

Being Different / Rahab

Guest: There was a village where all the women swept the floor with short brooms, made of strong grasses tied together in a bunch. They had to bend right over to sweep, and they often got pain in their backs from sweeping. But their mothers and grandmothers had always used these grass brooms, so they all did it the same way.

One day a family from another place came and settled in their village. The woman in this family bought a short broom in the market, and she tried using it to sweep her house, but it made her back hurt. So she found a strong straight stick and firmly tied the short broom to the end, and then she could sweep standing up. That felt much better!

She didn't say anything to the village women, but they noticed what she was doing. At first they all laughed about it; they had never seen a long broom. But first one, then another, went to visit her, and they tried out the long broom. They noticed that it did not hurt their backs. They found sticks and tied their brooms to the sticks, and used them inside their houses.

At first they didn't use them in the yard because the others might laugh at them. But then one woman decided she didn't care, and she used her long broom outside. Soon all the women in the village had long brooms and their backs didn't hurt so much. The broom maker started selling long brooms. And the new woman in the village smiled to herself - she hadn't said a word, but she showed them a better way.

Tammy: Hello, my friend! This is *Women of Hope*. I'm Tammy, and we're happy to be with you today.

Carol: And I'm Carol. I hope you can stay with us for a while because Ros and Fran are here too.

Ros: Hello. It's good to be here, isn't it Fran...

Fran: It is...hello.

Carol: That story made me smile, because we all like to do things the same way as our family, or our village, or our community. Often, we think the way other cultures do things must be wrong, and we don't even stop to think whether they might have something to teach us.

I once heard a story about a young bride who was preparing a family meal. She bought a large piece of meat and proceeded to chop off a large part of either end before she cooked it. Her husband asked her "Honey, why did you cut off those perfectly good pieces?" The bride smiled and said, that's what my mother always did. The next time they were visiting her mother the young bride asked, "Mother, why did you always cut off so much of the meat before cooking it? And the Mother replied – because that's what your grandmother always used to do. Finally, both the mother and the young bride went in to the grandmother and asked, why she would cut so much meat off before she cooked it and the grandmother replied, because I never had a pan big enough.

Tammy: Well I guess that the only way we make progress is when *someone* is willing to think about trying something different. What if no-one had ever tried to cook their food? We would have missed out on so many delicious things.

Carol: And what if we were not willing to try new flavors- wouldn't we miss out?

Fran: When I was growing up in Australia, my mother generally just boiled the vegetables and grilled or roasted the meat. People used to make fun of 'fancy foreign food'. But migrants brought their cooking from many other countries, and now we enjoy curries and pizzas...

Ros: ...and pasta and Asian dishes and all sorts of wonderful foods. But you have to try these new things to see if you like them.

Carol: I was thinking about how hard it is to make changes to the way things have always been done.

Tammy: Mmm, yes.

Carol: Did you know that at one time most men didn't think it was worth educating girls? That was true in most countries of the world. But some men realized that their daughters were just as clever as their sons, and they started teaching their girls. And some teachers decided to allow girls to go to their schools. But still, many people thought girls couldn't learn, ...or it was dangerous to allow the girls to mix with boys, ...or that the girls would not be good wives and mothers if they were educated. All sorts of reason were given - and they still are in some places.

I think it must have been quite hard for those families to let their girls go to school, and I know that some people gave those first girls a hard time. They had to be brave to be different to their community. But before long others saw that it was a good thing, and let their girls be educated too.

Tammy: We should be grateful to those girls and their families who made it easier for us to learn. And girls are certainly as clever as boys!

Carol: There are still places where girls are not expected to go to school. If you live in a place like this, you may have wondered why this is so!

Tammy: This is *Women of Hope*. We've been talking about how each community has its beliefs and customs, and it's hard to go against those customs. Cultures have their traditional ideas about health, too. Ros and Fran have been telling me about the time they visited a small village, tucked right away in the forest in Papua New Guinea.

