

**Katie Langston 00:17**

You're listening to an extra shot episode on the Project Zion Podcast, a shorter episode that lets you get your Project Zion fix in between our full length episodes. It might be shorter timewise, but hopefully not in content. So regardless of the temperature at which you prefer your caffeine, sit back and enjoy this Extra Shot.

**Linda Booth 01:00**

Hello, Coffee Connect listeners. My name is Linda Booth, and I host this podcast, and I love stories. I collect stories of how God interacts with ordinary people. For me, each story is a modern day scripture. It's holy. It's inspiring. It's transforming. For 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. Some of their stories are complex, others simply reveal God was there. God continues to reach out to people today. And if we pay attention, God is all around us in nature and the city in joy and sorrow, in the ordinary and sublime, in the quiet and roar of life. And when I'm intentionally paying attention, God is there and I don't have to search for the first story I'm going to tell you about is about a woman that I saw. Well, I didn't really see her. You'll understand what I mean. Several years ago, I attended a large reunion or family camp at Graceland University. There were about 300 people gathered in the commons area to register and as I walked toward the table to find my name, tag and room assignment, I passed behind a woman sitting at a table talking with a small group of people. As I approached her I slowed to see tattoos that covered her body from the base of her hairline, across her shoulders, down her back as far as I could see and down her arms. Now these weren't your typical black and green tattoos. They were Technicolor works of art. Mystical creatures in vibrant greens, reds, blues, purples, oranges, and yellows. As I passed her try not to be too conspicuous I thought, "Who invited this woman to this reunion?" I looked for her during the week, but I couldn't find her. Perhaps because I'd only seen her tattoos and I hadn't looked at her face. The end of the week during a morning devotion, the tattooed woman stood before us to share her story. She had been raised by a single mother who kicked her out of their apartment when she was 15 and her mother's boyfriends began to pay more attention to her. At first she stayed in the homes of high school friends. And when she wore out her welcome, she ended up on the streets, engaged in destructive behaviors and was arrested. A Community of Christ woman visited the city jail. The tattooed young woman said she ignored her because this Christian woman shared stories about Jesus and prayed with the women. The tattooed woman didn't want to hear so she said she stood in the corner with her back to the visiting minister. Now the only way the judge would allow her to be released from jail was for her to go to a halfway house run by the woman minister. The girl wasn't pleased but was her only ticket out of jail. In Marsha's home this young woman began to feel the hardness of her heart soften. She began to listen as Marsha told faith stories. She let Marsha pray for and eventually with her. Marsha invited her to a Community of Christ congregation where people loved her unconditionally accepted her despite what she had done, and invited her to follow Christ in the waters of baptism, which she did. And then this beautiful young woman began to sing her story of God's marvelous love for the world. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found was blind, but now I see." As her rich alto voice shared her story of God's amazing grace in her life. The congregation

saw Jesus reflected in her. Grace flowed freely as her story merged with ours, and connected in powerful ways.

**Linda Booth 05:51**

So here's another connection, how people's stories intersect, and how they become sacred stories. This is a story about a man named Earl. I was invited to preach in a congregation in rural Mississippi and the sanctuary was packed. As I made my way to the front, I stopped to talk with an elderly gentleman in a wheelchair. He introduced himself this way. "I'm the newest member of this congregation, and I'm 93." I asked him, "Do you have family who attend here?" Because I wondered about Earl's recent baptism and how he was connected to this community. "No" he said, "I don't have any family. These folks are my family." Of course, I wanted to hear Earl story. The pastor of the congregation, Steven, was picking up a prescription from the pharmacy on his way home from work, and the pharmacist asked him if he would be driving past a particular road on his way home. Now, this is a rural community. This could never happen, where I live in Lee's Summit, Missouri. When Steven said he would take the prescription, the pharmacist enlisted him to deliver it to Earl's home, and he explained that Earl was homebound and had trouble getting his medicines. So Stephen agreed to help. When Stephen knocked on the door of the small home, Earl warmly greeted him and invited him to come on in and Steven was shocked and then greatly concerned about the conditions of rural's home. The smell of mold was overpowering. He could see black mold on some walls near the ceiling. The interior didn't look like it had been cleaned in years. Now some members of the congregation participated in what they called Neighbors Saturday, and different crews would gather several Saturdays a month to help neighbors who are church members, friends and strangers in need. So Steven asked Earl if he and some members from his congregation could come by the next Saturday to help and Earl agreed and express great gratitude. Well, the next Saturday, three couples entered Earl's home. They discovered Earl's roof had never been repaired after Hurricane Katrina, it leaked. The clothes in his closet were wet and moldy. And the list of needed repairs was long. They got busy. One woman took Earl's clothes to a laundromat to wash and dry it and other started cleaning his home. And one man made a detailed list of needed repairs to make Earl's home safe and comfortable. Perhaps the most important thing they did that day was to sit and talk with Earl. They listen to his story. It was obvious he didn't have many visitors. He told them all his family were dead or moved away. The congregation's members promised Earl they would be back the next Saturday. They ended the day hands linked in a circle thanking God for Earl's life and praying for him. People arrived at Earls house on the next Saturday and Saturdays they were after and during the week, and they replaced the roof. They delivered food they stopped to visit. They came by to pick him up for church on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings. And they all prayed with Earl and as a result of a congregation witnessing to and loving an elderly man, Earl became the newest member of their church family. Since his baptism, there have been many newest members, because this congregations disciples are vibrant witnesses of Jesus Christ.

