

Trachoma / Anointing and betrayal

Louey the Fly: Hello- I'm Louey the Fly. You probably know that I spread diseases. But did you know I can make you blind? I carry germs from one dirty face to another, and those germs cause a horrible disease called trachoma. It could make you - or someone you love - blind.

Carol: Hi, I'm Carol, Welcome to Women of Hope. How are you today? It seems a bit odd starting our program with a "fly." But what we are going to talk about is not really that funny. Am I right, Tammy?

Tammy: Absolutely Carol, our conversation today is about that eye disease called *trachoma*. We've done lots of research, talked to our doctor, and we found out how you can prevent it...and treat it so you don't lose your sight. Do you know if there's trachoma in *your* community?

Carol: How do you know? Well, look around you. Do you see people, especially children, with red, itchy, irritated infected eyes? Maybe discharge or pus running down their faces? Do you know people who've had many eye infections, and now their eyelids turn inwards so their eyelashes are scratching their eyes? These poor people have very sore eyes, and have poor sight, and some of them could even be blind. If there *is* trachoma where you live, please listen carefully, because there's a lot you can do to stop this terrible disease.

Tammy: Trachoma is found in over 50 countries of the world, including many countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia, and even parts of the Americas and Australia. About 8 million people are blind from it. It used to be common in Europe but it disappeared when living conditions improved.

Carol: Here's an example of how trachoma spreads. Imagine a cute little boy with a dirty face, called Rao. Perhaps he cries, or he has a runny nose, so his face is wet and sticky. A fly comes and lands near Rao's eye; and this fly had just come from the face of someone with trachoma. The trachoma germs love little Rao's sticky face, and they get right into his eye and start an infection. His eye leaks a watery discharge, with more germs in it. Imagine Rao runs to his mother and rubs his face against her apron.

Tammy: Oh I can see where this is going. Then Rao's mother uses her apron to wipe her hands, and later she rubs her own eyes. She sees her baby has a dirty face, so she wipes the baby's face with her apron. Then she wipes her hands on a face cloth that the whole family uses. Rao goes off to play with his friends, and they hold hands and spread the infected eye discharge to each other.

Carol: They wipe their eyes and then they go home to their families and touch their mothers and fathers, and their brothers and sisters, without washing their faces or hands. And all these people get the trachoma germs, and they will probably have very sore eyes after a few days.

Tammy: Now, can you see how easily it spreads? And all of this started from germs

Carol: On the legs and mouth of the flies.

Tammy: ...and on the hands and faces of the children and adults...

Carol: ...and on the apron and the face cloth. So let's talk together about how they could prevent the germs spreading.

Tammy: It would help if they all remembered to wash their faces often, because those pesky flies love wet dirty faces.

Carol: You know, that sounds too simple, but it is exactly right; clean faces could make a *great* difference.

Tammy: And you should use a clean washcloth for each person, even if it's just a clean rag or even a piece of paper, like toilet paper or a tissue.

Carol: One of the best and simplest things you can do is to have lots of small pieces of cotton cloth, clean cotton cloth, wash them often and dry them in the sun.

Tammy: You could tear up an old worn-out piece of clothing to make small cloths. If you're careful, you can make a litre of water wet lots of cloths during the day, and keep all the children's faces clean. If one of them has an eye infection, you should probably burn or bury his facecloth, or soak it in disinfectant, and wash your hands very carefully afterwards!

Carol: They should all wash their *hands* often.....with soap, if possible. We often say that, don't we? Or you could use antiseptic lotions. Washing your hands is good basic hygiene.

But let's talk about that fly that started the chain of infection. Flies like to breed in moist, warm, places, especially in rotting food or animal manure - and that includes human waste. So really, the whole community needs to work together to keep animal droppings away from where people live and play.

Tammy: The community needs to work together to make sure every person has a toilet or latrine they can use, and that they are actually using it. And they need a way to wash their hands afterwards. You can do a lot to keep your own family clean and safe, but if there are a lot of flies, and other infected

people nearby, the germs will still be in your street and can easily get into your house and into your eyes.

Tammy: Here on Women of Hope we're talking about how the eye infection trachoma spreads in a community. Let's talk more about the trachoma infection. It's not the trachoma germ itself that makes people go blind. When people get an infection, it damages the inside of the eyelids and they start to get rough. Each time they get an infection, it forms tiny scars inside the eyelids that pull the skin, so eventually the eyelashes are pulled under and stick into their eyeballs.

Carol: UGH – this sounds painful!