Fran: That's right. We had a wonderful time there and they certainly taught *us* some new things. The local people were very clever. They knew about the resources - and the dangers - in their area. They knew which plants were good for food or medicine, and which were poisonous. Those are important traditions...there for good reasons.

Ros: While we were there we heard about an old tradition for women having babies. They used to go far away from the village into the bush to have their babies in bark shelters. They were not to come back for several weeks. Anyone who came back to the village too early was punished. It was very hard for the women, especially if anything went wrong.

Well, after these people had the Bible in their language, they read it to see if their custom was a good one. They decided that God did not expect them to do this, and it was causing sickness and death for mothers and babies, so they told the women to stay nearby where they could get help if they needed it.

Fran: The women told us that some of their young mothers were dying when they had their babies. We heard that often the afterbirth or placenta didn't come away properly and sometimes they bled very badly.

While we were there, a young woman had her first baby. The afterbirth was not coming out and she was bleeding. We suggested to the new mother to let the baby try to suck. Then we found out that this was *not* their custom. The women there did not try to feed their babies for several days; they gave them to other mothers to feed. They didn't realize that the baby's sucking is important because it makes the womb contract and helps the afterbirth to come away cleanly.

But this young mother was brave enough to try a different way. The older women there were surprised and maybe they didn't approve, even though the village health worker said this was good. But she took her baby to her breast, and the baby sucked. Then she cried out in surprise 'Ooooh! It's squeezing like labor pains!' because she could feel her womb contracting. Soon the afterbirth was out and the bleeding stopped. We really thanked God!

Ros: We wondered if this would change anything. Well, the wife of a village leader was pregnant. She was interested to learn how important it is for the newborn baby to suck straight away. The health worker explained that the first milk contains important nutrition for the baby, and that sucking also helps the breast to start making milk. The mother and baby are able to feel close very quickly. Well, when her baby was born she let him suck right away, and now other women are doing that too.

Carol: That was a *good* change in custom, wasn't it!

Ros: Yes, but someone had to be the first to try it, and that took courage. You have to be brave to go against what is the custom. You need to be sure it is a good change too, and I suppose you would need to trust the person who is teaching a new way. We don't want to make changes just to be different.

Carol: Today Ros is going to tell us about a woman who chose to be different to her culture and community. Thanks for coming again, Ros. We've been enjoying your stories from long, long ago.

Ros: Do *you* remember how God called out the family of Abraham, and they grew into a nation of twelve tribes who had no country to live in? Hmm?...

Tammy: I remember that God had promised their ancestor Abraham a country to be their home. They had made an agreement of loyalty with God. But they had taken a long time to get to the border of this promised land. God did some amazing things for them while they lived as nomads in the desert, and he taught them some valuable lessons.

Ros: Thanks Tammy, that's a good summary! Well, today's story starts as these Israelites were camped near the border of this land. Let's listen to the story from God's word, the Bible (Joshua chapter 2).

Two Israelite men were sent to have a look around and see what the country was like, and whether it would be easy to cross into the land and settle there. The first town they came to was called Jericho. It was surrounded by a thick wall and it looked well defended.

Towards evening the two men went to a house that was built into the city wall, to get food and a place to sleep. The house was owned by a woman named Rahab. She was a prostitute. The chief of the city heard about them, and he sent a message to Rahab; 'Those men are spies- bring them out!' Rahab said to the chief's men, 'There *were* two men here, but I don't know where they came from or where they went. They left before the gates were shut...why don't you go after them quickly?' So the soldiers went off to look for them.

But really, Rahab had hidden them on the flat roof. She told them, 'Lie down here,' and she hid them under the long flat leaves of the flax plants that were drying there.

Tammy: Now you might be wondering... 'Why would she do that? These men could turn out to be the enemies of her people!'