**Linda Booth 09:55**

And so my last story about connect Action is about Aubrey, Chris and Hilary. After the Tri-City congregation in, let's see Kentucky, sold its church building and moved into a commercial building and Mayfield Kentucky to be closer to the children who attended peace club. I was invited to come and see their new church home. I arrived on a Friday and after dinner with Kathy and John, we drove to the new

building, where about 40 children were gathered to meet with me. And I shared a little bit about why I follow Jesus. And then I asked those children why they follow Jesus. And many of their answers were a surprise to me because they were so profound. One little girl named Audrey, about a five year old with auburn hair, and a sprinkle of freckles across the bridge of her nose, she raised her hand and answered, "I follow Jesus because I love him so very much." Saturday evening brought a cookout at the pastor's farm. There were hot dogs and marshmallows roasted on a bonfire. Hay rides and fellowship. hay bales circled the fire. And I saw Aubrey standing next to a tall, thin man with blond hair and a red baseball cap turned to the side of his head. And as he reached take off his hand, I realized he must be her father. I went to them and I introduced myself to Chris her father. And I told him how special I thought Audrey was. I repeated her answer about why she followed Jesus Christ and he smiled. He obviously was pleased. I asked him to tell me his story. And he did. Chris was raised in the St. Louis, Missouri area by parents who made and sold drugs. And because he hated this lifestyle, he saved enough money to buy a bus ticket that took him to Mayfield, Kentucky. There he got a job in a candle factory. And he met a young woman named Hillary. They moved in together. And when Aubrey was born, Chris and Hillary decided they wanted a better life for her. Hillary had occasionally gone to church when she was a child. And they decided they wanted to Aubrey to know about God and Jesus. They started attending a Bible Church near their apartment, and they liked it there. They liked hearing the Bible stories of Jesus. They bought a Children's Bible for Aubrey, and they began to read it in to her each night before bed. One Sunday, the preacher asked them to stand up where they were sitting in the midst of the congregation. And he pointed at them and he told them that because they weren't married, they were living in sin. And if they didn't change their ways, he said they and their daughter would go to hell. Chris and Hillary took their daughter's hands and they left the building, never to return. Hillary got a new job at a donut shop. Each Sunday John would come in to buy dozens and dozens of doughnuts for all the children attending the Mayfield Community of Christ. Each Sunday he talked with Hillary, he'd asked about our family. He learned about Aubrey and he saw her photo on Hillary's phone. And he invited offered a peace club, something that they did there. And that's how the church grew because of the children's peace club. Because John was so kind, Chris and Hillary decided to give peace club a chance. And Chris told me, "They were all so kind. We've been attending church here every Sunday for a while now. We love this church. And guess what? Hillary and I got married right here. The church bought even bought our wedding dress. This is the church we have always looked for." So my friends, you see, people are looking, they're searching for. They're needing and yearning for a good friend, someone who will connect with them, who will listen to their story, and join their story together. And so you go out, please, and share your story with others and ask others about their stories. As we listen together, we do become friends.

### **Josh Mangelson 14:49**

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