, and healing of the Spirit. We decided to sponsor a Restoration Hymn Festival where we could worship together and focus on what we had in common, our belief in Jesus Christ. There were only two places where my Restoration brothers felt comfortable meeting. One was Stone Church in Independence, which seats about 600 people, and the other was the Auditorium across from the Community of Christ Temple, which seated about 6,000 people. In faith, we scheduled the Restoration Hymn Festival on a fall evening in the Auditorium. Communicating the festival was mostly by word of mouth. That evening, nearly 4,000 people attended. As they entered the chamber, images of Jesus Christ were displayed on the big screen in front of the rostrum. The service was presided over by two men, one from the Restoration Branches and one from Community of Christ. Men and women from both faith movements read scriptures, interspersed between hymns that we all loved.

Linda Booth 06:52

As we stood to sing The Spirit of God Like a Fire is Burning, the Spirit flowed and people cried tears of joy because for the first time in more than 15 years, they were worshiping with family who had been split by the separation. When I left the Auditorium about an hour after the service ended, people still were standing in the aisles talking, sharing, enjoying the company of those that they had been separated from so many years. We have a second successful Restoration Hymn Festival and then my field assignment changed and I no longer met with the men I now called my brothers in Christ. You know, if a group of men who don't believe God calls women to priesthood can meet for two years with a woman Apostle and together plan two Restoration Hymn Festivals, then there is hope for a world divided by race, culture, politics, or religion, etc. As this diverse group sat together, listening to each other's stories, and grew to love one another, the Enduring Principles, blessings of community, and unity in diversity, lived among us. God was present, uniting us in amazing ways.

Josh Mangelson 08:23

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