

Coffee Connect | Meeting Strangers | Colinda's Story

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SPEAKERS

Linda Booth

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Welcome to this episode of Coffee Connect, a podcast about ordinary people's encounters with God. My name is Linda booth. I've been blessed to travel the world as a minister in Community of Christ, having served as an apostle for 20 plus years. And I love stories about people who step out of their comfort zone, to minister to people and to become their friends. And I love stories of congregations who are actively involved in ways in which they can encounter strangers, even though they meet on the street. The story I'm going to share with you now is from a young woman named Colinda, and she begins this way...

On the weekend of March 17 through the 19. I will be getting baptized and confirmed along with some others at the Chattanooga Community of Christ. Baptisms are happening all weekend, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. And I'm so excited about making this good choice and invited dozens of my people to come witness my baptism. My name is Colinda. I was born in a little town in Mississippi. In 2018, I moved to Chattanooga to attend the University of Tennessee in Chattanooga, or UTC. Twenty-one months ago, my twin brother, along with his wife and their 11 month old daughter were killed in a traffic accident in Barcelona, Spain. My brother was working there in Hospitality Management, and his wife was a student at the University in Barcelona, seeking an international law degree. I never had the honor of holding or kissing my niece, a loss greater than I have ever experienced, or ever expected to experience. I consider myself a strong black American young adult woman. The unexpected deaths of my twin and his young family proved I was not as strong as I believed. Depression struck me like a hurricane. Adding to the difficulties of my depression were two things. First, my pride. I found myself too proud to share my battle of depression with anyone but therapists. And number two, living in a rented apartment and near the UTC campus, parties were always happening, and I became bitter as I watched others experiencing joy. I'm a huge fan of Dolly Parton. That might shock you. Whenever I mention being part of her fan base, the response I always receive is but you're black. I bring up Dolly Parton to explain my bitterness over other people's joy. The lyrics to one of her songs includes, "two doors down they're laughin' and drinkin' and havin' a party." But two doors down, they're not aware that I'm around. Those two lines of Miss Dolly's song explain how I was feeling. Everybody was happy and living life completely unaware of my crippling war with depression. My depression and pride caused me to realize that people pass by desperate broken people like me everyday, without noticing our desperation.

Where's the caring and kindness? For the first time in my 23 years of life, I was angry and judgmental in a very unhealthy manner. But this all began to change on a recent Saturday morning in February. I had just begun my morning run and was jogging in place, waiting for the light to change so I could cross the street. I quickly realized I had committed an error that no urban runner should ever do. I had lost focus on my surroundings. I wasn't prepared for the group of youth running toward me. For a moment I was concerned for my safety. I had never been chased by a group of kids before. But then I saw the cardboard signs they were carrying. Many of the youth, their cardboard signs said, "free paper flowers, free fist bumps, free hugs free prayers." My safety concerns quickly switched to sorrow. I was reminded of the losses of my brother, his wife and his daughter when I spotted two young brown children being held by some older youth. I thought, I will never embrace my loved ones again. Feeling sorry for myself I began to cry. Then one of the youth spoke to me using words like Miss Dolly's song. Two or three blocks down, we're having a party. You need to come, we will cry with you. Oh my goodness. I accepted their many invitations and finished the neighborhood prayer walk with them. These new younger friends. This child's words of wisdom shone as bright as a 200-watt light bulb in a dark basement. I needed someone to cry with me. After the walk through the neighborhood where we had met several people, I went to the party two blocks down. I was introduced to games we never played in Mississippi. Games like "snakes in the grass," "upside down volleyball" and "do the weird." After my introduction to the new games, everyone grabbed a chair and got in a circle. The leader of this bunch were Edrick and Ashton. As we got settled in our seats. I was excited about what this next activity was going to be. And then I was surprised because the activity was for me. Edrick and Ashton sat on the floor in front of me and one of them said, "Okay, we're all ready to cry with you. We are all good criers. It is safe to cry here." I've never been invited to go to a neighborhood prayer and hug walk. I've never been invited to play new games. And I never ever had been invited to cry. Crying I did. I could not keep from it. The kids and teenagers started praying for me. None of them knew I needed to cry or the cause of my sorrow. Most did not even know my name. And those who did, mispronounced it. I received hugs, pats on the back, head and legs, and heard prayers for me. I was even given a whole box of tissue to use. Finally, I stopped crying long enough to share the reason why it was so sad. I learned each young person in the Center on this Saturday had also experienced untimely deaths or abandonment from immediate family members. They understood. They got me. At the end of the crying with me session, Ashton gave a short message about our experience together. He pointed out how God has called us to share one another's burdens. He shared we're not called to fix people with right answers. Not even God chooses to fix us when life is broken. God will always be with us. Share our sorrow and brokenness seasons, and cry with us. I remember his words. "The Holy Spirit is the great comforter, not the great fixer." Jesus is more of the great Peacemaker than the great problem solver. Our worship closed with each of us saying, "Come unto God, God will give you rest." The real-life wisdom found on my first Saturday at this church began a new faith journey for me. I realized how often we are disappointed because God doesn't immediately fix our sorrow. But God shares our sorrow and weeps with us, granting us comfort stronger than our sorrow. The God who shares in our tears and comfort sets in our sorrows, is the God who causes wholeness, to become a true opportunity. My faith journey with community Christ is less than a month long, yet I am gaining a much clearer understanding of God who so loves the world. My two university degrees were not enough to fill my need. My career wasn't enough. The unconditional love of the best parents ever was not enough. It took an invitation from a 12 year-old girl to a church party two blocks down to start filling my needs. My baptism is one more step toward healing. Please don't be afraid to cry with each other. You will find God is already there to bring

rest and comfort. me this wonderful story told by a new sister in Christ, encourage you to cry with and for others. May you be aware of people who are in need of a smile, a touch and a friend will cry with them. Amen.