

Not a Monster After All / The Story of Jonah

Tammy: I wonder if you've ever heard the story of the Ugly Duckling...a story written by a Danish poet and author, Hans Christian Andersen? In the story a mother duck hatches a brood of ducklings. One duckling is very different from all the others. He is large, awkward and ugly. When they all grow up this ugly duckling turns out to be a swan (one of the most beautiful of all the birds).

Carol: I know that story Tammy. My mother used to read it to me when I was a child. I used to feel so sorry for the duckling when all the other animals picked on it for being so ugly. But I loved the ending - when he became such a beautiful swan. All the others were so surprised!

Tammy: In just the same way sometimes we might discover that what is right in front of our eyes is very different from what we expected.

Carol: We probably all have experiences like that, don't we, and it can come as a great surprise. I believe Sony, our guest today, had an experience a long time ago that taught her a very important lesson about judging someone on how they look.

Tammy: Welcome to *Women of Hope*, I'm Tammy. There's a little saying...I wonder if you've heard it...'You can't judge a book by its cover'. I'm sure you've heard this saying, right Carol?

Carol: Yes I have – what do *you* think it might mean? Yes... the outside cover of the book doesn't give you much idea whether the story is good - and it's just the same with people. But we often *do* make quick judgements don't we!

Tammy: Oh dear, I think we're all a bit guilty of that sometimes. Let's find out what happened to Sony...

Carol: Welcome Sony...tell us what happened such a very long time ago that made you realise you had made a mistake.

Sony: Hi Carol. Yes, it *was* a long time ago, in fact, 44 years ago. I was 7 years old and my brother was five. He had just started walking with me to and from school. One day something very interesting happened that changed me for the rest of my life.

Carol: Tell us about that Sony.

Sony: I must first tell you a little about the boy *who* helped to change me. I'm sure you've heard the words 'being in love'...

Carol: Yes, I think it happens to all of us some time – we like someone so much we want to be with them all the time!

Sony: That's right. Well, I had a nickname for this boy. It was the opposite of being in love! I named him 'In Hate' because I had decided that I hated him.

Carol: Oooh, that's a very strong nickname! What did he do to make you feel like that?

Sondy: Well, actually...nothing at all! You see, I am Italian and most Italians have dark hair. I had seen plenty of them in my seven years. And there were many children at my school who had blonde or light brown hair, so I was used to that too. But *this boy* had bright orange hair...and that's not all! He also had a pale white face that was covered in hundreds of freckles. Not just a few, but hundreds! I had *never* seen anyone like that in my entire life and I thought he looked very ugly... So ugly, in fact, that I thought he must be a very terrible boy to have been made to look like that. And you see, I *must* hate him if he is so ugly looking – it seemed like the only thing to do!

Carol: I guess that would make perfect sense to a seven year old. Did your little brother feel the same way?

Sondy: Oh, no. He had no idea that I felt like that until this one particular day.

Carol: So what happened on that day?

Sondy: We were both walking home from school and I happened to notice that 'In Hate' was walking behind us. You see, that's what I called him even though I knew his name! So I told my brother that this very ugly creature was following and that we'd better rush home quickly before he could catch up. And so we ran. That's when we got the surprise.

Carol: He started running after you?

Sondy: No...as we ran, my little brother fell and grazed his knee quite badly and began to cry. Everything tipped out of his little school bag and fell everywhere. I had to stop to help him, but I was terrified that 'In Hate' was going to be upon us any second.

Carol: And did he catch up with you?

Sondy: Yes... Not only caught up with us... but to my complete surprise, he actually stopped to help. He comforted my brother, picked up all his pencils and made sure we were ok! I was completely stunned! I couldn't believe it!

Carol: That would seem like a perfectly normal thing for another child to do, wouldn't it?

Sondy: Well, yes, but not for a very ugly child whom I had decided was a monster!

Carol: So he wasn't a monster after all?

Sondy: Not only was he *not* a monster but he was *so kind* to us. You see, we were one of the first families of migrants to move to the area and no-one had ever been kind to us like that. We were the different ones – just like the ugly duckling. We were often called names and treated very badly. But this boy was going *out of his way* to look after us. I had never experienced that from *anyone*.

Carol: So others were unkind and cruel to you – but *he* treated you in just the opposite way!

Sondy: Yes. He, *the one who I thought was so terrible*, turned out to be the kindest of all.

Carol: That must have been *such a surprise* to you!