Ros: Yes, it sounds strange, and the Israelite spies were surprised too. But listen to what the Bible says: she told them, 'I know that the Lord God has given you this land. We've heard so many reports about how God helped you escape from slavery in Egypt, and how he defeated your enemies who tried to stop you. I believe you follow the *true* God, who is God in heaven above and here on earth. We all know this, and our people are very afraid of you. Now, I've treated you kindly; so I want you to promise to treat me and my family kindly when your people come here to take over this city.'

The men promised her that they would. They told her to hang a red rope out of her window that could be seen from outside the town walls. They said, 'When we come back, everyone in the house with the red rope will be protected. But you mustn't tell anyone in the city about us.'

So they made an agreement, and then she helped them climb out of the window by a rope. She warned them: 'Hide in the hills till it's safe to go back to your camp.' They got back safely, and reported to their people: 'We are sure that the Lord has given us this country. The people here already know it.'

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

Tammy: It's an exciting story, isn't it? Rahab must have been brave, hiding these Israelite men from her own countrymen. I guess she risked her life to help these men. Why do you think she would do that?...

Carol: I think Rahab really wanted to know the true God, and she had heard enough to realize he was with these people. Do you remember what she said about their God? ...

Tammy: ...She said he had rescued these people and defeated their enemies didn't she!

Ros: And what else? ... Yes, she said he was *the true God, who is God in heaven above and here on earth*. That was an amazing thing for her to say...because her people sacrificed to local spirits to try to make the land fertile.

Let me ask you: how would *you* have felt, hearing for the first time about a great and holy God who created the heavens and earth? ... Rahab was drawn towards God. She did not feel threatened by the idea. Somehow she knew she could trust this God, and the people who followed him. She was actually looking forward to joining them, even though they were homeless nomads facing many battles. The Bible says that she tied the red rope in her window as soon as the spies had gone. ...She wasn't going to put it off, or forget, and she was sure they would be back to keep their promise. She had a lot of faith, even though she didn't know a lot about the true God yet.

Carol: This story reminds me that it takes courage and faith to follow God when your family and friends don't believe in him. Is it like that for you? Sometimes followers of Jesus, God's son, find it very hard to stand alone in their faith. Sometimes their families or communities feel they have betrayed them, and get very angry. But God can be trusted; when you give your life to him he is always with you, in your life on earth, and for ever after in heaven.

When you hear these stories of what God has done, are you drawn towards him, or do you feel threatened? We pray that you will *want* to follow Jesus as your Lord, and that God will give you faith and courage and the protection that you need.

Ros: Before we go, I must tell you what happened to Rahab.

Tammy: Oh, do, I'm sure we all want to know!

Ros: Well, the Bible tells us that when the Israelites came into the land they won the battle with Jericho, but the two spies looked out for the red rope in the window. They went and got Rahab and her family and brought them into the Israelite camp. They must have decided to join the Israelites, and become worshippers of the one true God who made heaven and earth. The Bible tells us that she married an Israelite man, and she became the great-grandmother of King David, who was an ancestor of Jesus himself! (Josh 6:22-25, Matt 1:6) That's the end of the story of Rahab, from God's word.

Tammy: I wonder if she married one of the spies that she hid! It's so good isn't it - to think about this poor woman...a prostitute.

Carol: ...yes, and she did not even belong to the nation that God had called to tell the world about him.

Tammy: ... yet she was accepted because of her faith (Heb. 11:31), and she became an ancestor of Jesus, our Savior and Lord. God really does welcome people from *any* country or race or community when they put their trust in him.

Carol: And that is *still* true; God will accept you when you put your trust in Jesus... whatever you have done...wherever you come from...whatever your friends and family and neighbors may think. And he will give you the strength to follow him even if no-one else in your family, or your community believes in him. He can give you new hope...a new beginning, because he loves you so very much.

Tammy: During the week, let's think about what we've learned from Rahab's story. Think about whether we need to make changes in order to do what we believe is good, even if it means being a bit different. Ask God to show you what is true and right, and to give you the strength to do it.

Carol: And maybe you could tell someone else this story and ask them what they learn from it.

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