Tammy: It is! The lashes scratch the cornea - that's the clear cover of the eyeball that you look through. At last it's so scratched and damaged that you can't see through it any more.

Carol: You can see that it's really important to prevent trachoma from spreading. It's just as important to treat infections quickly, so if there is trachoma in *your* area, and anyone in your family gets an eye infection, please take them to your doctor or health worker straight away. There's an antibiotic which is free in many countries, and it kills the germs. Some governments and the United Nations are trying hard to wipe out trachoma, and in places where it is common, they will send health teams every year to give this antibiotic to everyone. If they come to your village or town, make sure you get the antibiotic so that all the germs are killed. Some countries have gotten rid of trachoma altogether by doing this.

Tammy: That is great! Trachoma is one of those neglected diseases that goes along with people being poor. Poorer people often don't have good sanitation, like clean toilets for everyone, or good water supplies, so it's hard to keep clean. So poor people are more likely to get trachoma; and of course if you're often sick, or you become blind, you can't work and so you stay poor.

Carol: So we encourage you to do whatever you can to break this cycle. You can help your own family, and you can tell other adults how to stop flies breeding and how to keep their children clean. But it really does need the *whole community* to work together to improve sanitation and hygiene. Think about it - You could be the place that it starts!

Tammy: The World Health Organization has set a big goal - to get rid of trachoma by 2020. They want to treat every case of trachoma with antibiotics, and to break the infection cycle by helping communities to improve their sanitation and hygiene. They also want people whose eyelids are turning inwards to come for a small operation to fix their eyelids, so they won't go blind. I think we should help them with this goal, don't you? Could you start in your house and on your street?

Carol: In our research, I read this true story, about Safia, a trachoma community health volunteer in Mali, in Africa. She saw the government health teams coming each year. She wanted to help her village. She belonged to a women's group, and they organised themselves to clean the village streets and public places. She said, 'We feel proud that our public places are as clean as our homes.' They also applied for a grant from an aid agency, and made small loans to women to start making soap in their homes. Before this, it was really hard to get soap in that village. The women sold some of the soap and they even made a profit; they paid back the loans, and had a small income. Other women bought the soap cheaply and were able to keep their families clean and do their washing more easily.

Tammy: What a great story! What do you think *you* could do? Perhaps you could make a fly swatter today, and talk to your neighbors tomorrow.

Our friend Fran has been with us before and told us some of the things that happened in the week before the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified. Do you remember that she told us that Jesus told his followers that he would die to save many people? And then a crowd of followers welcomed him into Jerusalem like a king. But Jesus knew that the leaders and most of the people would reject him. Let's listen as Fran tells us more about this week before Christ died.

Fran: Today I want to tell you about two very different ways that people responded to Jesus. As you listen to this story from God's word the Bible, you can think about which way you respond to him.

When Jesus finished teaching, he said to his followers, 'In two days it will be the Passover Festival, and I, the Son of Man, will be handed over to be crucified.'

The chief priests and elders of the people made plans to arrest Jesus and kill him. 'But let's not do it during the festival,' they said, 'or the people will riot.' They remembered the crowd who had welcomed Jesus just a few days earlier, and they were afraid that if Jesus got more popular, the Roman authorities would take action (John 11:45-53). Then *they* would lose their power.

Jesus and his close friends went back to Bethany, a village on the hill opposite Jerusalem. Their friends lived there, Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha. Jesus had brought Lazarus back to life after he died, so they were very close. Martha helped to serve dinner to their guests.

While Jesus was eating, Mary took a beautiful jar made of alabaster, a fine white stone. It contained half a liter of very expensive perfumed oil. This oil was often saved up to anoint a dead body before it was buried, and it was worth nearly a year's wages. Mary broke open the seal and poured the oil onto Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her long hair, so the whole house smelt of the sweet perfume.

One of Jesus' followers was named Judas Iscariot. He protested, 'Why wasn't this perfume sold for 300 silver coins? We could have given the money to poor people.' But Judas didn't really care about the poor. He was in charge of the moneybag for the group, and he used to take money for himself.

But Jesus said, 'Leave her alone! She has done a beautiful thing for me. You will always have poor people with you to help, but you won't always have me. She has done this to get me ready for my burial.'

Then Jesus added, 'I tell you, wherever the good news is preached all over the world, people will remember what she has done and pass on this story.'

Carol: I have always loved this story about Mary and what she did. That perfume was probably the most precious thing she owned. It was a lovely generous thing to do and to show how much she loved the Lord Jesus.