Sondy: Absolutely...yes! It made me realize that what a person looks like on the outside does not show you what's in their heart. We look on the outside of a person, but God looks on the 'heart' – on what's inside. We often can't see that. Actually people can be very good at hiding what's in their heart, but God knows and sees it all. On that day I had a little peek into this boy's heart and what I saw was very beautiful indeed.

Carol: Wow...how did that affect you?

Sondy: I wish I could say that I now don't *ever* judge other people – but I can't! After all, other experiences throughout my life have shown me that people are not always kind... And if we've been hurt, then we become very cautious about trusting people don't we! It's actually very important to realise that being cautious is a normal thing...to avoid danger...or to avoid being hurt. BUT *prejudice* is making up your mind *before* you have any information. I think that incident way back in my childhood taught me not to make up my mind about a person until I could see what that person was really like. It taught me to give them the *opportunity* to be trusted.

Carol: Has that incident made a difference to you as an adult in any way?

Sondy: Oh yes! One way that comes to my mind immediately is that I am naturally drawn toward people who are very *different* from me... people who come from other cultures and countries. Because of this I now have some very valuable friends whom I would never have known if it wasn't for Geoffrey - that was his *real* name!.

Carol: That's quite a gift he left you with then isn't it?

Sondy: Oh yes...a valuable gift! Thank you God, for making different people in different places and thank you Geoffrey!

Carol: On *Women of Hope* today Sondy has just shared with us how she learned not to judge people by how they look on the outside. Sondy, is there anything else that has influenced you not to judge other people?

Sondy: Well Carol, there is a story in God's word, the Bible about a man called Jonah. In this story we learn how *God* feels about us judging other people. Jonah was a prophet from a place called Galilee in Israel and his story takes place over 700 years BC – or before Jesus Christ was born. During this period of history, Assyria was a powerful, violent nation and Israel's most dreaded enemy. The Lord spoke to Jonah and told him to go to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, and deliver a message

to the people of that city. Jonah was supposed to warn them to change their evil ways or suffer the consequences of their wickedness. If they didn't listen, God would destroy them.

Carol: Tell us more...did he go?

Sondy: He had no intention of going whatsoever! Instead of obeying God, Jonah took off in the opposite direction. The Assyrians had done terrible things to Jonah's people; for him to go to their capital city would have been terrifying. Imagine going to the house of your enemy to deliver a message that you know is going to make you very unpopular! He knew too that if he gave them the message, the people might listen and act on it...then God would not punish them ...because God's nature is to forgive. Jonah hated the Assyrians and probably would have liked to see God punish them, so as well as being scared of them (like I was of Geoffrey), he also would have been *angry* with them and *wanted* them destroyed.

Carol: So what happened?

Sondy: Well God did something extraordinary to bring Jonah back when he went off in the opposite direction. You may have heard the story of Jonah and the big fish...some people say it was a whale! Let me tell you this part of the story from God's word:

(Brief story of Jonah from Jonah 1&2)

'To get away, Jonah bought a ticket to travel on a ship. He set off, hoping to escape from God and the task he had given him to do. But God sent a violent storm that was about to break up the ship. The sailors were terrified and threw some cargo overboard to lighten the ship.

Jonah was asleep in the ship, so the captain woke him up..."How can you sleep in this storm?" he asked him, "Get up and pray to your God to save us all." After a while the terrified sailors asked Jonah, "What should we do to stop this storm?" Jonah told them it was because he was running away from God, so he said to them, "Throw me into the sea and it will become calm again." But the sailors just rowed harder. This made no difference, so finally they threw Jonah into the sea. Immediately the storm stopped. The sailors were amazed and worshipped the true God.'

Now here is the extraordinary thing that God did...

'God arranged for a very big fish to swallow Jonah! He stayed inside the fish for 3 days and 3 nights. Then Jonah cried out to God, worshipped him and promised to obey him. God then made the big fish spit Jonah out onto the beach.'

That is the end of this part of the story from God's word.

Carol: Can you imagine what this must have been like for Jonah? First, the terrifying storm, then telling the sailors to throw him in the sea. And finally thinking he was going to drown, but being swallowed by that big fish. Imagine the smell in the fish's stomach!!

So what do you think Jonah did as soon as the fish spat him out? I think I know...tell us Sondy...

Sondy: Jonah hurried off to Nineveh and bravely told the people God's message. They listened... and what do you think? ...They changed their ways, and God did *not* punish them after all. Now you would think Jonah would have been pleased... but he wasn't! Jonah walked away from the situation mad at God. He built himself a little shelter outside the city and sat there and sulked.

Carol: How come?

