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Showing Your True Colors

Someone once gave us the story of C.T. Stubbs, a well-known missionary of the 19th century, who one day boarded a ship bound for China. The captain of the ship was infamous among missionaries like Stubbs. He was known as a belligerent bully toward all the unfortunate missionaries who needed to travel aboard his ship on their way to and from China. Stubbs awaited his first encounter with the fiery captain with some anxiety. Would the captain live up to his reputation as a hard-nosed antagonist, or not? Well, Stubbs didn't have long to wait for his curiosity to be satisfied. The captain actually sought out Stubbs as he boarded the ship, and yelled to him, "Show us your true colors, missionary! Like the pirates, you fly a flag of peace to ensnare us. And then, like the pirates, when we come close, you change your colors, and you proceed to judge and indict us."

C.T. Stubbs was prepared for this Captain and his antagonism. He thought for a moment and then responded, "Captain, my true colors are that of peace and humility, love and kindness, and I hope you will see only those true colors flying from the flagpole that is my life, as we sail this sea together aboard your ship."

Over the course of the voyage from America to China, the ship's captain was a constant and vigilant observer. He watched the missionary closely and marked his every word and every act. What he observed made a considerable impression upon the captain. Finally, on the last night of the journey, with the ship's passengers preparing to disembark the next morning, the captain came to pay a visit to Stubbs in his cabin. He said to the missionary, "I now see your true colors, sir. Would you tell me of your God?"

We've always appreciated that old story because it reminds us that what we do is as important as what we say. It shows us that others observe us for what we truly are – even when we profess something quite different. Ultimately, other's judge us on what they see to be our true colors, whether we fly them clearly and honestly or not. Our true colors may not be the labels we outwardly wear or the positions we formally proclaim. But our true colors are apparent in the long run, and influence others far more strongly than we may ever guess.

And so, it would seem that the wise ones among us will, like C.T. Stubbs, always work to make their true colors admirable ones, and make them visible to others, for good.

What are your true colors?