Tammy: Yes. And Jesus accepted it graciously. Anything we do for Jesus, he values it, because he wants us to love him, like he loves us.

Carol: Then Jesus gave her act of love a special meaning. Jesus said she was doing this to get Him ready for His burial. Just before this, Mary saw Jesus bring her brother back to life. Now, her gift pointed to something incredible: Jesus, the Lord, the giver of life, would die! So Mary was showing him great honor and respect. She knew the authorities were out to get Jesus, but she openly showed that she was on his side.

Fran: We know that Jesus cared very much about helping poor people, and he often taught his followers to help them. In fact, just before this, he taught that helping the poor was the same as helping him (Matt 25: 31-46). So he wasn't being selfish, but he wanted us to see what is most important. He wants us to love and worship him with everything we do. I wonder how we can show our love to Jesus.

Tammy: I don't think perfume would be the best way now! In fact, we might show our love by helping someone who is poor or in need, because Jesus taught us that by helping others we were really serving him. Or we might give our time, or our money - anything that costs us something we would rather keep to ourselves. It might be time that we spend worshipping and praying. Whatever we give, or do for Jesus' sake, he sees it and he is pleased. Is there something special you can do this week, to show how much you love Jesus? I'm going to think hard about that.

Fran: Mary's gift was beautiful, but what happened next was ugly. Judas didn't like what Jesus said. I don't know if he just wanted more money for himself. Maybe he realized that Jesus wasn't going to raise an army and defeat the Romans after all, and that he was serious about dying. Listen to the next part of this story from God's word.

The chief priests and the temple guards were looking for a way to arrest Jesus quietly. Judas Iscariot went to see them, and asked, 'What will you give me if I show you how you can arrest Jesus without the people knowing?' They were very pleased. They counted out 30 silver coins and gave them to Judas. Then Judas started looking for a way to betray Jesus.

A couple of days later it was Passover, an important religious festival. Jesus and his 12 friends ate the special Passover meal together. As they ate, Jesus said, 'I tell you, one of *you* will betray me.' They were all upset, and began to ask him, 'Surely you don't mean me, Lord?' Jesus said to them all, 'The one who dips his bread in this dish with me will betray me. I, the Son of Man, will die as the scriptures have prophesied, but how terrible for the man who betrays me!'

Judas Iscariot asked too, 'Surely, teacher, you don't mean me?' Jesus replied 'So you say. Be quick about what you have to do.' He dipped some bread in the dish they were sharing, and gave it to Judas. Then Judas slipped out, into the night.

Carol: I feel so sad when I hear this. Imagine someone who knew Jesus well, turning against his friend! We don't like traitors, do we? It sounds like Jesus knew what Judas was doing, and he gave him every chance to change his mind. But the Bible story tells us that Satan entered Judas. Satan is a spirit, the great enemy of God and humans. Judas had to make a choice, and he did choose to betray Jesus, the Son of God, for just 30 silver coins – it's not a great amount of money. He chose to follow Satan.

Tammy: We often have to make choices, don't we? Sometimes they're big choices, and sometimes small. Often we have to choose whether to be on the side of God or the side of Satan. Can you understand Judas's choice? I think I can. We can all be tempted to do wrong things to get money, or to be on the side of those who are popular and powerful.

Fran: There's one *really important* choice we *all* must make. Jesus died to save us, because he loved us so much. He took the pain and punishment for all our sins, all our mistakes, when he died for us. Now he is alive forever, and he asks us to accept his sacrifice. He asks you, 'Will you follow me as your Lord and your Savior, now and always?'

If you say yes, God will welcome you as his own child, he will forgive you and give you a new life. And he promises to give you his Holy Spirit to show you what is true and to help you to choose the right way, not Satan's way. Have you made that choice? Are you thinking about it? It's a big decision, the most important one you will ever make. Don't leave it too long to decide to follow Jesus.

Tammy: Jesus said that people would always talk about the beautiful thing that Mary did. They still talk about Judas too - even the word Judas means a traitor now. I want to be like Mary and do anything I can to show that I love Jesus.

We have to go now, but we do look forward to next time. We would love to hear from you. You can write to us in care of this station or at TWR Women of Hope. The email address is Womenofhope@twr.org. That's Womenofhope@twr.org.

Or if you have missed a program or you want to hear it again visit our website: twrwomenofhope.org or visit our Facebook page.

We do hope you will be with us again. Have a great week filled with God's blessings.

Fran: And God bless you and your family today.

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