Sondy: He thought God should have destroyed those people instead of sparing them. He was so angry with God that he said he'd rather die than live!

Carol: I see...so even though he could see that God loved these people enough to lead them to a new life, Jonah wanted to hold onto his hatred.

Sondy: That's right. Jonah was angry and didn't think they deserved to be forgiven. That sounds silly to us doesn't it? ...Jonah throwing a tantrum...after all – he *was* a *grown man*! But think about it for a minute... Is there anyone you can think of that you resent and you don't want them to be successful? Is there anyone who's done bad things to you and you'd like revenge? That's what Jonah was feeling. He wanted those people to suffer because of what they'd done to his *own* people. But Jonah couldn't see into these people's hearts as God could!

And he didn't understand that God's mercy and salvation is for everyone, not just the people we think deserve it.

Carol: So we really need to guard against those kinds of feelings... hatred... resentment... revenge in our own hearts, don't we?

Sondy: Holding onto those feelings harms our relationship with those people... and our relationship with God. It also harms our own hearts. You can feel those things hurting you; they are not pleasant feelings, are they?

Carol: No. Definitely not! So if we feel hatred or resentment against someone, what can we do about it?

Sondy: Well, if God is willing to forgive people who do terrible things, like the Ninevites did, he is also *more* than willing to forgive *us* for holding onto these feelings toward others! We only have to *ask* him to forgive us and to help us change... and he wipes our hearts clean.

Do you know what I do? When those feelings creep back, through a memory or my thoughts, I simply tell them to leave. I say to that feeling or thought: 'God has forgiven me for feeling like that... go away! You are not welcome here. My heart only has room for love'

Carol: Wow! Sondy. And does it go away?

Sondy: Eventually. It's something we can learn to do – and get better and better at doing. After a while, it's almost like those feelings simply can't get into my heart in the first place. I have made it one of my life's goals to be a person who cannot be offended.

Carol: What do you mean by that, Sondy?

Sondy: Well, if someone acts in a way that could offend me, I try to imagine what they've done sliding right off me, as if I have oil on my back! It doesn't stick to me. I decide not to respond... and I try to forgive that person straight away. Often they do not even realise they have done, or said something that could offend me. It's not always easy, because sometimes it has hurt me... but I ask God to help me.

Carol: What if the person has done something really serious against you? And you *need* to respond?

Sondy: In that case, for example if you've been robbed, or someone has threatened you... you can take action without the ill feeling.

Carol: Can you give an example?

Sondy: Sure. If someone steals something, I can report them to the police so they can deal with the situation appropriately. But whatever happens – and no matter how it has affected me, I try to let go of any anger or resentment against the person who has stolen something.

Carol: How do you do that, Sondy? How do you find the strength?

Sondy: God has forgiven me for all the things I do wrong. So do I have the right, to hang on to my anger and resentment? No-one's perfect...least of all me. I have made plenty of mistakes. We all do. If we had to pay for every one of those mistakes, we'd be paying for a long, long time to reach perfection wouldn't we? In fact we could never reach it. You see...Jesus has already paid for *all* my sins. He took the punishment for me when he died on the cross. I have been set free.

Carol: Just like the people of Nineveh?

Sondy: Exactly.

Carol: Thank you for sharing your story with us Sondy.

Sondy: Thank you for the privilege Carol.

Carol: Welcome back to *Women of Hope*. Did you notice what Sondy said about not being perfect? Are you perfect Tammy? You never seem to get angry...

Tammy: Well – what do you think Carol? Of course I'm not perfect! *You* might not see me get angry but I sure do sometimes that's for sure.

Carol: I think we all do. I know I've held onto bad feelings about others when they've done or said something to upset me. But Sondy's right...Jesus died and took the punishment that we deserve. And God's word tells us that he rose again and is the one who stands before God, the father, in our place. So we now have the right to ask God to forgive us – and you know what? He will!!

Tammy: Let's ask him to do that right now. Would you like to join me?

Father God, thank you for sending your son, Jesus, to die on the cross to take the punishment for the wrong things we say and do. Please forgive us, and help us to forgive others when they say and do things that hurt us. Help us not to hold onto feelings of anger and resentment against them. We pray this in the strong name of Jesus Christ. Amen

Tammy: Our time has gone for today. If you would like to contact us to tell us your story, or to ask any questions, please write to TWRWomenofHope@twr.org. We also invite you to visit our website. TWRWomenofHope.org. Or visit our Facebook page.

Thank you for being with us...we'll look forward to next time. Have a wonderful week and God's blessings on you.

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